Spotlight: the hybrid library

The Covid-19 pandemic has thrown into sharp relief the hybrid nature of academic and research libraries which deliver a broad range of virtual services and digital content as well as a physical environment conducive to study and access to physical books and journals. With library buildings across the UK and Ireland closed, students, researchers and academics have had to rely on the services libraries provide virtually to continue their work and there is an increasing appreciation of the range of activities libraries undertake beyond the most visible element of buildings and books.

Now is perhaps a good time to take stock of some of the physical elements of the library, which institutions have invested in heavily during recent years, in order to determine their relevance for the future. With this in mind, this report for the 2018-19 SCONUL Annual Statistics looks at the extent to which academic libraries in the UK have been offering services such as 24-hour opening and laptop loans, the degree to which additional services/facilities are located within library spaces and the potential impact, if any, these additional services have on traditional usage measures such as footfall and loans. We hope this will help inform planning for the development of library services following the pandemic.

Key findings

- In 2018-19, responding institutions[1] with more than 5,000 FTE students were more likely to provide 24-hour access to the library.
- Responding institutions not providing 24-hour library access have recorded more loans per FTE student, on average[2], in each year since 2013-14.
- In 2018-19, responding institutions with more than 5,000 FTE students were more likely to provide laptops and tablets for loan in libraries.

24-hour opening

Rising tuition fees over the last ten to fifteen years have seen the UK HE sector increasingly accountable to students (and possibly more so, their parents), and one area this has

Figure 1 % of respondents offering 24-hour opening
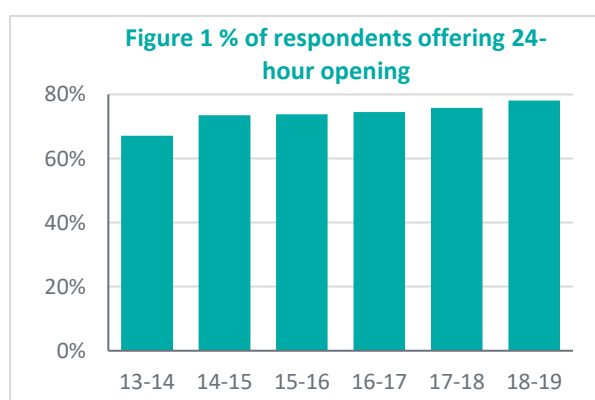
impacted on is 24-hour opening for libraries, with libraries seeking funding for 24-hour opening supported by Student Unions which have sometimes lobbied institutions to provide this level of access.
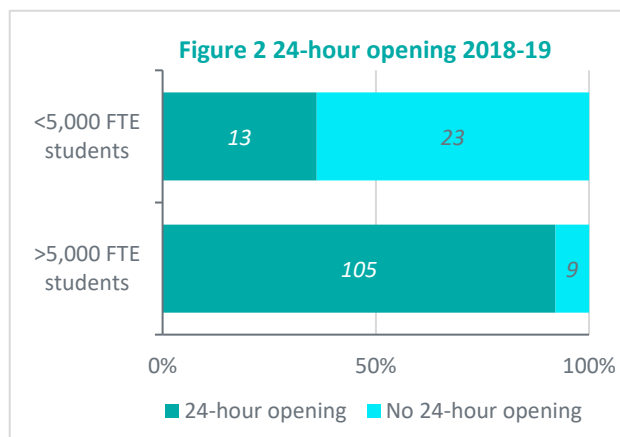
SCONUL began collecting data on 24-hour opening in 2013-14, and Figure 1 illustrates that the proportion of respondents providing at least some level of 24-hour opening in the library has increased steadily since then. In

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[1] Several areas in this report are 'yes' or 'no' questions in the SCONUL survey and so the data only includes those institutions responding in the relevant year
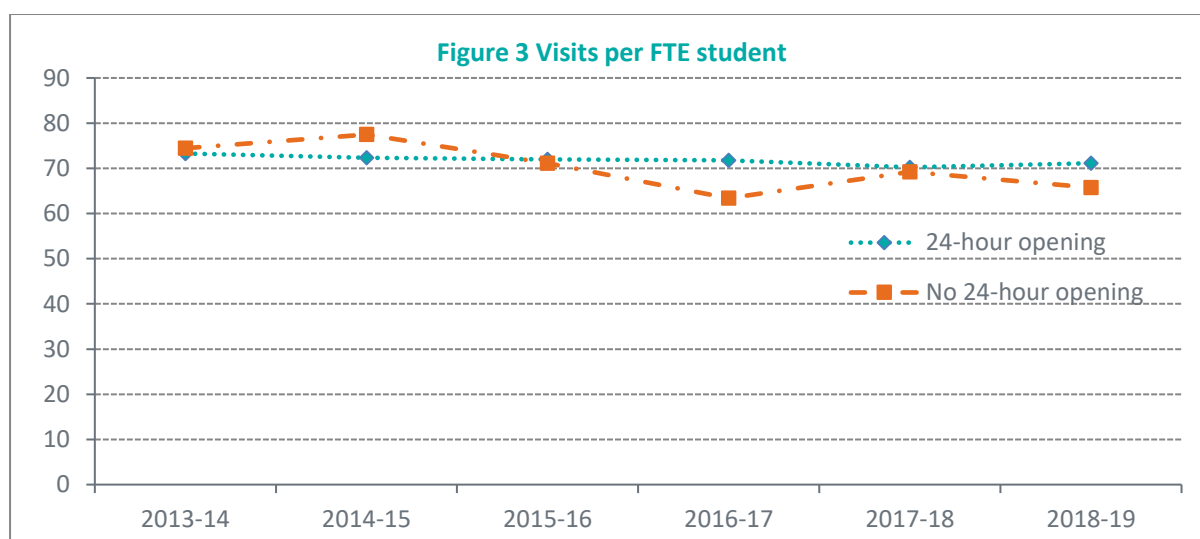
[2] Note that the averages given throughout the report are the weighted averages of all institutions included.

2018-19, 118 responding institutions (78%) indicated they provided 24-hour library access, compared to 100 respondents (67%) in 2013-14. It is important to note, however, that the data hides a wide range of differing policies, with some institutions providing 24-hour access throughout the year, and others opting to only open for 24-hours a day at certain times of the year, for example, around exam time.

There are some differences between institutions, however, and Figure 2 highlights that, in 2018-19, institutions with more than 5,000 FTE students were significantly more likely ($p < 0.01$) to open the library 24-hours a day. Overall, 92% of institutions with more than 5,000 FTE students reported that they provided 24-hour access to the library in 2018-19, compared to 36% of responding institutions with less than 5,000 FTE students.

Figure 2 24-hour opening 2018-19

|	24-hour opening	No 24-hour opening
<5,000 FTE students	13	23
>5,000 FTE students	105	9

It is interesting to investigate potential relationships between 24-hour provision and traditional usage statistics such as footfall and physical loans. Figure 3 displays the five-year trend in the average number of visits per FTE student depending on whether the institution provides 24-hour access to the library. There have been several fluctuations in the average number of visits per FTE student in institutions where the library does not open 24-hours a day, while the average number of visits per FTE student in institutions providing 24-hour access to the library has remained relatively stable over the five-year period. However, it is worth noting that this is potentially influenced by the changing institutions that are included each year. In 2018-19, those institutions providing 24-hour library access averaged 71 visits per FTE student, compared to an average of 66 visits per FTE student in those responding institutions not opening their library 24-hours a day, and there were no significant differences between the means of the two groups.

Figure 3 Visits per FTE student

Note that two outliers have been omitted

In contrast to this, Figure 4 displays the average number of unique loans per FTE student and highlights that there are differences (p<0.01) in the averages of the two groups throughout the five-year period, although the gap does appear to be narrowing. Overall, institutions not opening the library 24-hours a day averaged 11.0 loans per FTE student in 2018-19, compared to an average of 8.6 loans per FTE student in those institutions providing 24-hour library access. The potential reasons behind the differences are beyond the scope of this report; however, it is possible that students at institutions with 24-hour library access loan a book only when it is needed as they can access the library whenever required, and it is worth noting that not all libraries opening for 24-hours a day continue to allow access to physical stock.

Figure 4 Unique loans per FTE student
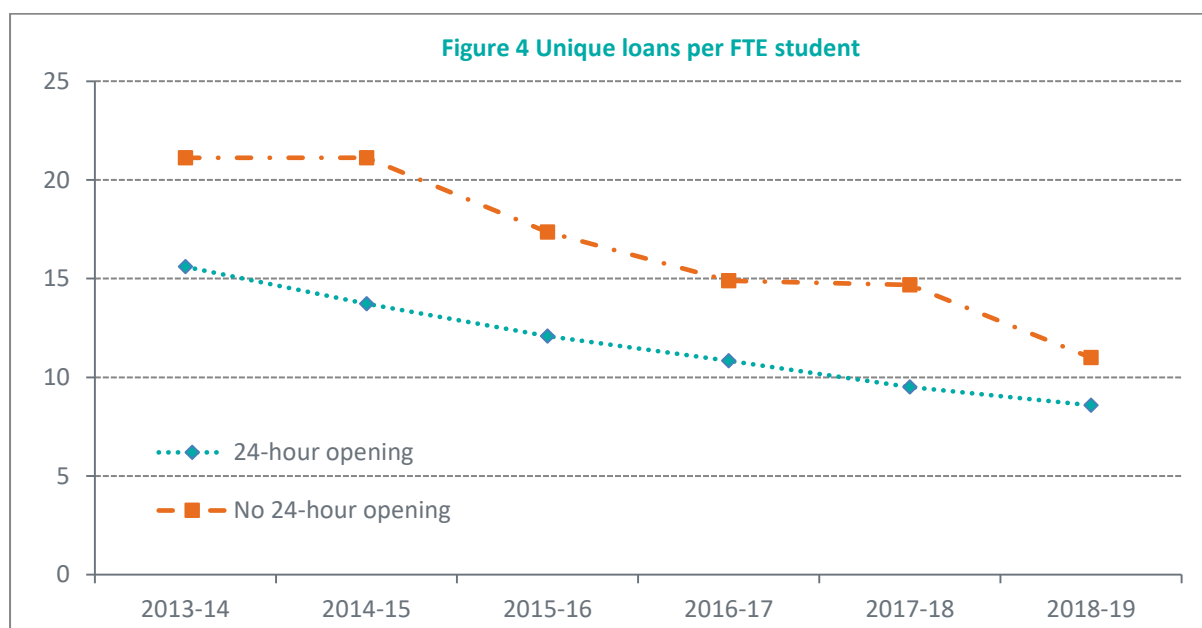
Note that two outliers have been omitted

Laptop loans

Figure 5 Laptop loans provided by the library
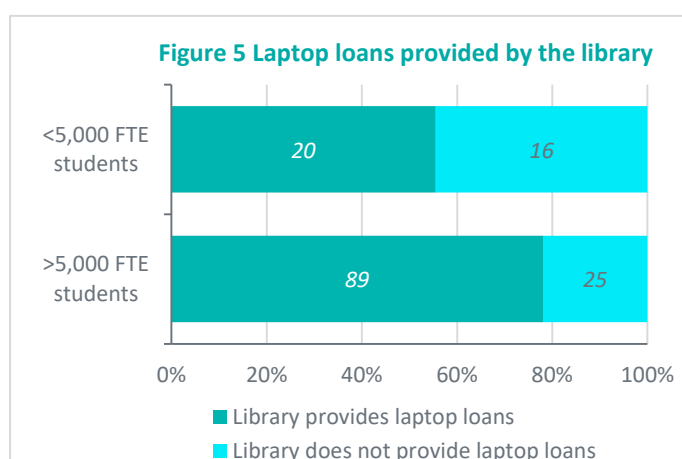
Over recent years, an increasing number of institutions have provided laptops/tablets for short-term loan to students, and this service is often provided by the library. SCONUL first collected data on the provision of devices for loan in 2015-16, when 94 respondents (65%) reported that the library provided this service – compared to 109 respondents (72%) in 2018-19. As with 24-hour opening, there are significant differences (p<0.01) relating to the size of the institution, and Figure 5 highlights that, libraries in institutions with more than 5,000 FTE students were more likely to loan devices to students than those libraries in institutions with less than 5,000 FTE students. In 2018-19, 56% of libraries in institutions with less than 5,000 FTE students provided laptops for loan – compared to 78% of respondents with more than 5,000 FTE students.
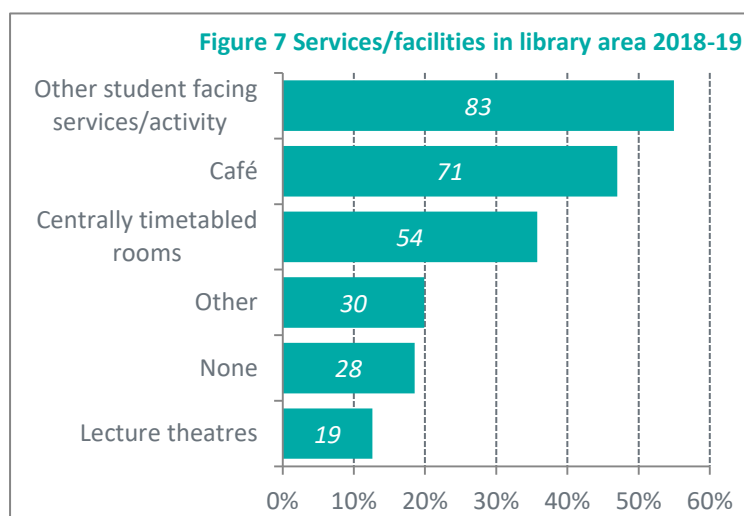
Figure 6 shows the recent trend in the average number of unique loans per FTE student and illustrates that those institutions where the library does not provide laptop loans have recorded more loans per FTE student, on average, than those institutions where the library provides this service, in each of the four years that data are available. The SCONUL data collected on the number of unique loans includes laptop loans where they are loaned by the library, and it is perhaps surprising that those institutions where the library provides laptops for loan do not report a higher average per FTE student, although the gap does appear to be narrowing. In 2018-19 those institutions indicating the library does not loan laptops reported an average of 9.1 unique loans per FTE student, compared to an average of 8.7 for those respondents where the library loans devices to students.

Figure 6 Unique loans per FTE student
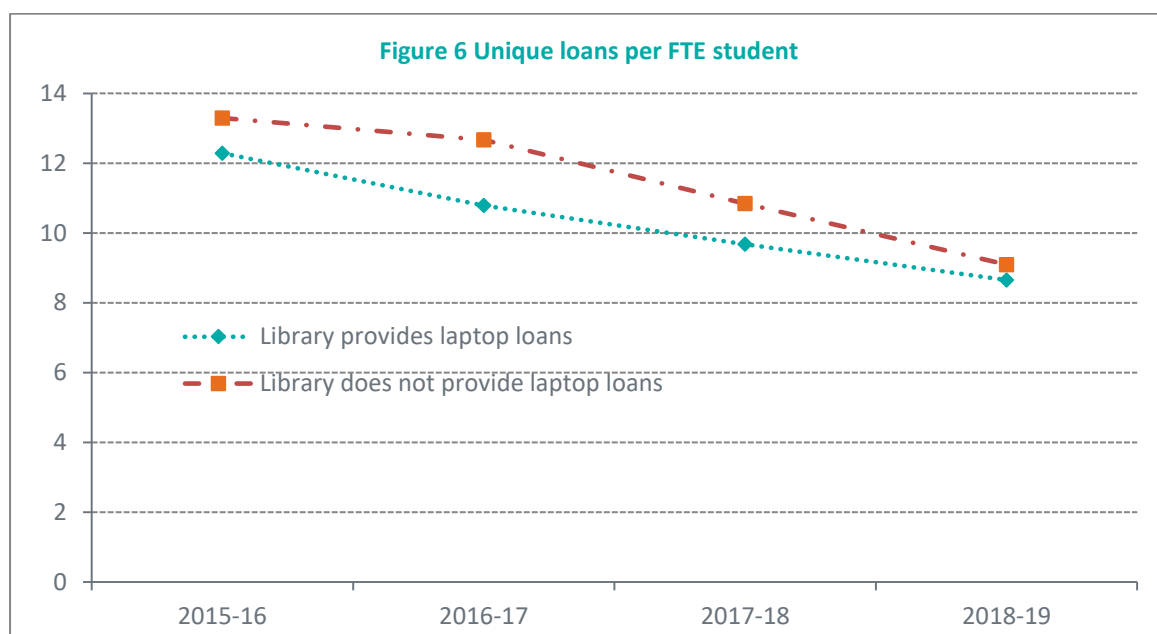
Note that two outliers have been omitted

Following on from this, responding institutions indicating that the library did not loan devices to students were more likely (p<0.01) to record more than 15 unique loans per FTE student, on average, in 2018-19. Overall, just 7% of those institutions indicating that the library provided devices for loan recorded an average of more than 15 unique loans per FTE student in 2018-19 – compared to 36% of respondents indicating that the library loaned devices to students. The reasons behind these differences are beyond the scope of this report.
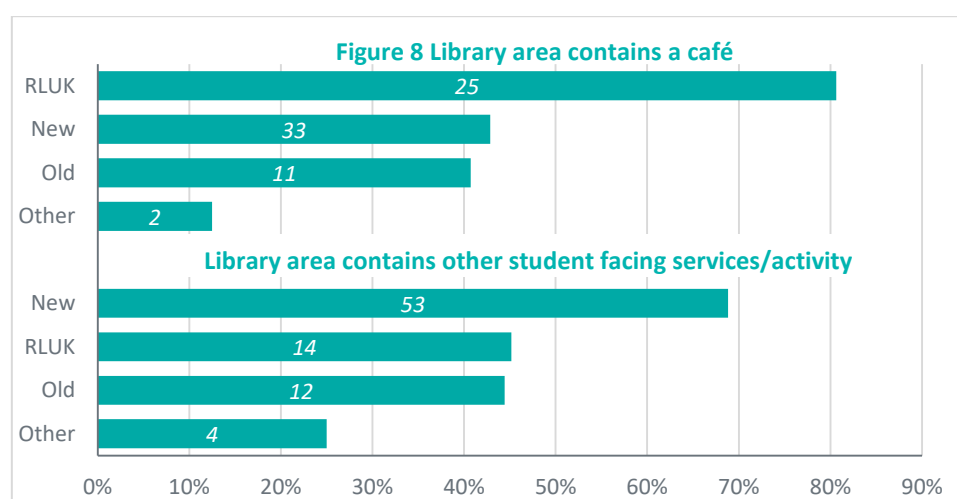
Other services or facilities

Figure 7 Services/facilities in library area 2018-19

Other student facing services/activity	83
Café	71
Centrally timetabled rooms	54
Other	30
None	28
Lecture theatres	19

SCONUL first began collecting data on the various services/facilities located within the library space in 2016-17. However, the two years since then have seen several changes in the format of the question which prevent reliable year-on-year comparisons, and so only the most recent year will be considered here. Figure 7 displays the proportion of respondents indicating which services or facilities are contained within the floor area managed by library services and highlights that, in 2018-19, more than half of respondents reported that the library area included other student facing services or activity, while just under half indicated that the library area included a café, and 36% indicated that the library area included centrally timetabled rooms. In contrast to this, just 19 respondents (12.6%) indicated that the library area included lecture theatres, while 28 respondents (19%) indicated that the library area did not include any other services or facilities.

There were some differences between the sectors[3], and Figure 8 highlights that RLUK member libraries were significantly more likely ($p < 0.01$) to contain a café, and around 80% indicated that this was the case in 2018-19. In addition, Figure 8 also illustrates that, in 2018-19, 'new' university libraries were significantly more likely to contain other student facing services or activity than libraries at RLUK member institutions ($p < 0.05$), 'old' universities ($p < 0.05$) and 'other' institutions ($p < 0.01$). It is also worth noting that 'other' institutions were more likely ($p < 0.01$) to report that the library area did not contain any other services or facilities than the 'new' universities or RLUK members.

Figure 8 Library area contains a café

RLUK	25
New	33
Old	11
Other	2

Library area contains other student facing services/activity

New	53
RLUK	14
Old	12
Other	4

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[3] 'Other' includes HE colleges and specialised institutions that do not easily fit in to the other sectors, including independent institutions which do not report to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

As with 24-hour opening, investigations were undertaken to discover any potential relationships between average footfall and the inclusion of these different services and facilities within the library area; however, no significant differences were found and it is worth noting that it is often unclear whether the library gate counter also covers the area where additional services and facilities are located.

Conclusion

This report highlights that libraries continue to show their resilience and ability to adapt in an ever-changing landscape. Despite declining trends in footfall and loans, it is perhaps encouraging that co-locating libraries with other services or facilities has little impact on these traditional usage measures and perhaps indicates that those students using the library continue to do so for the services the library itself offers.

It is important to recognise that the financial difficulty institutions will face over the next two to three years as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic will force UK HE providers to evaluate the services they provide for students. The digital shift started long before 2020, but for many, recent events have accelerated its progression. Library staff have quickly adapted to working from home, and UK academic libraries have continued to provide students with a professional service, despite the restraints of remote working. It will be interesting to see the impact the Covid-19 pandemic will have on the academic library of the future, and whether the shift to digital will continue or if students will welcome the opportunity to return to campus and the physical library.

Informal groupings of institutions used for summary data

SCONUL's higher education members vary considerably in both size and character. As an aid to the interpretation of these statistics, libraries have been divided into four informal groups, which tend to have many characteristics in common. These are:

'RLUK' UK members of Research Libraries UK

'Old' Those universities founded or chartered before the Education Reform Act 1992, excluding RLUK members.

'New' Universities incorporated in 1992 or subsequently. These include the former polytechnics, and some former HE colleges.

HEC Higher education colleges which do not have formal university status. These are primarily small institutions, each specialising in a narrow range of subjects, although the set of subjects covered is diverse.

Membership of these groups changes from year to year, as institutions merge, HE colleges gain university status, and new members join RLUK. Institutions are included in the group to which they belonged for the majority of the year to which the statistics relate. Changes in groups from the previous year are given at the end of the notes to the returns *(page 106). A* small number of members fall outside these groups; in particular independent institutions which do not report to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and the Open University. Their data are included in the overall totals, however.

Information on the mission groups (Russell Group, University Alliance, million+, GuildHE, Cathedrals Group, Conservatoires UK) to which institutions belong are also included in the survey.

Response rate
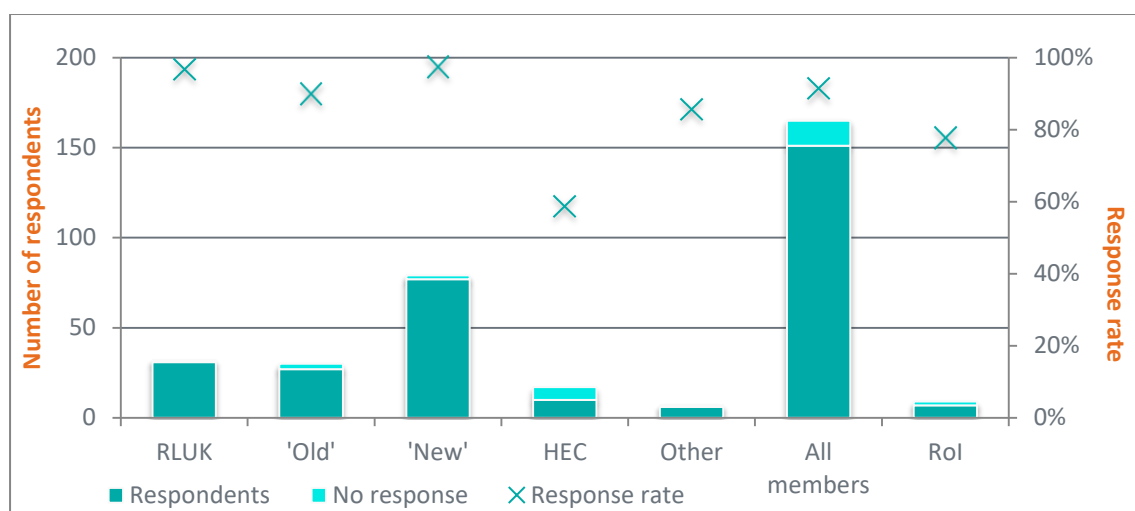
The UK response by institution type is illustrated in Figure 9. The compilers are grateful to the many institutions which provided statistics and spent time answering queries.

HESA data

Data for FTE students and FTE academic staff in the UK were obtained from HESA wherever possible. Their definitions are given on page 109. Data for other institutional employees (FTE) and registered external users (actual numbers) were obtained directly from respondents. In order to calculate a figure for total FTE users, the number of registered external users has been scaled by a factor of 40% to approximate to FTE use.

Please note that data for FTE students and FTE academic staff complies with the HESA Services Standard Rounding Methodology (https://www.hesa.ac.uk/about/regulation/data-protection/rounding-and-suppression-anonymise-statistics). Any FTE student and FTE academic staff data obtained from individual institutions has also been rounded using the same methodology for consistency.

Accuracy

Over recent years, respondents have made efforts to improve the quality of data returned, and each year there are fewer gaps and less data identified as not conforming to the definitions. There is also increased consistency over the distinction between "not applicable" *(the activity concerned is not performed at the institution)*, "not known" *(the activity does occur, but is not counted or analysed in such a way as to provide a figure)* and "nil" *(the count is zero for the year in question)*; however, there may still be a few instances where *n/a* has been entered instead of *n/k*, and vice versa. There may also be a few cases where respondents have entered *n/k*, but the relevant information is included in another column. Respondents are encouraged to mark any such combined data entries clearly. Figures which are known not to conform to the standard definitions are indicated by the use of italics in the data tables. In some instances explanatory notes have been included, and readers should refer to these to aid interpretation.

There remain some problem areas, most notably concerning the provision and use of electronic resources, and users of the statistics are recommended to read the notes to the returns *(pp 76-106)* in conjunction with the figures, to aid interpretation.

Financial summary

Figure 10: Total library expenditure and student numbers (UK)
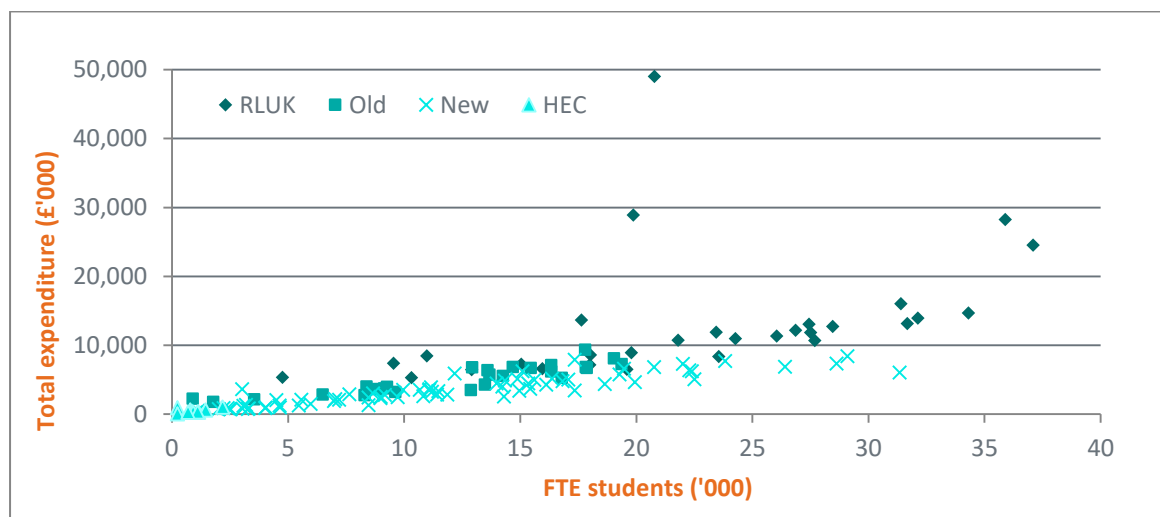
The range of expenditure levels, and their close relationship with student numbers, is shown in Figure 10. A summary of the main financial figures has been included before the main data tables *(pp 12-15)* provision, equipment, and other operating expenditure. The 146 UK members which provided full details for this summary spent over £810 million in total, an average of £411 per FTE student.

Strategic Planning Set

The data collected in the Strategic Planning Set are included between the summary of the main financial data and the main data tables *(pp 16-27)*. These tables present the most recent available data and so may vary from those in the Strategic Planning Set tables originally released in December 2019. Additional derived ratios are also included within this data set – not all of which are repeated within the derived ratios section of the report.

Main data tables

The main data tables *(pp 28-55)* show the data as received from each institution. The data extend over four pages for each column. The list of institutions *(pp 76-106)* is given in the same order as the data and provides a key to the identifiers used, with all institution names given as of July 2019. All mandatory items from the questionnaire are shown, and columns are generally in the order of the questionnaire, although some slight changes have been made to facilitate presentation. A copy of the tables in excel format, including the optional questions is also available. A copy of the full questionnaire, including the notes, optional questions and definitions, is included at Appendix B for reference *(pp 110-119)*.

Entries in italics in the tables do not conform to the standard definitions for the column, either because they include data which should properly be included in another column, or for some other reason, given in the notes to the tables *(pp 76-106)*. Where figures relate to two or more columns, this is indicated within the body of the tables.

An extended set of summary statistics has also been included. Summary figures are given separately for each of the four major UK library groups – RLUK members (excluding Trinity College Dublin), other 'old' universities, 'new' universities and higher education colleges. The total for all UK respondents is also given. The mean, minimum and maximum have been supplemented with the upper and lower quartiles, for each group. These summary statistics include data which do not conform to the standard definitions, identified by the use of italics in the tables.

Some relevant totals not included on the questionnaire have been included at appropriate points in the series. Detailed definitions for these columns are given in Appendix A *(page 107)*. If a component of a calculated total has been marked *n/k* in the return, generally that total has not been included for that institution. Data on FTE students and academic staff, and total institutional expenditure have been obtained directly from HESA as far as possible.

Because of their different regulatory framework and currency, SCONUL members from the Irish Republic, have not been integrated into the alphabetical sequence of institutions, but are grouped together following the UK list. They are also not included in the UK members' summary data. Separate summary statistics have been provided; however these are limited and, in particular, means for the derived ratios have been calculated only where at least four of the seven responding members have provided data.

Derived statistics

The derived statistics follow the main data tables, starting on page 56. Full definitions for each are given in Appendix A *(pp 107-109)*. Only those derived statistics based on mandatory questions are included here, the full set is included in the excel spreadsheet containing the optional questions. As for the totals in the main tables, if any component of a derived ratio has been marked *n/k* in the return, that ratio has not been calculated for that institution. The ratios have been divided into the following broad groups:

- Library provision and use *(pp 56-59)*
- Stock - provision *(pp 60-63)*
- Stock – expenditure and use *(pp 64-67)*
- Staff workload *(pp 64-71)*
- Financial ratios *(pp 68-75)*
- Electronic resources *(pp 72-75)*

Where source data items do not conform to the standard definitions, ratios have been included in the lines for individual institutions wherever possible and are shown in italics. Note that the averages given are the weighted averages of all institutions included, not the arithmetic average of the ratios shown.

SCONUL web database and the Statistical Reporting Tool

The 2018-19 statistics will be incorporated into the web database and uploaded to the Statistical Reporting Tool shortly after publication. SCONUL are grateful to those members who have taken the trouble to answer queries on their historic data and so improve the quality of the available data. The Statistical Reporting Tool is accessible to members on the SCONUL web site.

If any institution becomes aware of errors in the published data, they are asked to send details directly to SCONUL so that corrections can be made in the database. Similarly, if any institution has previously unpublished data that they are prepared to have included in the historical database, they should contact SCONUL.

Specific analyses and investigations can be undertaken on behalf of individual institutions, for a small fee to cover the staff time required. Any interested institutions are asked to contact Sonya White directly (sonya.white@hotmail.co.uk) to discuss their requirements.