

Evolving library spaces and practice

Technological advances and the rapid emergence of electronic resources have had an incredible impact on the expectations of academic library users. University libraries have been faced with a great challenge of meeting those expectations and anticipating future changes, and often in the confines of buildings that were constructed with a particular view of the library in mind – that is a space for the quiet study of books and print journals.

This report for the 2014-15 SCONUL Annual Library Statistics examines how libraries have adapted their spaces and professional practices to thrive in a changing environment. We also identify some potential outcomes of these changes. This work builds on a report produced last year that demonstrated that although the number of print resources has decreased and the number of e-resources has increased over the past decade, footfall has remained steady per FTE. As the number of students attending university has increased, this means libraries are actually dealing with a greater volume of users overall (see <http://www.sconul.ac.uk/page/sconul-statistics-reports>).

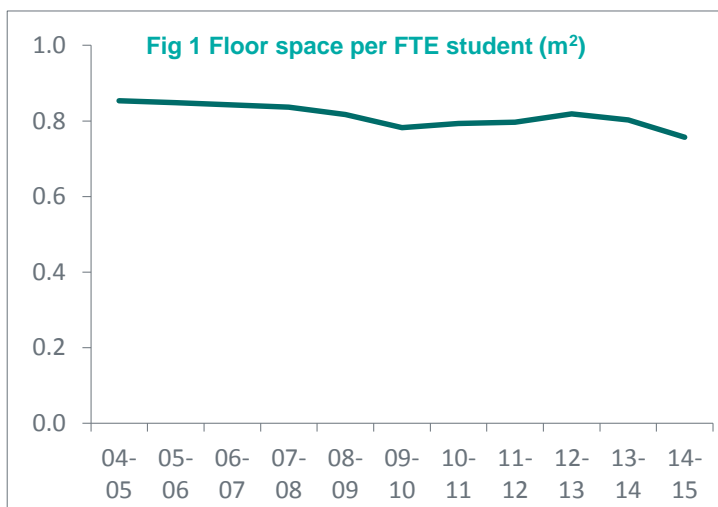


Fig1¹ illustrates that floor area per FTE student has fallen overall since 2004-05, by almost 11% for SCONUL members as a whole, while student numbers have increased by 11% over the same period. Providing additional floor space requires significant investment in new or refurbished buildings, so that individual libraries are finding other ways, such as the disposal or storage of low-use print materials, to increase the number of study spaces available to users. One such route that

¹ Note that, throughout this commentary, figures for 2014-15 are based on actual respondents, and do not include estimates for non-respondents. Figures for previous years are taken from the SCONUL database, and include estimates for non-respondents, unless noted otherwise.

has emerged in recent years is the UK Research Reserve (UKRR), which allows libraries to de-duplicate low-use print journals that are available elsewhere, thereby freeing up space to provide additional seating if required. The UKRR scheme currently has 29 members and is in its third phase – in Phase 1 (January 2007-August 2008), a total of eight members de-duplicated more than 11,000 metres of print journals, whilst Phase 2 (launched February 2009) saw 30 members de-duplicate approximately 73,000 metres of print journals².

Kingston University Space Usage – Case Study

Kingston University joined the UK Research Reserve (UKRR) during Phase 1 of the project and was the first post-1992 university to do so. Since the project began in 2007, Kingston has been able to use UKRR as an enabler to reconfigure library learning space as part of a number of refurbishment projects. At the Penrhyn Road campus, where space has always been at a premium, the removal of low-use print journals freed up space that contributed to the reconfiguration of the ground floor area, as part of a much larger Estates project, which resulted in the provision of a study café and a more flexible group study/IT area. By contrast at the Roehampton Vale campus, home to Kingston's smallest Learning Resource Centre, space created from UKRR withdrawals has ensured a better balance between print stock and study space, reflecting the Library's ambition to respond to student demand for improved study facilities at this campus.

Another development is the increasing popularity of Learning Centres, providing users with seating and equipment but with little or no access to print stock. Some universities have chosen to invest in extensive refurbishments of existing libraries or completely new library buildings to provide users with the type of space that they now require. For example, one university reported that they opened a new library in 2011-12, resulting in floor space almost tripling compared to the level two years prior to the opening of the new building (and before the library moved into temporary accommodation). The additional space also increased the number of study spaces four-fold so that there are currently almost 20 fewer students per seat than in 2008-09. In addition, the proportion of students agreeing with the National Student Survey question "the library resources and services are good

² Please note that these figures may change as the UKRR membership changes

enough for my needs” increased from 60% in 2008-09 to 83% in 2014-15.

Another university reported a new library building opening in 2011-12, which increased overall floor space by just over 40%. The overall impact of the new library has seen the number of visits per student increase by more than 30%, and has seen the proportion of students agreeing with the National Student Survey question “the library resources and service are good enough for my needs” increase from 83% in 2010-11 to 92% in 2014-15. Improvements such as these have contributed to the average proportion of students agreeing to the National Student Survey question “the library resources and services are good enough for my needs” increasing from 79% in 2008-09 to 87% in 2014-15 for SCONUL members overall.³

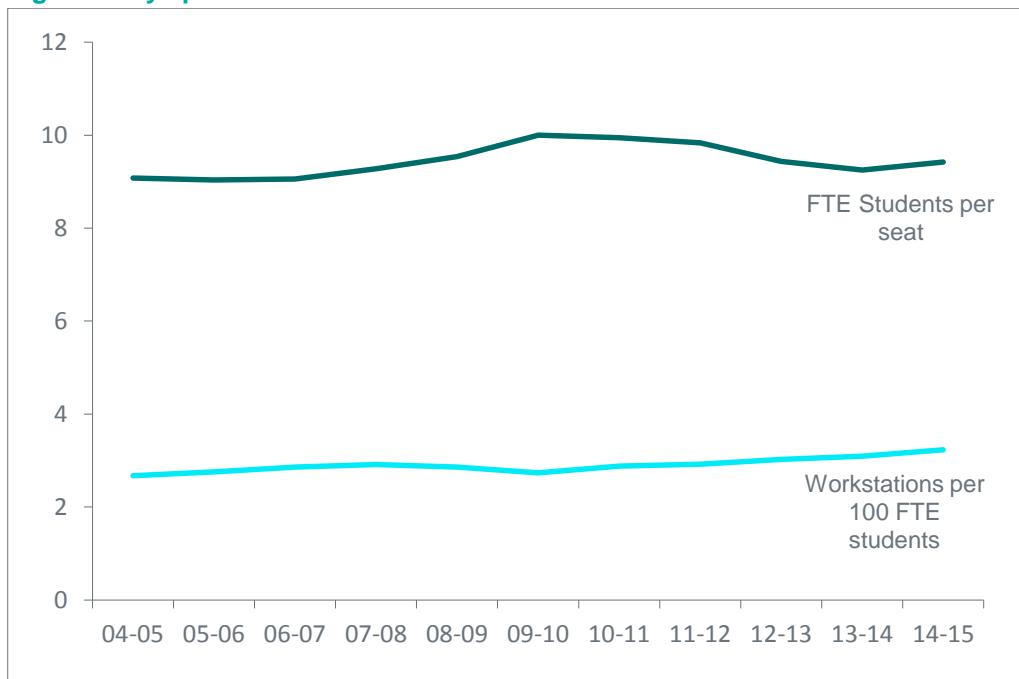


During the two most recent years, a total of nineteen members noted in their SCONUL annual statistical returns that they had either moved in to a new library or that at least one of their libraries had undergone a refurbishment, although the extent of the refurbishment was not always noted. In 2012-13 these nineteen institutions recorded a total of 50 libraries (excluding stores) occupying a total floor space (including stores) of 204,475m², with the space providing 25,789 study spaces – 6,880 of which were equipped with a workstation. In 2014-15, the same nineteen institutions recorded a total of 51 libraries occupying a total floor space of 207,540m², with the number of seats increasing by 15% to 29,738 and

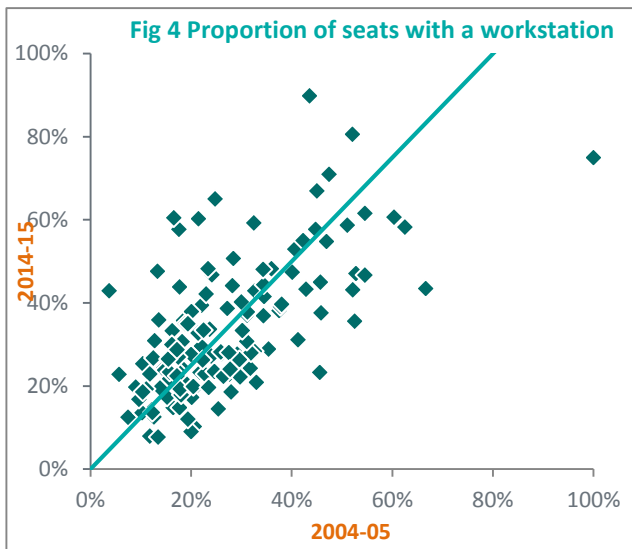
³There is no statistical evidence to suggest that improvements in NSS scores are a direct result of the new buildings, and not every refurbishment or new building has had such a dramatic impact. There are a number of factors contributing to student satisfaction with library services.

the number of workstations increasing by 14% to 7,886. Fig 2 illustrates the percentage increases in floor space, study spaces and workstations for the nineteen institutions since 2012-13. In contrast to this, the nineteen institutions recorded a 0.8% decrease in total catalogued book stock between 2012-13 and 2014-15, which suggests that library refurbishments or new library buildings are being used to increase the study space available to students, rather than to make room for additional print stock.

Fig 3: Study spaces and Workstations



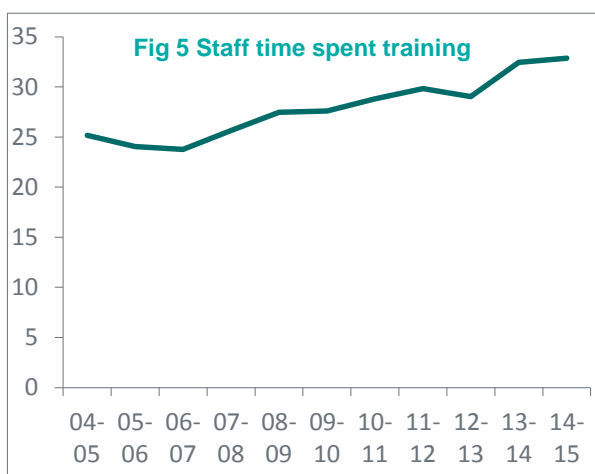
Not all libraries have been able to increase their provision in such a dramatic way, however. Fig 3 displays the number of FTE students per study space and the number of workstations per 100 FTE students for SCONUL members overall in each year since 2004-05, and highlights that the average number of students per study space has remained relatively stable throughout the ten-year period, indicating that, over the SCONUL membership as a whole, university libraries have kept pace with the growth in FTE students in this aspect of their provision. In contrast, the number of workstations per 100 FTE students (Fig 3) has increased overall since 2004-05, so that there are now 3.2 workstations per 100 FTE students, on average, compared to an average of 2.7 workstations per 100 FTE students ten years ago.



Taken together, this would appear to indicate that an increasing number of study spaces are equipped with a workstation, and Fig 4 shows that this is indeed the case for the majority of member institutions. However, 38 out of the 131 institutions included in Fig 4 reported a lower proportion of seats equipped with a workstation in 2014-15 compared to 2004-05, and therefore lie below the line of equality shown on the graph. For SCONUL members overall, almost one-third of study spaces are currently equipped with a workstation, compared to just under one-quarter of study spaces ten years ago. In addition to this, recent years have seen an increase in the number of university libraries offering laptop loans, along with a rise in the number of students bringing their own devices onto campus. As a result, as well as offering study spaces with fixed workstations, many libraries are now also increasing the provision of seats with power connections to meet this increasing demand from users.

Increasing overall space (as well as the number of study spaces or equipment) is just one example of how libraries are improving the level of provision that they offer their students. In 2013-14, SCONUL began to include a question on 24-hour opening, and this shows that university libraries are increasingly offering 24-hour opening for at least part of the year – out of the 146 members responding in both years, 73% indicated that some or all of their libraries offered 24-hour opening for at least part of the year in 2014-15, compared to 68% in 2013-14. 24-hour opening not only enables libraries to meet the increasing expectations of their students but also to maximise use of their estate, providing value for money to their institutions.

It is not just the spaces and resources that are changing to meet user expectations. Both in and outside of the library buildings, we see an increasing number of hours spent delivering information literacy training, an area important to employability for graduates. Training has increased overall from almost 26 hours per FTE professional staff member in 2004-05 to almost 33 hours in 2014-15 (Fig 5). It is important to note that the time spent delivering training does not include any preparation time. With an increasing emphasis on students becoming independent learners, support in helping them to navigate an increasingly complex information landscape is a growing aspect of the librarian’s role.⁴



The figures above support the idea that university librarians are responding to the changing needs of their users, both in creating flexible learning spaces that support access to an increasingly diverse range of resources, and in providing instruction on key skills related to employability and independent study. During a period when user expectations have changed and the demands on library spaces have increased, SCONUL members have seen an increase in student satisfaction, indicating that we are meeting those challenges, sometimes with major building works, but often by evaluating and adapting the spaces available.

⁴ It is important to note that the average number of FTE professional staff per 1,000 FTE students has fallen slightly over the ten-year period – from 2.23 in 2004-05 to 2.02 in 2014-15 (based on those respondents providing detail on the number of FTE staff in the most recent year). The increase in time spent on information literacy training, however, is still important enough to indicate increased attention being given to supporting students in developing skills essential to employability.

Acknowledgements

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