# Leading libraries
## Supporting members

October 2017

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# 1. Introduction

SCONUL is the professional association for academic libraries. Our members are university libraries in the UK and Ireland, as well as national libraries and many other libraries with collections of national significance. We work closely with heads of service at member institutions and support them in ensuring that their library services are innovative, efficient, and strategically aligned with the core teaching and learning and research mission of their institutions. (For more information about SCONUL see https://www.sconul.ac.uk/page/about-sconul.) A key element of our work is supporting leadership development within member libraries and across the sector as a whole. As part of its most recent strategy[1] SCONUL established a Task and Finish Group to explore the leadership development needs of our members and to develop new practical means of support. Meanwhile SCONUL has continued to work with the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education in the development of its Future Professional Directors Programme and with the Higher Education Academy to support our members seeking fellowship. We also continue to facilitate the creation of new informal networking and support groups for new library directors and for deputy directors of services, provide best practice and networking events and represent the voice of the sector in a wide range of fora.

Within member institutions the leadership development continuum ranges from those who may be considering stepping up into a leadership position to those who are well-established directors of service. With this in mind the Group focused on initiatives to support groups of staff across SCONUL institutions, broadly characterised as aspiring; emerging; newly appointed; and established.

1    SCONUL Strategy 2016–19. Collaborating for change: https://www.sconul.ac.uk/sites/default/files/documents/ Collaborating for Change - SCONUL strategy 2016-19_0.pdf

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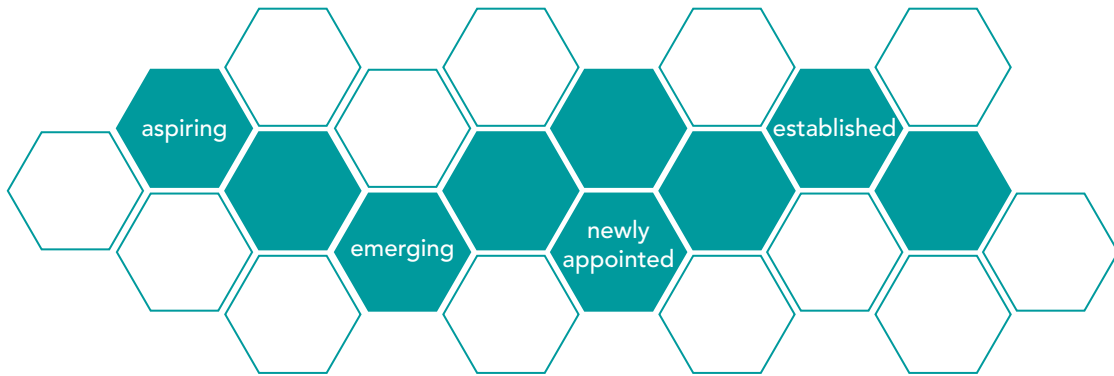
**Aspiring leaders:** those who may be aspiring to a role in a senior leadership team.

**Emerging leaders:** those in senior leadership teams or operating at deputy level. They may or may not be interested in progressing to head of service level.

**Newly appointed leaders:** those who are newly appointed to a head of service role.

**Established leaders:** those who are experienced leaders who may both seek support for new areas of work and may lend the benefit of their experience to others in the sector.

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# 2. Leading libraries

## Responsibilities and positioning

It was clear from the results of a survey of library leaders carried out in March – April 2017 that SCONUL directors have a wide-ranging portfolio, with lead responsibilities in many areas other than the library. The areas most frequently listed in addition to library were archives and special collections (83% of respondents), research support and open access (68%), and academic study skills (47%). There was a long tail of 37% of other, sometimes quite diverse, areas such as learning spaces and technology, research support and records management which were also led by the head of the library service.

Despite this diverse and sometimes extensive range of responsibilities, board table representation is not evident, with only 2% of library leaders sitting on the VC's Executive Board (although membership of academic board and senior management teams is more common). This makes it challenging for heads of service to extend their level of strategic influence. In organisational terms it is the case that the library in some institutions is no longer the central independent unit it once was and 'the librarian' is often one or two tiers down in the senior staff structure. This was evidenced by the interviews with institutional leaders carried out by David Baker and Alison Allden, and reveals some challenges for library leadership in how they position themselves and the services to achieve maximum impact.

Given that in today's environment, heads of service are no longer automatically given a place at the top table as part of the role of university librarian, many organisational leaders felt that library leaders needed to demonstrate a wider knowledge across the sector in order to take on a leadership position within their institution.

## Research informing new services

The work of the Leadership Task and Finish Group was underpinned and informed by a series of pieces of research. These included a survey of deputies (198 respondents in November 2016), a survey to establish the range of knowledge and experience of

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senior library leaders (95 respondents mainly at director-level in March – April 2017), and a desk-based review of over 150 relevant leadership development and training courses in the UK and abroad.

There were also two major research strands which were directed by the Task Group and consultant led: a literature review on 'Leading in uncertain times' and 'The view from above' – perceptions of academic library leadership based on interviews with twelve strategic leaders in the UK HE sector. A companion piece, 'The view from beyond', looking the perception and experience of academic library sector leaders with an international focus, is also being published.

### Leading libraries: Leading in uncertain times: literature review

Top 10 reads:

Adams Becker, S., Cummins, M., Davis, A., Freeman, A., Hall Giesinger, C., & Ananthanarayanan, V. (2017). NMC Horizon Report: 2017 Higher Education Edition

Baker, D. (2017). The end of wisdom? The future of libraries in a digital age

Brennan, J., Broek, S., et al. (2014). Study on innovation in higher education: Final report. European Commission Directorate for Education and Training Study on Innovation in Higher Education

Garmer, A. (2016). Libraries in the exponential age: Moving from the edge of innovation to the center of community

Germano, M. (2011). Library leadership that creates and sustains innovation

Hendrix, D. (2013). Emotional intelligence and the winds of change in academic libraries

Lewis, D. W. (2016). Reimagining the academic library

McCaffrey, P. (2010). The higher education manager's handbook: Effective leadership and management in universities and colleges

Nayar, V. (2010). Employees first, customers second

Roberts, S., & Rowley, J. (2008). Leadership: The challenge for the information profession.

The full literature review with annotated bibliography is available here: https://www.sconul.ac.uk/publication/leading-in-uncertain-times-a-literature-review

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## External perspectives

A key aim of the research undertaken by consultants David Baker and Alison Allden was to look at library leadership from different angles, challenging our own perceptions of how we are viewed and positioned within our institutions.

There were a few surprising results and others that were not unexpected. The research validates the perception that libraries operate efficiently and effectively without being on the strategic radar of their institutions. Strategic leaders in the UK value the work that the library does, particularly in relation to supporting students and being close to the understanding of how students learn, but they do not see the library as a strategic concern. They also highlighted the importance of library leaders having a wider knowledge of the sector than that which directly impacts on their area. This prompted the question 'Does the senior academic library leader need to be a librarian?'

**Seeing ourselves as others see us: interviews with sector leaders**

- Leading libraries: The view from above: available at https://www.sconul.ac.uk/publication/the-view-from-above
- Leading libraries: The view from beyond (international perspectives): available at https://www.sconul.ac.uk/publication/the-view-from-beyond

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# 3. Support for aspiring leaders

SCONUL provides a number of opportunities for members of staff in member libraries who are not yet part of a senior leadership team but who aspire to be so.
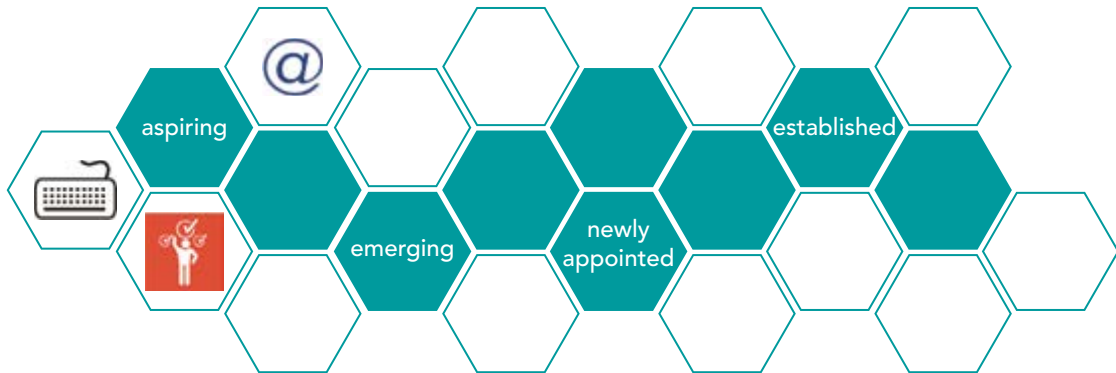


We suggest that aspiring leaders:

**sign up for lis-sconul**

Lis-sconul is an excellent way to keep informed about SCONUL activities and those of our partners. Anyone from a SCONUL member library can join – just contact us at sconul@sconul.ac.uk with your library email address.

**read and write for FOCUS**

FOCUS is SCONUL's practitioner journal. It provides a mechanism for sharing experience and best practice between institutions. Writing for FOCUS provides an opportunity to raise the profile of interesting projects and to practice writing for publication. We welcome proposals for articles from anyone in a member institution – please contact the Executive Director at ann.rossiter@sconul.ac.uk.

**come to SCONUL events**

We have a residential summer conference every year which covers a wide range of topics and issues of interest to those running academic libraries, plus a number of smaller conferences and workshops over the year on specific topics, some of which are free and some paid for. For further information sign up to lis-sconul or see https://www.sconul.ac.uk/events.

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# 4. Support for emerging leaders

As part of its research base for the leading libraries work, SCONUL surveyed those working in senior teams within our member libraries to establish the kinds of interventions and support that they would find useful in their leadership journey. This feedback from our emerging leaders has informed the work of the Task and Finish Group. For example, those surveyed indicated that SCONUL support for more formal leadership training and networking events would be helpful. SCONUL is publishing a directory of leadership courses and will be promoting our events for members. Those who were already members of a SCONUL deputies group found membership of them invaluable but some were not aware of how to join a group. We will be reminding members of the deputies' groups and how to join them through the SCONUL email list at regular intervals. Guidance and support documentation will also be updated and provided to each deputies group.



We suggest that emerging leaders:

**find a mentor**

SCONUL is launching a new mentoring scheme for emerging and newly appointed leaders. If you are interested either in finding or becoming a mentor, please see 'SCONUL Mentoring' at https://sconul.ac.uk/publication/sconul-mentoring for more details on the scheme. You can also register your interest by emailing ann.rossiter@sconul.ac.uk. You can find out more about coaching and mentoring from a SCONUL briefing at https://www.sconul.ac.uk/publication/briefing-paper-on-coaching-and-mentoring.

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**join an action learning set**

SCONUL is partnering with AUDE, BUFDG, UHR, and UCISA to deliver action learning sets for deputies across professional services. To express an interest please email ann.rossiter@sconul.ac.uk. Action learning is a powerful development experience for leaders. For more information see the SCONUL briefing at https://www.sconul.ac.uk/publication/briefing-paper-on-action-learning-sets.

**join a group for deputies**

SCONUL facilitates the creation of new groups of deputies who come together to share experience and learn from each other in an informal way. If you're not already involved in one of these groups and would like to be, please register your interest by emailing ann.rossiter@sconul.ac.uk.

**find a leadership course**

SCONUL has produced a directory of leadership courses suitable for those leading libraries or aspiring to do so. This provides a representative sample based on desk research and made from a global long list of several hundred options. The directory is available at https://www.sconul.ac.uk/publication/directory-of-leadership-courses.

**learn from the latest research**

What strategies can library leaders employ to 'lead in uncertain times'? Which approaches to leadership are needed in the context of continuous and rapid organisational, legislative, and technological change? To explore these questions read the Leading libraries literature review at https://www.sconul.ac.uk/publication/leading-in-uncertain-times-a-literature-review.

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# 5. Support for newly appointed leaders

Library leaders taking on their first role as a head of service face a particular set of challenges associated with operating as part of the institution's leadership. The research commissioned by SCONUL looking at how library leaders are viewed by university leaders may be helpful in considering how to develop their own leadership style.



We suggest that newly appointed leaders:

**find a mentor**

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**join a group for newly appointed leaders**

SCONUL facilitates the creation of groups for new heads of service who come together to share experience and learn from each other in an informal way. If you're not already involved in one of these groups and would like to be, please register your interest by emailing ann.rossiter@sconul.ac.uk.

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**understand how others see us**

What are the views of university senior leaders about academic library leadership and culture? SCONUL commissioned Professor David Baker and Alison Allden OBE to conduct an investigation into this question, and has published the results in a 'View from above'. Separately, a 'View from beyond' looks at international perspectives. The research is available at https://www.sconul.ac.uk/publication/the-view-from-above and https://www.sconul.ac.uk/publication/the-view-from-beyond.

**evaluate your own service**

Later in the autumn SCONUL will be producing a 360° appraisal tool to help SCONUL members ensure their strategic alignment and readiness for change. For more information please contact ann.rossiter@sconul.ac.uk.

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# 6. Support for established leaders

Even well-established leaders may come across new challenges and issues with which they haven't dealt before, for example being given responsibility for new areas of work such as philanthropy or whole new departments such as student services. SCONUL is establishing an Experience Exchange Register where directors can seek advice from other directors in areas with which they have less familiarity. Established directors who are considering promotion within the institution may also benefit from looking at some of the formal training options on offer in the directory of leadership courses and considering some of the advice forthcoming from university leaders in 'The view from above' and 'The view from beyond'.

Established leaders also have the opportunity to give back by contributing their experience to the Experience Exchange Register or by becoming a mentor themselves.



In addition to the support identified above, we suggest established leaders:

**become a mentor**

SCONUL is seeking mentors for its new mentoring scheme for emerging and newly appointed leaders. If you are interested in becoming a mentor, please see 'SCONUL Mentoring' at https://sconul.ac.uk/publication/sconul-mentoring for more details on the scheme. You can also register your interest by emailing ann.rossiter@sconul.ac.uk.

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learn from others' experience

SCONUL is setting up an Experience Exchange Register so that library leaders can contact others who have experience to share that is particularly useful when encountering new and / or challenging situations. For more information see https://www.sconul.ac.uk/publication/sconul-experience-exchange-register or contact ann.rossiter@sconul.ac.uk either to participate in or use the register.

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# 7.  About the SCONUL Leadership Task and Finish Group

The SCONUL Leadership Task and Finish Group set out on its own journey in January 2016. The aims were to develop a range of practical initiatives to enhance the collective leadership capacity across SCONUL and to support individuals and groups of staff in member institutions in their leadership development.

The Task Group comprised twelve directors of library services in a diverse range of institutions reflecting the wide variations in structure, size, and mission across the sector. It is clear that the challenges that the community faces are similar. The higher education landscape is changing and the role and make-up of the academic library is evolving in response. The work of the group was stimulated by the following key questions. What skills and attributes do academic libraries need to succeed in this period of change and uncertainty? How do we develop ourselves to extend our strategic influence? The outcomes of the work aim to provide a range of tools to help the SCONUL leadership community to address these issues.

| The Task and Finish Group | |
| --- | --- |
| Alison Baud, Bath Spa University (Chair) | Roisin Gwyer, University of Portsmouth (Vice-Chair) |
| Michelle Anderson, University of Hull | Lesley Castens, Plymouth University |
| Wayne Connolly, Newcastle University | Janice Conway, University for the Creative Arts |
| Dave Ford, University of Hertfordshire | Sue Hodges, Bangor University |
| Liz Kerr, Regent's University London | Jo Norry, Leeds Beckett University |
| Anna O'Neill, University of Chichester | Ann Rossiter, Executive Director, SCONUL |
| Jane Savidge, University of Southampton | |

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