

# Planning for the future in new library development



Libraries are changing, but buildings have a long life – so, how do you future-proof a new library? This was the issue facing the University of Bristol as they contemplated a large capital investment in a new library building. Students expect quality space, excellent service and extended opening hours.

Technology is becoming embedded into buildings and nowhere more so than in libraries which are no longer just bookstores, but rather places of learning. As library services extend from the physical to the digital, library budgets become increasingly stretched. In order to continue to deliver excellent service, libraries need to embrace automation and cloud services wherever possible.

The University of Bristol asked SUMS to inform their library development plans through benchmarking with particular focus on building a new university library and moving the library management system into the cloud. Leeds, Leicester, Nottingham, Cardiff and Birmingham Universities all agreed to participate in the study.

The benchmark questions were first agreed with Bristol's library management team and focused on future trends. Bristol completed the questions first, to verify that they could be answered, before other participating librarians were interviewed by SUMS consultants. Given views on future trends were being sought, qualitative insight was at least as important as collecting numbers. The numbers were therefore largely taken from the SCONUL (Society of College, National and University Libraries) return.

SUMS identified three key trends:

- 1) From subject segmentation to user (taught and research) segmentation in particular the development of library services for the researcher
- 2) The librarian as custodian of learning places, as well as custodian of access to information
- 3) The need to blend physical and digital resources to achieve best value for the customer

Nine months after SUMS' benchmarking report was completed, Bristol presented at the SUMS Special Interest Group on how the Library development was progressing from an Estates' perspective. This meeting was held in Leeds so that attendees could visit the Leeds Laidlaw Library, which had particularly impressed SUMS as a new library building.

While this report was commissioned by Bristol, its findings have been shared with other SUMS members, both through the space managers Special Interest Group and through sharing the report. This is true sharing of best practice, a core value for SUMS.

**Andrea Buttle**  
SUMS Consultant

Working with SUMS helped us collate independent evidence benchmarked with peer institutions to support business planning for a new university library. Accurate space metrics for learning spaces (library, study spaces, etc) proved the most difficult to ascertain and this helped open up new lines of enquiry with estate management over collating and evidencing data for library and study space planning.

**Dr Jessica Gardner**  
Former Librarian at the  
University of Bristol

SUMS works for universities. SUMS is different – we really understand the culture of universities and how to bring about change within them.

SUMS consultants combine commercial expertise with a deep understanding of the sector. Our consultants come from the commercial sector – including from the big four consultancy firms – and senior roles within universities. Our principal consultants are a professional team that share their experience of commercial and public sector best practice. We learn from what has worked well elsewhere, from other sectors and within HE. We horizon scan, are aware of the issues that will be impacting UK HE and are developing solutions to help our Members meet the challenges ahead.

SUMS membership gives unique access to other Members and other SUMS international networks: in USA, EU and Australia.



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