

**Co-operative collection development: a UK national library perspective
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The British Library is one of the one of world's great library collections. As an institution, however, it has only existed since 1973, when it was created as the national library of the United Kingdom, taking over the library functions and collections of a number of separate precursor institutions, each with separate collecting aims and traditions. I will describe some of the difficulties and challenges the Library has faced over recent years in relation to its collection development, and how, following a Strategic Review in 1998, it now wishes further to develop co-operative and partnership approaches to collection development and related activities with other organizations both nationally and internationally. Given the nature of the British Library's existing collections and current collecting, this paper concentrates primarily, but not exclusively, on issues relating to the collection development of printed publications.

The Library's collection covers many centuries of recorded knowledge. It contains material in all major and many minor languages, from all countries and in all disciplines. For over two hundred years the Library and its predecessor, the British Museum, have collected systematically UK printed publications through legal deposit. At the same time as building the national archive of UK printed publications, the Library and its predecessors have assembled and developed one of the world's greatest research library collections. It is renowned for having incomparable holdings of manuscripts, maps and music, one of the world's largest archives of sound recordings, the world's largest collection of patent specifications and of conference proceedings, and rich and vast holdings of early and modern books and periodicals from the UK and overseas.

Increasingly, the Library is taking in or accessing elsewhere publications in electronic form and, at the same time, continues to collect publications in those more traditional forms which are the historic basis of its collections.

The Library provides access to its collections within its reading rooms in London to scholars and researchers from the UK and all over the world on the basis of their need to use the collections, and as a back up and extension to the resources they have available to them in their own institutions. At the same time, its document supply and interlending services, based at Boston Spa in the North of England, deal with over four million requests a year from both UK and foreign users for copies of articles and other texts, and for interlibrary loans of items from the Library's collection. This allows other libraries to concentrate on building their own core collections secure in the knowledge that material outside of that core will remain accessible systematically to their researchers through remote supply.

Until the mid 1990s the component parts of the Library brought with them traditions of acquisition for reference and for remote supply which were largely sustained, funded and staffed independently of one another. This resulted in considerable duplication in different parts of the collection, particularly of UK publications, of serials in both humanities and science held separately for document supply and reference purposes, and of English language monographs held both at Boston Spa and in London. Following a review in the mid 1990s, the Library brought together in 1996 its collection development functions and staffing under a single department to assist in the shaping of a corporate collection development policy and to move towards the development and use of a Library-wide "single collection." This has aimed to minimize duplication as far as possible, and to use where practicable a single copy of an item to support both reading room access and remote document supply. However, some level of duplication continues to be required on either policy or service grounds. Items belonging to the national published archive, which have been deposited by publishers under legal deposit arrangements, are only available to readers who visit the Library's reading rooms, and are not used for remote supply. Duplicate copies of UK publications, both serials and

monographs, continue therefore to be purchased for document supply purposes and interlending. Other items, particularly some scientific journals, are in such heavy demand by both readers and remote users that reference and document supply services cannot both be provided adequately from a single printed copy. And so duplication has continued, initially of print copies, but increasingly using electronic versions where publishers are willing to license these for both reading room and document supply use.

In 1998 the British Library carried out a Strategic Review to help it define its role and plan its activities for the future. This included a wide-ranging consultation exercise to seek the views of stakeholders, particularly users and other UK libraries and related organizations. Responses to the consultation exercise emphasized the importance of the Library's collection in underpinning its services to support scholarship and research. Responses recommended that the Library should play a leading role in creating a national strategy for national library and information provision, to lead to an efficient and effective library infrastructure. It should ensure that its strategy is informed by and compatible with the development of parallel arrangements in other parts of the world. It should ensure that the Library's new direction is firmly set in the context of the United Kingdom library and information network and that its role is clearly understood by all. It should conduct proper and timely consultation with the library and information community before changes are introduced.

In relation to collection development the Strategic Review recommended that:

building the collections should continue to be a top priority, with a wish to spend substantially more on acquisitions than 1998/99 in each of the next 3 years;

digital works should form an integral part of the Library's collection, with efforts continuing to extend legal deposit to cover non-print publications;

it should be recognized formally that collecting in all subjects, in all languages and from all nations cannot be sustained;

there should be particular emphasis on material which is most used, or most likely to be much used in the future;

co-operation on the collecting of legal deposit material should continue and develop further with the other UK legal deposit libraries;

there should be increased co-operation with UK public libraries on the collection of and provision of access to local newspapers and other categories of local publications;

there should be continuing emphasis on the extensive collecting of works published world-wide relating to the UK and the UK experience, and of English language materials of research level significance;

material should be collected which interprets and illuminates the non-UK material in the Library's foundation and historic printed collections, and in the Library's great special collections of manuscripts, maps and music;

material in foreign languages should be collected which adds value or meaning to the existing collection, subject to expectation of need and use.

The Library's Board endorsed the main recommendations of the Strategic Review, in particular that the Library should seek to develop partnership arrangements with other institutions that would enable a more distributed approach within the UK to collection development and other activities. Co-operation on collection development would form one strand of the Library's wider program of increasing co-operation with other UK libraries and institutions, expected to cover co-operation also on access, preservation, digitization, record creation and bibliographic services.

To help take forward these recommendations and the outcomes of the Strategic Review, the Library has set up a small team of staff to develop and co-ordinate a co-operation and partnership program, and has established a new fund to support practical co-operative

activities and projects in the UK. The program is headed by Geoff Smith. The purposes of the team are to define and develop the program of co-operation and partnership in the key areas mentioned, to co-ordinate existing and new BL co-operative activities, working with colleagues in the relevant operational areas, and to provide an external focus and point of contact relating to co-operation

Discussions have begun with a number of institutions, and a number of projects have been initiated to take forward this co-operation program. Examples of these are given below.

Collecting of UK publications

Several initiatives are under way in relation to the collecting of United Kingdom publications. Within the UK legal deposit system, consisting of the British Library, the university libraries of Oxford and Cambridge, the national libraries of Scotland and Wales, and Trinity College Dublin, there is increasing co-operation on collecting and preservation responsibilities for particular materials, starting with leisure journals and local newspapers, but expected to extend in the future to further types of material.

In pursuit of a long standing joint aim the UK legal deposit libraries are seeking to extend legal deposit arrangements to cover non-print publications in both microform and electronic form and to bring these into the national published archive. In December 1998, following the report of a working party of library and publisher representatives, the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, announced his intention to move towards legislation for this once further work on definitions and impact on business had been completed. The legal deposit libraries are currently working with publishers' representatives to agree to a code of practice for the voluntary deposit of non-print publications to fill the gaps in collecting until legislation comes into force. It is expected that this code of practice will be agreed upon before the end of 1999, with a voluntary scheme to be implemented from early 2000, while it is hoped that the legislative process will begin within the next eighteen months. It is the view of the deposit libraries that, as for printed publications, deposited electronic items should be available to researchers

within each of the deposit libraries, either through deposit of multiple copies, or through limited access across networks between the libraries. Planning for management procedures and for the network mechanisms is currently under way between the libraries.

Discussions have begun with the public library sector to improve collecting of and access to UK local publications. A research project is being carried out at Loughborough University on a case study of local publications from Leicestershire and from the city of Leicester. The main aims of this research are to identify and develop models which will facilitate co-operative initiatives and partnership arrangements at local, regional and national levels, intended to improve the coverage of collecting of local publications and to ensure their recording in the British National Bibliography.

Foreign collecting

It is in the area of collecting foreign materials, particularly those in foreign languages, that the greatest changes in the British Library's collection development policies and practices are likely to occur. The 'universal' model of collecting was established in the British Museum by its great Keeper of Printed Books, Antonio Panizzi, in the middle of the 19th century. In 1861 his deputy, Thomas Watts, wrote:

“the object ... has been to bring together from all quarters the useful, the elegant and the curious literature of every language; to unite with the best English library in England or the world, the best Russian library out of Russia, the best German out of Germany, the best Spanish out of Spain, and so for every language, from Italian to Icelandic, from Polish to Portuguese”.

This ideal, though affected over time by budget fluctuations and by external political circumstances, remained since then the basis of the British Museum's, and subsequently the British Library's collecting policies and practices, with collecting organized on the basis of language and country of publication rather than on the subject basis more common in academic libraries.

As stated earlier, the 1998 Strategic Review recommended that ‘it should be recognized formally that collecting in all subjects, all languages and from all nations cannot be sustained.’ One of the factors influencing this conclusion was the financial pressure arising from escalating costs of materials, the associated collecting activity, and the long-term life cycle costs of processing, storage and preservation. In addition, however, analysis of British Library usage data, and external developments in publishing, technical infrastructures, researcher expectation and library provision, all point to the need for the British Library’s foreign collecting to be better coordinated with that of other major collections in the UK and elsewhere to ensure overall optimization of the use of limited resources, and best overall provision to meet research needs.

Significant factors include the high overlap in user communities with academic libraries in the UK. In many areas the Library’s current collecting overlaps significantly with that of other academic and specialist institutions. At the same time there is relatively little use of current foreign language materials (as compared to foreign language materials in the Library’s historic collections). Reader use of recent (post 1990) foreign language humanities and social sciences material is low, suggesting that researchers’ first resort needs for access to such material are being met elsewhere. Purchasing of foreign language monographs in science, technology and medicine has virtually ceased, with little apparent impact on services or users. At the same time, demand for items for document supply shows a continuing diminution of the proportion of foreign language requests, with, in the most recent survey carried out, 96% of items requested being in the English language.

There appears to be general consensus that in principle there should be increased and improved co-operation on collection development. The difficulties lie in establishing effective and economic ways to achieve this, and in finding overall a systematic way forward that is to the benefit of both libraries and researchers.

A number of projects are under way to collect and analyze data on current collecting patterns and usage, to examine models and to identify appropriate solutions based on collaborative and partnership approaches. Some of these have been initiated by the

British Library as pilot projects. Examples include investigation of the collecting of German language humanities and social science materials (with Cambridge University Library); history of medicine materials (with the Wellcome Institute); natural history materials (with the Natural History Museum); oriental materials (with the School of Oriental and African Studies at London University). Work so far suggests in each case that there is scope and likely benefit in closer collaboration on collection development and access.

At the same time the Library has been invited to be a participant in a number of initiatives within the UK higher education sector as part of the higher education funded Research Support Libraries Program (RSLP). The Library is involved in ten separate projects, including collaborative collection development and collection management projects relating to Russian and East European studies, Asian materials, foreign legal materials, official publications, music, archaeology, Icelandic materials, and resources for Caribbean Studies and the history of Black and Asian people in Britain. These projects will take place over the next three years and are intended to map existing provisions, establish models, and provide a framework for agreeing upon responsibilities and mechanisms for the future for improved collecting and access arrangements on a distributed basis.

The challenges to be faced in achieving successful co-operation should not be underestimated. It will not be successful without the support of specialist staff in the British Library and elsewhere, who need to understand and believe in the mutual benefits and to be committed to establishing effective ways of working together. Equally important is the understanding and acceptance of users of the rationale and the overall benefits. A number of difficult issues will have to be addressed. Some of these issues are described below, together with suggestions for how they might be approached.

There is concern at the prospect that for non-UK materials the range of languages and / or disciplines collected by the British Library, and the level of its duplication of current collecting with other institutions, will be reduced through co-operative agreements, and

thereby leading to a reduction in the quality of its collections and its value to current and future users. It will be important to ensure that material no longer taken by the British Library will be collected by and accessible in or from other institutions. It will be equally important that in addition to appropriate rationalization of collecting, co-operation should also aim for and be able to demonstrate an overall improvement in the range of material available to researchers where there is an identifiable need for this extended range.

There is likely to be a conflict between usage as a key driver of collecting policy in all institutions and the need to ensure systematic overall availability of lower use material as institutions move from a holding to an access strategy. There is a tendency for all institutions under budget pressure to retreat to a common core of collecting of material most in demand. The British Library intends to continue systematic collecting on a centralized basis of materials for document supply, particularly of serials and English language materials. It will collect both materials in high demand from its services, and other materials, for which the cost in relation to local levels of use are uneconomic to individual libraries outside of their core areas of collecting, but for which there is sufficient aggregate level of use at the national level.

There is an expectation in the UK that the British Library should continue to be the last resort systematic collector of some categories of material, particularly foreign language, of which it may be the only significant holder in the country-- even where there is little evidence of either their use for reading room reference or remote supply. It needs to be examined and debated whether last resort, low-use material in individual disciplines or languages is best held centrally or whether it would be better held in the specialist institutions or academic collections, where first resort use is also most likely by researchers in the field concerned. In some cases it should be considered whether categories of last resort 'just-in-case-material' in particular disciplines or languages need to be held within the UK at all; or whether reliance on remote supply services or even reference access in other countries, including the country of origin, would be sufficient in the event of future research need.

There is likely to be resistance of users to the concept of more distributed collecting, in particular if its implementation were to mean they would have to travel significant distances to use material they would previously have found in their home institution or in the British Library. This argues that printed material in high use and demand should continue to be held locally, even where it duplicates material elsewhere, with distributed approaches being more appropriate for lower use material, for material for which there is an imbalance in use (high in one institution but low in another) or for electronic resources which can be accessed locally regardless of where they are physically held. In a more distributed collecting environment efforts will need to be made to ensure wherever possible that material held elsewhere is accessible via interlending or remote supply copying rather than solely by on site reference access. It may be possible, if wished by users and the libraries concerned, to extend the backup arrangements currently operated by the British Library's Document Supply Centre so that requests can still be routed via a single point, even if the request is subsequently filled by lending or copying from another institution.

There is a fear among libraries, and possibly among funding agencies, that co-operation may in fact result in either an increase in overall costs, or in an unequal redistribution of costs, with savings in one institution resulting in an increase in costs in others. This points to the need to examine and discuss openly the economics of co-operation, and to develop models able to identify in financial terms the success or failure of co-operation.

Changes in collecting policy and responsibility are likely to impact on staffing needs and organization, leading some staff to view co-operation as a threat to the status quo. In the British Library this is reinforced by a belief in some staff that the centralized 'universal' model of collecting remains valid, and is still the most appropriate method of provision at the national level for meeting current and long-term research needs, particularly for onsite reference use. To overcome this attitude, staff need to be encouraged to become more outwardly focused on user needs and external developments rather than internally focused on their own collections. They need to see the establishment of effective co-operation in their field, in order to improve overall provision for researchers, as an

important professional opportunity and challenge, and to become actively involved in the detailed investigation of and planning for co-operation.

Future research needs are unpredictable, given an assumption that research libraries collect material as much for future generation of research use as for the present. That this assumption has validity can be seen from the evidence of the continuing high levels of use of the British Library's historic humanities and social science collections. The diversity of this use suggests that it would have been impossible a hundred or two hundred years ago to identify selectively only that material then being published which would be of interest to the researchers of the end of the twentieth century, and that the greatest legacy of those collectors was in the range and depth of their collecting. Similar considerations are argued in terms of what of current output will be of long-term value to the researchers of the future. For UK material it is accepted that the purposes of current legal deposit collecting are both to support current use and to build and preserve systematically and comprehensively the national published archive for future generations of researchers. However it can no longer be realistic for an individual national library to carry out this same dual role for the published output of the whole of the rest of the world, particularly when electronic publications are added to the still growing print output. Here it will be essential for libraries to collaborate both nationally and internationally, to ensure that the material needed to support current research is collected and held where current use and demand are likely to be highest, whether in national libraries, specialist collections or academic institutions. Responsibilities for long-term preservation, retention and access provision to support future research also need to be agreed upon, either between the same libraries, or, increasingly with institutions abroad, including national libraries and major collections in the country of origin.

These then are some of the barriers to co-operation that will need to be overcome if it is to be effective and successful. The need to work together effectively has never been greater. Most libraries in the UK, and almost certainly in other countries, including the USA, have been subject to budget pressures and have seen collecting budgets shrink in real terms as the rise in cost of materials, particularly serials, outstrips general inflation

and any increase in institutional funding. In the UK all public institutions have experienced pressure on their staffing, while user numbers and demand continue to grow, stimulated by the government's learning and education agendas.

At the same time, the opportunities to work together more effectively, and the enabling technologies and mechanisms to allow us to do so, have never been better. Electronic mail and list servers offer our staff improved communication to assist their working together. Our major library catalogues are now mostly in computer form, and are accessible to each other across the World Wide Web, though many of us still have valuable but underused resources in material still needing to be catalogued, or catalogues still needing to be converted to computer form. In the UK significant amounts of funding continue to be allocated to major retrospective conversion projects, and the British Library is involved in support for the development, promulgation and quest for funding of a national strategy on retrospective catalogue conversion. At the same time, there are significant developments in inter-availability of library catalogues, with the development of Z39.50 capabilities, giving users the capacity to search seamlessly and at the same time the catalogues not only of their home institution but also those of other institutions with related holdings.

The development of subject gateways and other resource discovery tools offer the librarian powerful ways to guide users to the relevant electronic and physical resources to meet their needs; while the World Wide Web, with its vast and rapidly growing electronic content, increases massively the range of materials accessible to our users, whether direct or while in our reading rooms. At the same time it provides us with a mechanism for delivering to users the content of our own collections, once converted into digital form.

In the UK there are significant new funding initiatives to ensure that the capabilities of the Internet are made widely available to the general population through greatly improved provision in public libraries, and there are major opportunities for collaboration between library sectors in the provision of digital content for this 'New Library Network.'

The British Library believes the time has never been better to explore and implement shared approaches to our common concerns, and to build a framework of agreements and a network of collaborations to lead to an improved, coordinated, and increasingly distributed national and international library resource that will meet the needs of current and future generations of researchers.