

The Pro-Vice-Provost's Report, February 2021

1. The Covid-19 challenge

The challenges covid-19 presents are real and ever-present. Because of the current lockdown, the Library is faced with enormous challenges in supporting 48,000 students both remotely and on campus. Day-to-day supervision of the Library's response is undertaken by the Oversight Team, chaired jointly by Ben Meunier and Martin Moyle. I am happy to say here that this Team is doing an absolutely superb job in maintaining morale in the Library and in securing the promotion of services and facilities from the Library during lockdown.

At the time of writing, the Library is offering learning spaces for students at 4 sites: the UCL Student Centre, the UCL Institute of Education Library, Bidborough House and the Royal Free Hospital. During core hours (11.00-18.00) these learning spaces have been fully occupied 91% of the time they are open.

Morale amongst Library staff is good, but many who are working on site are fearful of travelling on public transport when infection rates in Camden are so high. Happily these are now falling and (at the time of writing) are lower than the national daily average.

Running services from the Library in lockdown is difficult, but Library colleagues were much heartened by the Vice-Provost (Research)'s comments at Christmas that the Library was a 'standout success' in the difficult period that UCL is experiencing. This was underlined by the gift, with the approval of UCL SMT, of £20 per person in digital tokens to each member of Library staff as a recognition of their vibrant contribution to the Library and its users throughout 2020.

2. [User Experience](#)

E-Textbooks

With new recurrent monies of £3.1m provided by UCL, the Library has invested in commercial e-textbooks to support programme leads deliver core learning support for UCL modules of study and to ensure content coverage in ReadingLists@UCL. Without this funding, it would be impossible to support the Student Experience.

On national and European levels, UCL has been gaining quite some visibility in its support for an investigation into e-textbook pricing. A robust article in the [Guardian](#) entitled 'Price gouging from Covid: student ebooks costing up to 500% more than in print' has drawn extensive coverage on Twitter and was trending on Reddit

with thousands of comments. There is certainly an issue on pricing, with calls for a national investigation into the commercial e-textbook model. Examples librarians have given include an education textbook called *An Integrated Play-based Curriculum for Young Children*, published by Routledge, offered to libraries for £36.99 in print but for £480 for an ebook that can only be read by one student at a time. The cost to libraries for one business studies book, *Fundamentals of Corporate Business*, published by McGraw Hill, was £65.99 in print and £528 as a single user ebook. Surprisingly, or perhaps not, the Publishers Association has (at the time of writing) declined to comment on the article. On 4 February, I gave a live TV interview on the subject to *Euronews*, whose distribution reaches 400 million households in 160 countries.

As well as advocating for an investigation, UCL is establishing an Open Access E-Textbook platform via UCL Press as an alternative provider for e-Textbooks, e-Lecture Notes, and other forms of educational output. It is university lecturers who write textbooks, and this is an opportunity for universities to bring back educational publishing into the academy.

The objectives of the UCL Press pilot are to:

- Test the level of interest amongst UCL academics in publishing educational materials with UCL
- Look at possible cost savings in E-Textbook production when compared to commercial Business Models
- Engage with other universities to explore collaborative approaches to OA E-Textbook provision

3. Staff, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

3 learning spaces have recently been affected with closure because of one member of staff catching covid-19. Study spaces at Bidborough House were not available on the 25/01/2021. The building reopened on the 26/01/2021. 1-19 Torrington Place and Ramsay Hall (New York Building) were closed between the 25/01/2021 and the 31/01/2021. They re-opened on the 02/02/2021.

It is a challenge to maintain staff morale because of the extended closure of most physical library sites. Regular coronavirus updates are sent to all members of staff twice a week, informing them of the current situation. As Pro-Vice-Provost, I make sure that I send a weekly Newsletter article to all members of Library staff, informing them of high-level decisions being taken in UCL and of work that I myself have done during the week. There are also regular Library Newsletters produced with Microsoft Sway and a Break Room on Microsoft Teams, which offers events such as Quizzes.

UCL Press is broadening the compass of its Executive, which is charged with overseeing the production of digital research monographs. The purpose of the expansion in membership is to include more members from the BAME community. The Press is working with Fiona McClement, who is the UCL lead on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

4. Finance and Management Information

The following statistics are taken from the SCONUL 2019-20 data.

Institution	FTE Students	Total gross Library spend (excl. APCs)	Library baseline budget as % of total University expenditure	Total Information spend per student FTE (£)
UCL	36,900	26,265,963	1.8	282
RLUK MEAN	22,861	12,732,000	1.8	250
Imperial	18,450	13,635,596	1.2	442
King's London	29,240	12,786,143	n/a	200
Oxford	20,890	48,837,554	1.6	481
Cambridge	20,385	28,970,559	1.0	483
Edinburgh	33,090	17,660,740	1.6	274
Manchester	37,475	24,546,240	1.9	318
SCONUL Strategic Benchmarking Data 2019-20				

Institution	Total Library visits	Article downloads per FTE student	E-Book section requests per FTE student
UCL	3,011,764	285	102
RLUK MEAN	1,196,290	242	130
Imperial	1,083,973	340	42
King's London	1,368,836	249	127
Oxford	1,019,569	575	284
Cambridge	n/a	499	210
Edinburgh	2,244,753	314	107
Manchester	1,861,928	301	102
SCONUL Strategic Benchmarking Data 2019-20			

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The data shows that UCL performs well and efficiently when compared to its UK benchmark comparitors. Gross spend is high, with Oxford leading the Table by some way. The % of the institutional budget spent on the Library in UCL, at 1.8%, is respectable. Information spend per FTE student is respectable, but far behind Oxford, Cambridge and Imperial. The conclusion is that a larger spend by UCL on the Library would result in UCL being more competitive when compared to its benchmark partners. Article downloads per FTE student are good, but lagging behind a number of UK institutions. UCL is also the library with the most visits in UK HE.

5. Systems, Collections and Processes

The newly-launched UCL Office for Open Science has begun a series of webinars on topics of interest. In December, 87 people (UCL and non-UCL) attended a webinar organized between UCL and the Wellcome Trust on the new Wellcome Trust OA policy, which requires institutional compliance with [DORA](#). From David Carr, our Wellcome speaker: 'it was excellent and fantastic from my side to hear about the great work UCL is doing.' From Jason Harper, a senior library manager at the University of Plymouth 'Tip-top, tremendous webinar'.

UCL Special Collections now holds regular webinars to introduce the research community to the glorious collections which the Library holds. 19 January saw the first in a series of webinars on Dante, for whom the Library has an astonishingly complete series of editions. The webinar was entitled *Dante: a man for all seasons* and was given by Professor John Took. At the beginning of the webinar, Dr Tabitha Tuckett from UCL Special Collections showed a copy of the Library's first printed edition of Boccaccio's *Life of Dante*, containing Dante's *Divine Comedy*. The webinar was attended by 150 participants. It is a tremendous achievement and shows how UCL Special Collections can contribute to UCL's Public Engagement agenda and to the 'new normal'.

The DART-Europe portal for giving access to Open Access research these across Europe is a service which is offered, free of charge, by UCL to the global research community. The entire database has now been re-loaded and is available for searching at <https://www.dart-europe.org/basic-search.php>. The portal gives access to the following theses collections:

- Access to **991,804** open access research theses from [549](#) Universities in [28](#) European countries

UCL is one of the largest contributors to the portal – with the full text of **19,526 research theses** available in this way.

One of the results of the pandemic is the physical closure of libraries and so the loss of ready access to UCL's 2 million+ bookstock. This is particularly damaging for taught course students undertaking research projects and dissertations in terms 2 and 3. The Library has gained capital funding of £51,000 to extend the current Scan and Send service until July. To fail to do so would be to risk contravening the emerging UCL No Detriment policy.

6. [Sustainable Estate](#)

Use of UCL learning spaces - weekly summary 25-31 January 2021

Core Opening Hours 11.00-18.00

Library	Hours Occupied	Hours Available	% of Hours Occupied
All Sites	13639	15001	90.92
Student Centre	5972	5985	99.78
IOE Library	2072	2100	98.67
Bidborough House	5274	6216	84.85
Royal Free Hospital Library	321	700	45.86

All opening hours

Library	Hours Occupied	Hours Available	% of Hours Occupied
All Sites	26885	30500	88.15
Student Centre	14303	14364	99.58
IOE Library	4184	4680	89.40
Bidborough House	8044	10656	75.49
Royal Free Hospital Library	354	800	44.25

- Study spaces at Bidborough House were not available on the 25/01/2021. The building re-opened on the 26/01/2021.
- 1-19 Torrington Place and Ramsay Hall (New York Building) were closed between the 25/01/2021 and the 31/01/2021. They re-opened on the 02/02/2021.

Use of study space in those buildings which are open remains strong. In the last week of January, with two learning spaces out of commission, the Library still managed to meet requirements for learning space on site.

7. [Communication, Outreach & Open Science](#)

In January 2021, LERU (League of European Research Universities) published the results of 18 months of activity on Open Science and the role for LERU member universities in taking this agenda forward. The resulting paper can be read at '[Implementing Open Science](#)'. It makes 41 recommendations under the 8 pillars of Open Science, which universities can choose to adopt if they wish. The Working Group was chaired by Paul Ayris and included members of a number of other LERU policy groups who worked on each pillar using their expertise to identify ways forward.

The findings of the Report are also summarized in a formal interview with Dr Ayris, which is reproduced below:

Corona virus will strengthen Open Science

25.01.2021

The corona virus pandemic has brought home the importance of Open Science to many people, but Dr Paul Ayris needed no convincing. As chair of LERU's Information and Open Access Policy Group for the past decade, he has long been a champion of this approach to research.

You say Open Science will be part of the 'new normal' after the pandemic. What is the connection?

The pandemic is a chance to show that Open Science practices, such as sharing the data from trials and investigations, make it possible to find successful treatments and develop successful vaccines quickly, for the benefit of society. So while the pandemic is an appalling threat, it's also an amazing opportunity to change research culture, so that we emerge from the pandemic stronger than when we went in.

You also draw a parallel with the Ebola crisis of 2016?

Simon Hodson, who is the chief executive of Codata in Paris, found that most of the data that was produced during the Ebola crisis about infections and routes to a cure was not open data, and therefore couldn't be shared. It was either in the wrong format, or the people who produced the data didn't understand that sharing and openness were important. I'd like to think that we are doing better this time, but we need time and research on this specific question to know for sure.

Your paper covers the EU's eight pillars of Open Science. Remind us what they are?

They are the future of scholarly publishing; FAIR data, which is to say data that is Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reusable; the creation of the European Open Science Cloud; education and skills; rewards and incentives; next-generation metrics; research integrity; and citizen science.

How much progress has been made implementing them?

As an academic community, we in Europe have come a long way in the last 10 years. I would have liked to get where we are now in five or six years rather than ten, but I've known from the beginning that changing the culture of universities and university researchers would take time.

What does that cultural change involve?

It's getting people to think differently, for example to say that we could be better researchers if we share our data, so that it can be viewed, tested, and commented on by other people. If your subject area doesn't have a culture of sharing, that's the last thing you are going to think about, but in terms of doing good research, that sharing and the ability to reproduce results is really important.



“With journals, monographs and text books the current model is heavily weighted in favour of commercial publishing”

Dr Paul Ayriss

How much freedom do universities have to drive that change?

That depends on the area of Open Science. With journals, monographs and text books the current model is heavily weighted in favour of commercial publishing, and it's not within the power of universities to do things on their own. But in other areas of Open Science, universities have a great deal of power, if they choose to exercise it.

For example?

Many LERU universities are beginning to set up skills development training courses for early career researchers, to embed Open Science principles and practice. And universities can

change the way they recognise and evaluate excellence in research on their own. That doesn't require publishers or funders to agree. Universities can just do it.

Is achieving cultural change becoming any easier?

At my own institution, University College London, we have done two things that have made it easier. First, we appointed a senior manager -- me, as it happens -- to be the Open Science lead for the university. It's my job to talk to other senior managers about Open Science and to win them over to changes in policy and practice. That leadership role, at a senior institutional level, is important if you are going to bring about change. Every LERU university has now been invited to appoint an Open Science ambassador to play a similar role.

And the second initiative?

The second was to set up UCL Press, the UK's first fully open-access university press. When our academics saw the large number of downloads for the books we published, and in particular how useful this would be for early career researchers, it made open-access very popular. Once we had won hearts and minds in this way, that made the cultural change easier when we were looking at more difficult things, such as evaluation and research integrity.

“In an Open Science world, negative results are just as important as positive results”

Dr Paul Ayris



What makes research integrity difficult in this context?

One example is that most journals, and indeed many academics, do not want to publish negative results, because they think they are boring, and because they show that a hypothesis didn't work. But being able to see everything is an important part of research integrity, and in an Open Science world, negative results are just as important as positive results, because they inform your research choices.

What other challenges come to mind?

In the area of research data there is a great fear among universities that they will lose control if they sign over the rights to that data to commercial third parties who provide tools, services and platforms. We've made that mistake once, they think, with research publications and we mustn't make it again. So we have to think of ways that we can work together and collaborate to produce the platforms, services and tools that we need.

Such as the European Open Science Cloud?

Yes, the purpose of EOSC is to create a federated set of infrastructures that will allow countries and researchers in Europe to share their data and publications. To start with, the idea is to bring together existing infrastructure rather than create new infrastructure. Then phase two of EOSC would look for the gaps and ask how we can fill them. It's an important initiative, which is why LERU has agreed to become an observer in the new EOSC Association.

Dr Paul Ayriss is Pro-Vice-Provost responsible for UCL Library Services & Open Science and Scholarship at UCL (University College London)

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Paul Ayriss, FRHistS

Pro-Vice- Provost (UCL Library Services & UCL Office for Open Science and Scholarship)

4/2/21