

Aston University

Library & Information Services

Strategic Plan 2007/08 to 2011/12

Synopsis

Envisioned Future

Our strategy for the next five years is designed to take us further towards a future for the Library & Information Services (LIS) that comprises three main features:

- A digital collection available from anywhere and at anytime
- A physical space that is available 24/7 and that facilitates learning and social interaction in ways that are synergistic
- A service that is embedded in the learning, teaching, research and community engagement activities of the University

Strategic Intent

To enable us to move towards this future, we intend to:

- Continue to migrate our physical collections to electronic formats, as fast as funding, the publishing industry and our customers allow
- Relegate to our external stores printed material that is little used, or that is also available in electronic form, and dispose of it when it is safe to do so
- Seek funding for a major refurbishment and extension of the library building to accommodate new styles of learning and teaching and increasing student numbers
- Become more closely integrated with the University's Learning & Teaching Strategy, e.g. by delivering our resources and services through the VLE and Portal, in close collaboration with academic staff
- Explore new avenues for supporting the University's research activities, such as advocacy for open access publishing, development of an institutional repository and support for e-research
- Continue to be highly customer focussed, in terms of our support to the staff and students of the Schools of Study and in terms of the services that we offer to those who visit the library, either physically or electronically
- Support the University's engagement with the local and regional community by methods such as involvement in sustainability initiatives and collaboration with a variety of external partners, including other local higher education libraries and further education colleges

Aston University

Library & Information Services

Strategic Plan 2007/08 to 2011/12

1. Introduction

“Looking towards 2000, the only certainty for libraries is that there will be continual change. Forward planning for the Library and Information Service (LIS) is based on a high degree of uncertainty as to the rate and extent of change, and the degree to which traditional services will continue alongside the new, electronic information services.”¹

Looking towards 2025, Lynne Brindley’s observation still seems entirely apposite. Furthermore, it is obvious that the planning pointers, general objectives, and many of the specific objectives of the LIS Forward Strategy for 1986 –1990, could probably serve as the basis for our strategic plans for the next twenty years as well. That is not to say that we have made no progress over the last twenty years, but rather that the fundamental nature of what we have been trying to achieve remains unchanged, which pays tribute to Lynne’s strategic vision at that time.

A recent paper by David W. Lewis² identifies the challenges facing academic librarians during the next fifteen to twenty years and provides a strategy for academic libraries for this period. Its five components are:

- 1) **Complete the migration from print to electronic collections** and capture the efficiencies made possible by this change.
- 2) **Retire legacy print collections** in a way that efficiently provides for their long-term preservation and makes access to this material available when required. This will free space that can be repurposed.
- 3) **Redevelop the library** as the primary informal learning space on the campus. In the process, partnerships with other campus units that support research teaching and learning should be developed.
- 4) **Reposition library and information tools, resources and expertise** so that they are embedded into the teaching, learning and research enterprises.
- 5) **Migrate the focus of collections from purchasing materials to curating (open access) content.**

This provides a useful contextual framework within which we can examine the progress that we have made so far towards our envisioned future and what we still have to do.

¹ Lynne Brindley. Library & Information Services: [Forward Strategy 1986-1990](#). Aston University, September 1986, p.5.

² David W. Lewis. A Strategy for Academic Libraries in the First Quarter of the 21st Century. *College & Research Libraries*. 68(5) 418-434 (September 2007).

2. The Strategic Context

2.0 Student 2.0 and Library 2.0

In 2007/08, there were about 7,500 full time equivalent (fte) students attending courses at Aston University. By 2012, the University expects its student population to increase to 9,000 fte and by 2015 to 10,000 fte. The majority of students (about 75%) will continue to come from the UK and Europe and many of these will be in the age range 18 to 21 years and will study full time. However, there will be more part-time undergraduate and postgraduate students, as the University focuses its expansion plans on undergraduate Foundation Degrees, taught postgraduate courses and students from overseas.

An expansion in the number of part-time students is likely to lead to demands not just for longer opening hours in the evenings and weekends, but also for similar levels of staffed services to those during the weekday daytime, at least for part of these extended hours. We will also need to develop remote enquiry services for those students unable to make the journey to the library because of work or domestic commitments. The expansion in the number of overseas students means that we will need to work closely with the International Office and the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for International Relations and we plan to provide a designated member of staff to act as the contact for international issues.

The overall expansion in student numbers means that we will need to extend the library building, despite the fact that part-time students will not visit the library as much as full-time students, because the existing building is already close to capacity. The latter also needs to be refurbished as the carpet, lighting, and heating and ventilation system are over thirty years old. This will give us the opportunity to introduce new types of learning spaces, in recognition of the fact that students want and need to learn in different ways – in groups, on their own, whilst drinking coffee or listening to music, and so on.

Students are also learning in different ways in virtual spaces, as well as physical ones. We need to investigate ways in which we can reach them in these virtual spaces, without intruding into spaces that they consider are owned by them and where we are not welcome. At the very least, we can make use of the technologies underlying Web 2.0 (social networking, blogs, wikis, etc) to develop Library 2.0 services for our students.

The challenge that we face can be summed up by the phrase “changing students, changing spaces, changing services and changing staff roles” and will be outlined further in the following sections.

2.1 Complete the migration from print to electronic collections

The JISC-funded Periodicals Site Licence Initiative (PSLI)³, which ran from 1995 to 1997, effectively pump-primed the widespread adoption of e-journals in the UK. Ten years after that initiative ended, the existence of so

³ See, for example, http://www.hefce.ac.uk/Pubs/hefce/1998/98_22.htm

many of our journal titles (current and archival) in electronic formats means that we have been able to liberate significant amounts of library space. This space has been used to accommodate the increasing number of students and their demand for room to socialise and to learn – activities that tend to blend into one another when students work in groups. This trend is likely to continue, and even accelerate, and we envisage that in five years, or so, Aston’s library will contain few printed journals and by 2025 virtually none.

We may now be at a similar tipping point with books, as we were with journals in 1997. A 2004 study for the British Library⁴ predicted that by 2020 the percentage of UK book output available in electronic form would rise to over 80%. Whilst e-book packages have been available from publishers for some time, the JISC is now funding the National e-book Observatory⁵, a project to examine usage, assess impacts, observe student behaviour and develop new models to stimulate the e-books market⁶. Furthermore, the Copyright Licensing Agency’s three-year trial licence for photocopying and scanning⁷ is enabling us to provide digital extracts of books to students through the medium of virtual learning environments. It remains uncertain as to exactly how long it will be before most of our bookfunds are spent on electronic formats, rather than printed ones, but an horizon of ten years may prove to be a pessimistic prediction.

For the last twenty years or more, inflation rates on journal prices have consistently been well above the Consumer Prices Index (CPI), the Retail Prices Index (RPI), or any associated price indices. Furthermore, increases in student numbers mean that we need corresponding increases in our book budget to maintain our spend per fte student. We will submit annual bids for the Library Information Resources (LIR) that, at a minimum, allow us to maintain our spend per fte student in real terms. However, we are conscious that, over the last ten years, we have lost ground with respect to other universities in terms of spend per fte student on LIR and we will also bid for additional recurrent funds to boost our baseline LIR budget to a level compatible with that of similar size universities that occupy a place in the top twenty of national league tables.

The Library Information Resources model will be updated on a biennial basis to ensure that the resources available to the Schools reflect changes in staff and student numbers, prices for books and periodicals, and usage of electronic resources.

2.2 Retire legacy print collections

Our Collection Management Policy⁸ underpins the decisions that we make when developing our physical and virtual collections. For the reasons explained in section 2.1, the emphasis is upon acquiring electronic versions

⁴ Powell, DJ. Publishing output to 2020. The British Library, 29 January 2004

⁵ <http://www.jiscebooksproject.org/>

⁶ The requirements for the academic e-book market to become mature are the technology (e-book readers that simulate a conventional book as closely as possible), suitable content for the user, revenue models for the publishers and acceptable licensing and pricing for librarians

⁷ http://www.cla.co.uk/assets/169/uuk_guild_he_trial_licence_photocopying_and_scanning.pdf

⁸ <http://www.aston.ac.uk/downloads/lis/CollectionManagementPolicy.pdf>

of periodicals and books, where these are available, and selectively digitising those materials for which we own the copyright, or are licensed to do so, to support learning and teaching. In parallel with this, we actively and systematically weed our printed collections to ensure that they remain relevant.

We will continue to decant little-used printed periodicals from the Library Building to our store and we will discard any titles that receive less than three requests for use in a two-year period. We will retain print titles that are duplicated in electronic form, where there is any doubt about continued electronic access to these titles. However, the British Library, in partnership with Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), are in the early stages of implementing a UK Research Reserve⁹ that will ensure that a minimum of three print copies of each title are retained by the British Library and, on a distributed basis, by HEIs. This will ensure that libraries work together to avoid all institutions paying storage costs for the same low-use journals and will ensure that we can obtain copies for staff and students as and when required. When this happens, we will discard our duplicated print titles.

Although we have weeded about 70,000 books during the last five years, we still have about 40,000 books that have been not been used for five or more years. To liberate more space and to make the active stock much more visible, we will transfer these items to another store and measure usage over a period of five years, before consulting academic staff about the future of this material.

2.3 Redevelop the library as an informal learning space

The student population is continuing to change: becoming even more diverse and accustomed to learning in different ways and in different environments to previous generations. This has implications for the physical and virtual spaces that we provide for them, such as the library, virtual learning environment, portal and so on, as well as for the services that we provide. Increasingly, students are demanding twenty-four hour access to the library, as well as to its electronic services.

In the early 1990s, it became obvious that students were starting to work more collaboratively on projects and presentations, a trend that was facilitated by increasing access to electronic resources. However, the library was built primarily as a bookstore, with limited study space intended mainly for individual silent study. From the mid-1990s onwards, we began to address this tension between space for stock and space for study, by creating group study facilities, using space liberated by systematic weeding. However, this created another tension: between the space required for silent study and that required for group study, with demand varying at different times of the academic year. The situation was further complicated by the growth in the number of students visiting the library, with a 45% growth in visits to the library between 2002/03 and 2006/07.

⁹ <http://www.rluk.ac.uk/projects#UKRR>

In 2006, we commissioned an assessment of the library building by an external consultant. His report¹⁰ was delivered in March 2007 and was subsequently disseminated to key stakeholders in the University. It recommended that the library building be completely refurbished and extended to enhance the learning experience for the existing student population and to accommodate the increase in student numbers anticipated in the University’s strategy to 2012.

In April 2008, we submitted a successful bid for £2M to the HEFCE TandL capital fund to refurbish and re-equip the library building and this work will be carried out over the next three years. We will also work with the University’s Director of Development & Alumni Relations, to raise the necessary funds to enable us to extend the library building and create an inspirational learning environment that will be a magnet for students. This extension has provisionally been called the Information Hub or iHub.

2.4 Reposition library and information tools, resources and expertise so that they are embedded into the teaching, learning and research enterprises (*and community engagement*)

To ensure that the library remains fit for purpose, we need to maintain a high profile with our key stakeholders, continue to listen to our customers and act upon what we hear. Our professional staff play a crucial role in these processes; without them we would be reactive, rather than proactive. Equally, our support staff perform essential duties underpinning our public services and business processes. As students, spaces, services and information resources change, so too must staff roles, leading to a blurring of the demarcation between academic staff and professional library staff, and between professional library staff and library support staff.

The changes in the student population, alluded to in sections 2.0 and 2.3, are leading to an inevitable decrease in face-to-face interactions between LIS staff and customers for routine transactions, such as issue and return of books, and an increase in face-to-face(s) and virtual transactions for more complex support, ranging from in-depth subject enquiries to information literacy teaching sessions and online interactive information skills modules. To reflect and accelerate this trend, we have recently restructured staffing support for counter services and purchased a third self-issue machine. The next stage in this process will be to introduce self-return systems, facilitated by RFID¹¹ tagging of all of our stock.

The Library Management System (LMS) will also play an increasingly vital role in everything we do - not only by underpinning library processes and services, as it currently does, but also by integrating those services with virtual learning and research environments. Towards the end of the planning period, we will need to review our LMS, to ensure that it is fit for purpose, and consider whether or not it should be replaced, and, if so, whether the

¹⁰ MacDougal, A.F. An assessment of the space potential and the vision for the future of Aston University Library and Information Services Building: enhancing the student learning experience. March 2007.

¹¹ Radio Frequency Identification

replacement should be an integrated system sourced from a single supplier, or an aggregation of modules from different suppliers.

Enquiries (both simple and complex) are currently answered face-to-face at an Enquiry Desk situated on the ground floor of the library and staffed by professionally qualified staff and support staff. Subject enquiries can also be made by telephone or email to professional staff. General enquiries can be sent to the library email box and students can telephone an IT Helpdesk if they need IT support. We will work towards introducing enquiry services delivered through different channels, such as virtual chat and telephone enquiry services, reaching out to those who are unable to visit the library to make their enquiries in person.

We will endeavour to become more explicitly recognised in the University's Learning & Teaching Strategy through the development of an Information Literacy Strategy; by collaborating with the Learning Development Centre; and by encouraging our Information Specialists to achieve the Aston Learning & Teaching Certificate. We will also become more closely integrated into the teaching and learning process by incorporating our resources and services into the Blackboard virtual learning environment. The aim is to deliver our e-content in the students' e-learning environment and thereby assist them to move beyond being ICT literate (i-literate) and become e-content literate (e-literate). In parallel with this, our Information Specialists will work with their academic colleagues to embed our information literacy programmes into the academic curriculum. As our Information Specialists assume more of a para-academic role to support this transition, so will some categories of support staff need to assume a more para-professional role to assist them.

We recognise that certain categories of students, such as international students, part-time students or those with additional needs, may encounter more challenges than other students when accessing library services and staff. To ensure equity of access, we will work with staff in other support services, such as the International Office, the Foundation Degree Centre and Student Services, to identify what improvements we can make in provision to these students.

Our support for research will continue to be primarily through the provision of research journals and databases. In addition, we will participate in the establishment of an institutional repository for research papers (and perhaps also research data in due course) and continue to promote open access publishing models. We will participate in the EThOS service for a national repository of PhD theses, and advocate electronic submission of Aston theses and dissertations. We will investigate what kind of support we might be able to provide for the development of e-research at Aston and for the Research Excellence Framework from 2010 onwards. We will also contribute to the Research Skills Training Programme to ensure that postgraduate research students can make effective use of the wide range of information resources available to them.

Our primary customers are the staff and students of Aston University. Our secondary customers are the staff and students of those organisations with which the University has a partnership, such as Matthew Boulton College, other higher and further education colleges, and the Birmingham Law Society and its members. We have reciprocal and collaborative arrangements with other higher education institutions, locally, regionally and nationally. We have made a commitment to take at least one secondary school pupil on work placement each year. We also offer to any member of the public who can provide us with sufficient identification, physical (and electronic, where licences permit) access to our resources. We will support the University’s programme of community engagement through activities such as these and through involvement in sustainability initiatives at Aston, such as the Fairtrade campaign.

Finally, it has become clear that our existing staff complement will be unable to sustain the demands of an increasingly diverse, increasingly demanding and growing student population, and of major projects such as the refurbishment and extension of the library. Accordingly, we will develop a human resources strategy to determine what size of staff complement, with what mix of skills, will be needed over this period.

2.5 Migrate the focus of collections from purchasing materials to curating (open access) content

Proponents of the open access¹² movement believe that the scholarly literature should be openly available to everyone, everywhere, without charge. The main drivers for the move towards open access are the ever-increasing costs of subscriptions to conventionally-published journals, whether print or electronic; the perception, especially amongst librarians, that certain publishers are making unreasonable profits from journal subscriptions; the view that authors are giving away the rights to the intellectual property that they have created, only for their institutions to have to buy back that property later; a desire to make the results of research available immediately and to a much wider audience; and so on.

The open access publishing movement has the potential to engender a paradigm shift in the funding of higher education libraries, as budgets are used to pay for the production and curation of open access articles, rather than their purchase from traditional journal publishers. This may be through an “author-pays” or “research-funder pays” model for article publication, as

¹² The **Bethesda Statement on Open Access Publishing** defines an open access publication as one that meets the following two conditions:

- a. The author(s) and copyright holder(s) grant(s) to all users a free, irrevocable, worldwide, perpetual right of access to, and a license to copy, use, distribute, transmit and display the work publicly and to make and distribute derivative works, in any digital medium for any responsible purpose, subject to proper attribution of authorship [2], as well as the right to make small numbers of printed copies for their personal use.
- b. A complete version of the work and all supplemental materials, including a copy of the permission as stated above, in a suitable standard electronic format is deposited immediately upon initial publication in at least one online repository that is supported by an academic institution, scholarly society, government agency, or other well-established organization that seeks to enable open access, unrestricted distribution, interoperability, and long-term archiving (for the biomedical sciences, PubMed Central is such a repository).

used by BioMed Central¹³, or by an initiative such as SCOAP3¹⁴, whereby organisations cancel journal subscriptions to contribute to a consortium, which pays centrally for the peer-review service, so that neither authors nor readers pay for the resulting open access articles. Whatever the model, these articles are deposited into one or more open access repositories, either before or after publication.

Currently, then, we are faced with a hybrid curation environment in which many articles are published in electronic form in subscription-based electronic journals and increasing numbers are available in open-access repositories. On the one hand, libraries need to consider how to retain access to electronic content that they have purchased, should the publisher cease trading. Potential solutions to this problem are emerging¹⁵ and we will investigate them, to determine their suitability for our subscriptions. On the other hand, libraries will also need to manage and preserve research articles and data in their institutional repositories, and these are issues that we will need to address, now that Aston has decided to establish its own institutional repository.

3. The Strategic Planning Process

We initiated the 2007-2012 strategic planning process in November 2006, by identifying the key questions to be addressed:

- Where are we now? (PEST and SWOT)
- Why do we exist? (Mission)
- What do we believe in? (Values)
- Where do we want to go to? (Vision)
- How do we get there? (CSFs/Strategic Objectives)
- When should we be there? (Timescales)
- Who will help us to get there? (Stakeholders)
- How do we know when we have reached there? (Evaluation)

To these, we subsequently added another critically important question:

- What might prevent us from getting there? (Risks and Uncertainties)

We then established a small Environmental Assessment Group (EAG) to conduct a PEST¹⁶ scan of the external environment. In this context, we are indebted to Anne Bell, the University Librarian of the University of Warwick and the current Chair of SCONUL¹⁷, who gave us her perspectives on the external issues that might affect academic libraries over the next five to ten years. The University's Senior Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Professor Graham Hooley, also provided an invaluable contribution to this scanning process, by giving us a presentation on the University's emerging strategy to 2012, and facilitating a workshop to elicit our contribution to this.

¹³ <http://www.biomedcentral.com/>

¹⁴ <http://www.scoap3.org/>

¹⁵ http://www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/publications/ejournalspreservationbp_rtf.rtf

¹⁶ Political, Economic, Social and Technological factors

¹⁷ Society of College, National and University Libraries

The EAG presented their findings¹⁸ in February 2007 and we followed this up with an all-staff brainstorming session to identify our Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) and our Values¹⁹. With the context established, Director’s Group (the LIS senior management team) then developed our mission, vision, values, critical success factors and strategic objectives. From this, we produced a set of strategic priorities for the next five years and an operational plan for 2007/08. Finally, we focused upon the risks and uncertainties that might throw us off course on our journey.

Shortly after we embarked upon our strategic planning process, the University appointed a new Vice-Chancellor, Professor Julia King, who launched a strategy review for the University, aimed at developing a new strategy for the University for the period up until 2012. The new strategy was finalised in December 2007 and provided the final piece of the contextual jigsaw for our own strategy.

The University’s mission focuses on three key areas. It aims to be:

A Centre of Excellence in Learning and Teaching

- Creating intellectual challenge in a supportive environment
- Building partnerships to widen participation and enhance the professional and vocational focus of our programmes
- Offering flexible delivery tailored to individual needs

A Centre of Excellence in Rigorous Relevant Research

- Crossing boundaries: interdisciplinary and international
- From science and scholarship to exploitation
- Delivering accessible research outputs to support industry, business, public policy and the professions

A Centre of Excellence in Community Engagement

- Raising aspirations amongst children across the community
- Supporting the growth of business
- Recognised for best practice in knowledge transfer and the “Knowledge Economy” through our work in Birmingham and the City Region

We have attempted to develop our strategy such that it supports, and is aligned with, the University’s mission, but also so that it takes into account the external factors that are influencing libraries, resulting from the changes in the nature of our students and their learning behaviours, academic teaching styles, the ways in which information is being communicated to, and by, our customers, and the rapidly-changing technological infrastructure.

¹⁸ Appendix 3 Library & Information Services PEST 2007

¹⁹ Appendix 4 Library & Information Services SWOT & Values 2007

4. Strategic Plan

By addressing the questions listed in Section 3, we have developed a strategic plan that identifies our mission, values, vision, critical success factors and strategic objectives. We have used these to identify strategic priorities for the next five years and translated these into an operational plan for the current year.

4.1 Mission (*Why do we exist?*)

To provide the library information resources and support needed by students and staff for learning, teaching and research

4.2 Our Core Values (*What do we believe in?*)

Respect for our customers and our colleagues; Equity in provision of service; Professionalism in everything that we do; Quality of our business processes and services; Positive attitude to change; Sustainability in our use of resources

4.3 Vision (*Where are we going?*)

Towards a digital collection that is available from anywhere and at anytime; a physical space that is available 24/7 and that facilitates learning and social interaction in ways that are synergistic; and a service that is embedded in the learning, teaching, research and community engagement activities of the University.

4.4 Critical Success Factors/Strategic Objectives (*What do we need to focus on to achieve the vision and mission?)/(What do we need to do to address the CSFs?)*)

CSF1 Collaboration and partnerships with our stakeholders, and good intelligence about our customers' needs

SO1 To maintain and develop the formal and informal links with our stakeholders, our primary customers and our external customers

SO2 To be active partners in the teaching, learning and research processes

SO3 To support the University's programme of community engagement

SO4 To ensure that we meet the needs of our stakeholders and customers, by revising the LIS Strategic Plan on a regular basis and translating it into an Operational Plan on an annual basis

CSF2 A physical and virtual collection of library information resources to meet the needs of our staff and students

SO5 To agree with Schools the appropriate balance of electronic and printed information resources for their subject areas

SO6 To select, purchase and organise these information resources

SO7 To deliver these information resources by various means, as and when needed

CSF3 Effective exploitation of our library information resources by our customers

SO8 To promote these information resources and services to staff and students through various channels

SO9 To provide face-to-face and remote enquiry services for our customers

SO10 To provide transferable information skills for students to enable them to exploit more effectively our information resources and to contribute to their personal and professional development

CSF4 Effective and efficient management and development of the library's resources, business processes and services

SO11 To continuously improve or redesign our business processes and customer services to optimise return on investment and equity of access

SO12 To measure and evaluate our business processes and customer services to ensure optimum performance

SO13 To provide feedback to our stakeholders and customers about how well we are meeting their requirements and needs respectively

SO14 To maximise overall stakeholder and customer satisfaction with our service, using the University's staff and student surveys as our internal benchmark and the Chartermark standard as our external benchmark

CSF5 Well-motivated, well-trained, knowledgeable and change-positive staff

SO15 To recruit, develop and support highly skilled, flexible, motivated staff in an environment in which students, spaces, services and staff roles are continually changing

SO16 To maintain and improve our personnel policies and procedures, using the University's staff survey as our internal benchmark and the Investors in People standard as our external benchmark

CSF6 Reliable and accessible ICT systems and support

SO17 To work with ISA to maintain and develop the library's ICT systems and ISA support for library users and library staff

SO18 To ensure that the library's ICT systems are effectively and efficiently integrated with the University's corporate systems and with external information systems

CSF7 A building that is comfortable to work in and supports all kinds of individual and group learning

SO19 To work with Estates to maintain and improve the existing library building and its environment

SO20 To refurbish and extend the library building, so that it can meet the needs of existing and planned student numbers

SO21 To seek to introduce sustainable working practices and facilities, wherever possible

CSF8 A balanced budget that is sufficient to fulfil the mission over the planning period

SO22 To work with the University to determine an appropriate level of funding to enable us to deliver and develop, and to invest and innovate

SO23 To work with partners in the University to explore the potential for obtaining funding from external sources

4.5 Timescales (*When should we be there?*)

In previous years, we have used our strategic plan to produce an annual operational plan that has enabled us to translate our strategic objectives into reality on an annual basis. For the LIS Strategic Plan 2007-2012, we have also developed a set of LIS Strategic Priorities for the same period (see Appendix 6.1) to enable us to take a longer-range perspective as well as an annual one. This is complemented by a five year recurrent and capital budget plan that we have maintained for several years now.

The primary focus of this strategic plan is the next five years, but within the context of a longer-range perspective of developments over the next ten to fifteen years.

4.6 Stakeholders (*Who will help us to get there?*)

Our primary customers - the staff and students of the University - represented by the LIS User Group; the Vice-Chancellor's Executive Team; the Senate and the Council.

4.7 Evaluation (*How do we know when we have reached there?*)

The University's annual staff and student surveys are the two main instruments for evaluating how well we are doing. The results of those surveys, and our proposals for addressing the issues identified, will be presented to the recently established LIS User Group, which will monitor our progress.

We also invite users of the library to send us comments, complaints and compliments and this can be done using a printed form available in the library, a dedicated email address and a web form. We undertake to respond to users within seven calendar days. Analysis of the issues raised

is incorporated in the termly usage and performance statistics presented to the Senior Pro-Vice Chancellor.

In 2005, the Academic Planning & Resources Committee asked Support Services to develop Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). We have developed a set of six KPIs that are listed in Appendix 6.5. These comprise two input indicators, two output indicators and two indicators of satisfaction (taken from the staff and student surveys) that serve as surrogates for indicators of impact. These indicators are compared with benchmark values for a comparative cohort of university libraries of similar size and subject mix to our own. We will consult the LIS User Group about the appropriateness of these indicators and develop new ones if necessary.

As well as internal measures of our performance, we have also committed to two externally validated quality standards, namely Investors In People (IIP) and Charter Mark. We obtained IIP accreditation in 2005 and again in 2008, and Charter Mark status was awarded in 2007. One of the most useful aspects of both exercises was the gap analysis that we had to do between where we were and what was required by the standards.

4.8 Risks and Uncertainties (*What might prevent us from getting there?*)

See Appendix 6.2.

5. Conclusion – Challenges and Opportunities

Our major challenge (and opportunity) over the planning period is to obtain sufficient funds to refurbish and extend the existing library building in such a way that the whole is transformed into an inspirational learning environment. We also need to increase our LIR funding per fte student to a level that produces a significant increase (of the order of 10%) in staff and student satisfaction ratings for availability of books and journals. This is also an opportunity to make an even more significant shift to electronic information resources. However, this is likely to be a challenge in the current economic climate. Last, but not least, we need to increase our professional staffing complement, to enable us to innovate even more than we have been able to do in the past; we need to facilitate a shift in the role of many of our support staff towards one that is para-professional; and we need to continue the development of the Information Specialists’ role towards one that is para-academic.

Dr NR Smith
Director
Library & Information Services
Aston University

6. Appendices

- 6.1 Strategic Priorities 2007/08 to 2011/12
- 6.2 Risk Assessment
- 6.3 PEST analysis
- 6.4 SWOT/Culture analysis
- 6.5 LIS Key Performance Indicators 2007/08
- 6.6 Information Literacy Strategy