



# **Optimising Storage and Access In UK Research Libraries**

**A study for CURL and the British Library**

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**CHEMS Consulting**

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## Executive Summary

1. This report has been commissioned by CURL and the British Library (BL) to assess the current shortage of research library storage, the options for the most efficient and cost effective nationwide solution and to make recommendations. The work has involved obtaining data from 33 university research libraries and 4 municipal libraries as well as visits to, or conversations with, university and national library staff.
2. The context for the study is that storage in research libraries is under pressure for several reasons. Despite the growing number of electronic journals, the growth of print collections shows no sign of diminishing and the prevailing academic cultures in many disciplines are averse to disposing of paper copies. Within libraries the use of space is becoming critical and institutional strategies increasingly promote student-centred approaches to the layout of the building in order to provide a favourable student experience. Extra storage space comes low in funding priorities. Further pressures are caused by departmental libraries coming under financial and physical pressures in some institutions due to space charging, and the central library is being asked to house their stock.
3. Our survey of research libraries achieved an outstanding response rate of 88%. It showed that there is indeed a shortage of storage space, and this will grow substantially in the next ten years. Only 13 libraries could provide specific data, but they predicted a total shortage of shelving space of 238 km by 2015. If this figure were applied to all CURL libraries the shortage could amount to as much as 350 km. However, many libraries have - or are developing - plans to deal with this, with 16 acquiring or considering acquiring an extension and 14 contemplating having an extra store on or off campus. Whether or not institutional management will agree to fund these plans is not clear.
4. The obvious space pressure and associated costs is causing many libraries, especially research libraries, to think again about the possibility of collaborative approaches to storage, and a number of the options proposed in this report (see below) were thought worthy of consideration by the majority of respondents consulted.
5. This report focuses on space and cost savings that might be made as a result of collaboration over the storage of little-used periodicals and serials. Typically, these materials occupy considerable space and, if different ways of storing them collaboratively could be found, then savings across the sector should result. The crucial issue is the extent to which libraries will dispose of copies of their little-used materials, if they are available from other sources. However, in order to have the confidence of the academic and library communities, any such collaboration would need a number of features including: reasonably prompt access to the stored materials when required; the preservation of the materials; and a long term guarantee of security for the 'last copies' from whoever is holding them.
6. The report analyses lessons from two collaborative storage schemes in the UK (Scotland's CASS and the University of London scheme) and others in the USA and Australia. The Australian scheme - called CARM - is the most relevant as it represents a collective effort by the government of the state of Victoria and the vice chancellors of the universities in that state.

7. The report sets out five options for consideration:
- Option 1 is for shared regional stores, where individual HEIs rent space for their own materials in a shared building and each institution arranges its own delivery, access and services. The main benefit would be a potential reduction in the storage costs.
  - Option 2 is a collaboratively managed store(s), where HEIs place their materials and retain ownership over them, but common services (for example, document delivery and reading rooms) are provided. This option would not encourage disposal of duplicate copies, and any one store could still be holding several copies of the same items for different owners. As a result it would be unlikely to achieve any significant cost savings in overall space usage.
  - Option 3 is a fully collaborative store(s) with common services, where HEIs cede ownership of materials to the organising body and duplicate copies are removed before deposit. This approach would result in substantial savings of space, but the main drawbacks would be the difficulty in agreeing the funding for such a store by the consortium members, and the development of a national document delivery service from scratch to meet the needs of researchers. This would duplicate the work of the BL.
  - Option 4 is a scheme based upon the holdings of the BL which would form the largest part of what the report calls the National Research Reserve (NRR). The BL would guarantee to hold these materials in perpetuity for researchers to access in either hard copy or electronic form through Secure Electronic Delivery (SED), document supply and inter-library loans. Research libraries would be encouraged to send to the NRR any materials they possessed that were not already held by the BL. HEIs could then dispose of duplicates in confidence, knowing that they could always obtain copies from the NRR when required.
  - Option 5 suggests that no central initiative is needed and places the responsibility on university librarians for finding answers to their own storage problems. It argues that some research libraries are already solving their storage problems by moving to greater disposals and a zero growth policy and others could do the same. These strategies are influenced by the knowledge that the BL already has a reserve stock which can be borrowed and supplied to academic users. The assumption is made that this will continue in perpetuity. The Option assumes that other libraries, encouraged by space charging or other financial incentives or penalties, will follow this example in time.
8. The report analyses each of these options against defined criteria which take into account the interests of key stakeholders such as researchers, institutional managers, librarians and the BL. It also considers factors relating to Scotland, Wales and the English regions. The criteria include matters such as: guarantees on preservation, quality and ease of access to the material, whether access is to a national collection, cost outlays, cost savings, and flexibility as regards to those HEIs wishing to exit from the arrangement.
9. On the basis of these criteria the report recommends that Option 4 is adopted and that the NRR is designated for serial holdings in the first instance. This is influenced by the need to look at the problem from the national perspective, but we are satisfied that the interests of all the key stakeholders can be protected. The effect of adopting the option would be to ensure permanent, long term availability to researchers of a wider range of little used journals than before, although the BL estimates that it holds some 90% of serial holdings at present.

10. The final chapter seeks to answer various questions on how the option would work, and some of these are for negotiation between the BL and the research sector. The report recommends a leading role for the newly formed Research Information Network (RIN), which could set the overall strategy for the scheme and act as the representative of the research community with the BL as the manager.
11. In the final Chapter 6 the report makes a number of suggestions and recommendations concerning implementation, including:
  - The overall objective of the NRR is “to create a national repository where research materials will be preserved in perpetuity and made easily accessible to all UK researchers should they need them”.
  - In the first instance the NRR should cover serials only with a focus on low use older journals and ones where there is a secure electronic back-up of a print version. In later years the NRR should be widened to cover monographs.
  - The serials collection of the BL would be regarded as the core of the NRR.
  - The RIN would establish a management board for the NRR and would negotiate a service level agreement for its operation with the BL.
  - The BL will need to be compensated for its role in guaranteeing to hold the NRR. Such funding will need to come from the research and/or higher education sectors.
  - BL’s current transactions-based pricing model for the document supply part of the NRR would need to be reviewed and the aim would be to introduce a method that was much easier to administer.
  - If Option 4 is adopted there are potential savings to be made to HE nationally. If all libraries decided to dispose of their holdings of serials which duplicated the NRR, up to £103 million of capital expenditure (needed to meet the expected shortfall in storage facilities) might be avoided in the next ten years. The surrender of shelving space no longer needed could generate savings of up to £300,000 in recurrent costs in the sector.
  - The realisation of these savings would be encouraged if funding bodies were to adopt a policy of limiting central funding of storage facilities in future library projects.
  - The report recommends that the BL, RIN and CURL explore funding options, as a good business case can be made from a sector perspective.
12. Finally, the report outlines the next steps for CURL and the RIN, and identifies an outline management strategy for dealing with the possible risks. The next steps involve a period of consultation and discussions between CURL members, as well as with vice chancellors and the funding bodies. Public consultation within communities could be helped if a simple description of the proposed scheme was prepared by CURL. A detailed feasibility study would then be needed to work through the implications of the operational processes, before the NRR could be launched.