

**INVITATION TO TENDER: Scoping study: The role of academic and research libraries as active participants and leaders in the production of scholarly research.**

**Commissioned by Research Libraries UK in partnership with the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)**

**Issue Date:** Tuesday 15th December 2020

**Deadline for Response:** Midday, Monday 11th January 2021

**Interviews and presentations:** Wednesday 20th and Thursday 21st January 2021

**Project commences:** Monday 25th January 2021

**Maximum commissioned budget:** £75,000 (exc. VAT)

**Project duration:** January-June 2021

## **1. Introduction and context**

Academic and research libraries have long occupied a prominent place within the research and scholarly landscape. Whether they belong to universities or national institutions, they are custodians of vast collections of international importance, spanning thousands of years and multiple formats, from ancient manuscripts to contemporary research data. Their collections stretch beyond what are commonly conceived as belonging to libraries. Many academic and research libraries include large museum, gallery, and archival collections within their structures, and offer spaces for experimentation, both physical and digital, to increasingly large and diverse audiences. The staff working within these institutions are highly-skilled, have vast curatorial, conservation, and collection-based knowledge, and considerable technical expertise in the application of increasingly sophisticated processes and techniques relating to digital scholarship, data management and curation, and pedagogy.

This is a period of transition for libraries in their relationship with researchers and the research process. Many libraries are moving from being 'service providers', to take more of an active role as meaningful 'research partners' in the production of scholarly research, and in conducting academic research in their own right. In doing so, they are bringing a multitude of skills, knowledge and expertise to the scholarly research process, crossing disciplinary boundaries, and enabling the involvement, communication, and dissemination of research with diverse audiences, and supporting the 'real world' applicability of research outputs. Staff working within research and academic libraries are well placed to bring advanced and multidisciplinary expertise to scholarly research and are looking for ways of furthering the role of the library as research partner through continued investment in the skills and competencies of their staff, the

flexibility of their spaces, and the discoverability and availability of collections, both onsite and virtually, to be used in an increasing variety of ways.<sup>1</sup>

This transition, however, is not without its challenges. A number of barriers exist which can prevent research and academic library colleagues acting as full and embedded partners within scholarly research projects. These barriers can be internal within the library, be rooted within its parent organisation, be associated with academic perceptions of the library, and the terms and conditions of research funding. This research will undertake a holistic examination of the role of academic and research libraries as partners in, and leaders of, scholarly research, and the barriers and challenges which might prevent or hamper this.

This research will make a series of recommendations regarding how these challenges might be overcome. These recommendations will form the foundation of a subsequent piece of work, namely the creation of an implementation roadmap. This subsequent phase will be commissioned separately from this scoping study during 2021.

## **2. About Research Libraries UK**

Research Libraries UK is a consortium of 37 of the UK and Ireland's leading research libraries whose purpose is to shape the research library agenda and contribute to the wider knowledge economy through innovative projects and services.

RLUK is here to convene its 37 members around the issues that affect them, to represent their collective voice, to support them as they face shared challenges, and to be an effective advocate on their behalf. It is these four roles that define RLUK's work and around which its membership offer is shaped. They enable RLUK to promote the research library community as a vibrant and integral element of the scholarly landscape.

RLUK wishes to actively support its members, and the wider library community, transition from service providers to active and meaningful partners in, and pioneers of, academic and scholarly research. Although RLUK members will form a key community involved in this research, it will be essential that its focus stretches beyond RLUK's 37 members and involves a significant cross-section of the wider academic library community.

## **3. Project specification**

This scoping study, commissioned by RLUK in partnership with the AHRC, will investigate the role of library staff as partners and leaders in the initiation, production, and dissemination of academic and scholarly research. The research will explore the role of academic and research

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<sup>1</sup> Recent research which has explored elements of this transition include: S Pinfield, A M Cox, Sophie Rutter, *Mapping the Future of Academic Libraries, A Report for SCONUL*, November 2017; M Greenhall, *Digital Scholarship and the role of the research library, An RLUK Report*, July 2019; C Kamposiori, 'Partnering through collections in digital humanities: looking at researchers' needs', *Imagining the future of digital archives and collections*, Stedelijk Studies, Issue 10, Fall 2020.

libraries as places of scholarship and experimentation, for a wide variety of disciplines, and the role, and potential, of library staff in envisaging, initiating, and leading high-quality scholarly research. It will explore the expertise held within libraries to lead and partner in multi-disciplinary research projects, and will establish the opportunities and barriers of them doing so. The latter will include an examination of issues such as the terms of funding, institutional policies, and working cultures. This research will also make recommendations to the AHRC and the wider research community in terms of enabling library staff to be active partners in academic and scholarly research, and will identify the potential for collective action between research and academic libraries to enable this.

**Part I: Establish the existing and potential role of academic and research libraries as partners in, and leaders of, academic and scholarly research.**

- Establish the role and potential of research and academic libraries as meaningful and active partners in the envisaging, production, and dissemination of scholarly research.
- Establish the role of research and academic libraries as leaders, and originators, of scholarly research in their own right, outside the framework of the Independent Research Organisations.
- Establish the opportunities for academic and research libraries to further enhance their role as leaders of, and partners in, high-quality scholarly research.
- Establish the role of research and academic libraries as essential elements of the UK's national research infrastructure.
- Place the experiences of UK academic and research libraries within an international context through selective engagement with international academic and research libraries.

**Part II: Establish and identify any barriers associated with academic and research libraries acting as partners and leaders of academic and scholarly research.**

- Establish the extent of the current barriers preventing academic and research libraries from being both leaders of, and partners in, the development and production of scholarly and academic research.
- Establish the extent of the barriers preventing academic and research libraries for expanding their role in leading or partnering in the development and production of scholarly and academic research including from within the library, its parent organisation, amongst the academic and scholarly community, or due to the conditions of academic funding.
- Highlight examples of best practice or where barriers have successfully been mitigated.

**Part III: Make a series of recommendations regarding how academic and research libraries can expand their role as research leaders and partners and how any barriers preventing these can be overcome.**

- Make recommendations to the research and academic library, and wider information and research community, regarding how they can enhance their own research capacity and the opportunities to do so.
- Make recommendations to universities and the parent institutions of research and academic libraries regarding how institutional barriers to non-academic staff conducting research can be overcome.
- Make recommendations to the AHRC regarding how their programmes and initiatives can assist in untapping the vast scholarly expertise and potential of research and academic library staff as research-active partners and leaders.

These recommendations will inform a further piece of work to identify the tangible steps to be taken in order to achieve and implement these recommendations.

#### **4. Key audiences**

In order to get an overarching picture of the potential of academic and research libraries as partners in, and leaders of, scholarly research, and the extent of any barriers currently preventing them from being so, this scoping study will have several key audiences, with which the appointed contractors will need to engage:

1. **LIBRARIES:** Colleagues working within academic and research libraries, from a variety of professional backgrounds, and with varying experience of partnering and leading academic research. This can also include colleagues working within information or cultural organisations which are integral to, or closely associated with, an academic or research library such as a university museum, gallery, archive or special collection.
2. **RESEARCH FACILITATORS:** colleagues responsible for facilitating the research process, including colleagues working within research offices, finance departments, or other research facilitation units.
3. **ADMINISTRATORS:** University administrators responsible for facilitating the research process, including colleagues working within university research offices.
4. **UNIVERSITY LEADERS:** University senior decision makers, such as vice chancellors, pro-vice chancellors for research, and registrars, responsible for setting overarching institutional direction and strategy.
5. **FUNDERS:** Colleagues within academic funding and grant giving bodies responsible for awarding research funding.

#### **5. Key deliverables**

This is a highly ambitious research project within a tight timescale. Members of the RLUK Executive will actively work with the contractor appointed to support and enable the research process through providing access to key networks, groups of colleagues, and contacts. The contractor will be provided with a list of key contacts, groups, and existing research on their appointment. Due to the ambitious chronology and scope of this work, a series of key deliverables are given below.

**Foundation:** an overview of existing research in relation to the role of the academic and research libraries as partners in, and leaders of, academic and scholarly research.

**Key deliverable 1:** quantitative cross-sector survey to establish:

- The extent to which academic and research libraries are active partners in the conception, creation, and delivery of scholarly academic research, their experiences of this, and the opportunities for this role to grow.
- The extent to which academic and research libraries are leading the conception, creation, and delivery of scholarly academic research, their experiences of this, and the opportunities for this role to grow.
- The experience of academics and scholars in the partnership process.
- The extent to which barriers exist in preventing academic and research library colleagues from being partners in, and leaders of, academic research, what these are, and how they might be overcome.

**Key deliverable 2:** targeted qualitative research with members of key stakeholder groups (listed in section 4, above) and communities of practice.

- To establish the perceptions and opinions of the key research audiences regarding the current and potential role for academic and research libraries to act as partners in, and leaders of, academic and scholarly research.
- To further contextualise the perceived opportunities and barriers associated with academic and research libraries taking a greater role as partners in, and leaders of, academic and scholarly research.
- To identify the potential ways in which barriers might be overcome and opportunities seized.
- To engage with a small number of representatives of the international academic and research library community regarding their experience of academic partnership and for examples of how barriers have been mitigated.

**Key deliverable 3:** project report providing detailed analysis of key findings of the quantitative and qualitative research.

**Key deliverable 4:** recommendations based on the report's findings for the key project audiences. These recommendations will provide the basis for a second strand of work. This will establish the necessary activities required to implement the report recommendations in the form of a implementation roadmap and will be commissioned over the course of 2021.

**Dissemination:** that the contractors present their results at various stages during the project including at RLUK member networks, the RLUK21 Conference March), and DCDC21 (June).

## 6. Timetable

Below is a draft timetable of the potential project milestones for the scoping study.

<b>Invitation to tender published</b>	<b>15 December 2020</b>
<b>Deadline for responses</b>	<b>11 January 2021 (midday)</b>
<b>Supplier interviews</b>	<b>20 and 21 January 2021</b>
<b>Contract Award</b>	<b>w/c 25 January 2021</b>
<b>Project Completion</b>	<b>30 June 2021</b>

## 7. Budget

The maximum available budget for the delivery of this project is 75,000 (exc. VAT)

## 8. Evaluation Criteria

Tender submissions will be evaluated on a combination of price (30%), familiarity with HE sector (20%), familiarity and experience of working with libraries (20%), and quality of response (30%).

## 9. Submissions

Please respond to this opportunity by:

- **Project specification:** Describe how you would meet the requirements described in the Project Specification including any additional approaches or methodologies you might utilise in order to attract a large number of respondents from a variety of backgrounds and institutions.
- **Experience:** Provide relevant evidence of your research experience and expertise, including details of relevant projects successfully completed in the past 2 years. This should include your experience of working with the key project audiences.
- **Key deliverables:** Provide an outline of how you will deliver the project within the ambitious timeframe of the project.
- **Working practice and communication:** Provide an outline of how you would ensure good communication and close working with RLUK throughout the project.
- **Cost:** Providing a total price for you to deliver the project.

## 10. Key dates and contacts

Please submit your proposal to [matthew.greenhall@rluk.ac.uk](mailto:matthew.greenhall@rluk.ac.uk) by Midday on 11 January 2021

Please submit any clarification questions to [matthew.greenhall@rluk.ac.uk](mailto:matthew.greenhall@rluk.ac.uk)