

RLUK Research Libraries UK
Annual Review 2025

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Durham University
University of East Anglia
University of Edinburgh
University of Exeter
University of Glasgow
Imperial College London
King's College London
Lancaster University
University of Leeds
University of Leicester
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Senate House Libraries, University of London
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University of Sheffield
University of Southampton
University of St Andrews
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Trinity College, Dublin
University College London
University of Warwick
Wellcome Collection
University of York

WHO WE ARE

Research Libraries UK (RLUK) is a consortium of the leading and most significant research libraries in the UK and Ireland.

Our strength comes from the distinction and influence of our member libraries, and our partnerships with leading organisations in the research and higher education communities.

Since our formation in 1983 we have led and supported a vast number of initiatives and services that are helping to fulfil our vision of realising the modern research library.

OUR MISSION

Our purpose is to shape the research library agenda and contribute to the wider knowledge economy through innovative projects and services that add value and impact to the processes of teaching, learning, and research. We also contribute to the health of society through the preservation and sharing of knowledge: one of the pillars of an open society.

OUR STRATEGIC PLAN

Our strategy, [The Library Transforming 2022-25](#), seeks to drive change, enable dialogue, and promote collaboration across the research, information, and cultural sectors.

The strategy has five key strands:

The role of the research library: RLUK will work with its members to support and advocate for the diverse roles of the research library as places of experimentation, their role as partners and pioneers in the research process, and as catalysts for change within society and scholarship.

Digital shift: RLUK will proactively support its members to seize the collective opportunities and face the shared challenges that new and emerging technologies and methodologies bring. It will do so with an emphasis on openness, inclusivity, and sustainability.

Open Scholarship: RLUK will support its members in moving towards an 'open by default' setting through working for open access to research outputs, the development of Open Educational Resources, and advocating for openness and transparency across the entire research cycle.

Culture and heritage: RLUK will work with members to maximise the scholarly and societal impact of their collections, support their innovative curation and presentation, promote the role that collections and the staff who care for them have as catalysts for cross-community and disciplinary discourse, and highlight their joint role in addressing key societal challenges.

Collective collections: By coming together, RLUK members and the wider community can introduce efficiencies into the processes underpinning support for research and look to set up collaborative collection management. RLUK will identify potential areas for collaborative actions, with a focus on those that can best be progressed by collectives at the scale of RLUK.

The strategy also has three cross-cutting themes, which represent key challenges to RLUK, its members, and wider society:

Equality, diversity and inclusion: RLUK will work with its members, stakeholders, and partners to take actions across our community that challenge structural inequalities and biases in collections, services, and access.

Rights, copyright and licensing: Whilst preserving the protections of rights holders, RLUK will work with its members, stakeholders, and partners to call for a reformed and functioning copyright and licensing regime for the UK that is appropriate to the complexities of current and emerging forms of scholarship.

Infrastructure: Research libraries both contain and act as research and innovation infrastructure. They are places of experimentation for cross- and multi-disciplinary scholarship and collaboration, home to a diverse range of specialist skills and expertise, and hold diverse collections and technical facilities which form the bedrock of research.

STRATEGIC ACTIVITIES

Libraries X Research

RLUK champions the pivotal contribution libraries make to the research process, as enablers, partners and pioneers of research excellence. The roles played by research libraries are continually changing: for their users, within their institutions, and amongst their communities. RLUK works with its members to support and advocate for the diverse roles of the research library as places of experimentation, their role as partners and pioneers in the research process, and as catalysts for change within society and scholarship.

RLUK launched libraries X research in November 2024 which has brought together all our work to champion libraries and their vital contribution to research, including our partnerships with AHRC and The National Archive.

RLUK continued its joint work with AHRC under the Research Engagement Programme (REP) – a series of activities that include the Professional Practice Fellowship Scheme (PPFS) and Research Catalyst Cohort Programme (RCC) – that help support our members and the wider academic and research library community in developing and promoting research capacity, capability, and confidence amongst their staff. To date REP has distributed £425K of grants to institutions supporting 19 PPFS fellows to undertake research projects and £30K for the RCC which has helped 33 colleagues from RLUK and other institutions to develop their knowledge and skills in submitting research funding applications. Three colleagues from the first RCC programme joined the second Fellows scheme.

In May 2025, we celebrated the second round of PPFS research projects with an event in London. Fellows presented their research projects to Library Directors, project mentors, and to colleagues representing the major research funders in the sector: Arcadia, ESRC, Arts Council England, Wellcome Trust, and the Rothschild Foundation.

RLUK will continue to take this work forward through our Research Shift Programme (RSP). This provides a space to empower and support librarians, archivists, information professionals, and colleagues across the Galleries, Libraries, Archives, and Museums (GLAM) sector to actively engage in research. The first series of RSP events (April to June 2025) explored the concept of research, overcoming structural barriers, and practical strategies for initiating and sustaining research projects.

Digital Shift

RLUK supports its members to seize the collective opportunities and face the shared challenges that new and emerging technologies and methodologies bring. We do so with an emphasis on openness, inclusivity, and sustainability through the Digital Shift.

Digital Shift Forum

RLUK's Digital Shift Working Group (DSWG) met throughout the year to discuss the ongoing delivery of the digital shift manifesto's delivery plan and to begin planning for a fourth series of the Digital Shift Forum. This commenced in October 2024 with a short series on openness and repository infrastructures, exploring the role of repositories in a wider open research ecosystem, opportunities and issues around open infrastructure for research and its implementation in research libraries, and the impact of AI on infrastructure development. The forum also took a broad look at sustainability for libraries: environmental impacts, sustainability of knowledge, and sustainability of our services and systems.

Digital Shift Maturity Survey AI Analysis

In June 2023, the DSWG launched an RLUK-wide survey to establish the level of Digital Shift Maturity across members, related to the shift to digital, the shift within digital, and the equitable shift. In early 2025 the survey was re-analysed using ChatGPT to compare it to the original analysis and to explore the suitability of AI for this work. We wanted to explore these new models and platforms to help gain new insights into work we have already done, and develop expertise and understanding about what can (and can't be done) with surveys.

STRATEGIC ACTIVITIES

This work was also done in the spirit of the survey which identified “Engaging with AI as a Transformative Technology” as an area which was recognised as less mature. A revised summary report on Zenodo highlighting key themes and gaps which provides a mix of affirmation of the original analysis in addition to some value added insights.

Cyber-resilience

In today’s interconnected digital research landscape, cyber incidents are now a clear and present risk for libraries (it may not be “if” but “when”). In recent years public libraries, national libraries and universities have all experienced incidents. Cyber-resilience is critical for research libraries which provide access to rich and unique collections, support open scholarship, and provide essential research infrastructure. RLUK is uniquely placed to address this and to convene a Task and Finish Group drawing on experiences from members and in turn supporting its members with practical steps, recommendations and guidance.

The Cyber-resilience Task and Finish Group was launched in October 2024 and over the course of the year the group developed a leadership framework which recognised that cyber-resilience is not just a technical challenge, but a strategic, cultural and organisational one. The framework is based on a four-part cyber incident lifecycle model of Readiness, Response, Recovery, and Review and each stage will provide practical steps and recommendations to help research libraries be more cyber-resilient.

Scholarly Communications

RLUK works with members and Jisc to deliver sustainable deals with journal publishers that promote efficiency, value-for-money, and equity in terms of access to content and publishing venues. During 2024 and 2025 the HE sector decided on negotiating criteria and engaged with the five largest publishers. As part of our responsibility to convene the membership we have continued to hold monthly virtual town halls. These are a constructive forum for members to discuss ongoing publisher

negotiations and issues around future models, including for increased open access content, and to establish collective priorities and concerns.

As a representative body, RLUK participates in a number of national and international committees and working groups moving open scholarship forward, including the Jisc Research Licensing Strategy Group, the Jisc Publisher Negotiations Expert Group and the Jisc Learning Content Expert Group, and is also a member of the Open Research Competencies Coalition (ORCC).

We engage with funding bodies to ensure RLUK members are able to help fulfil open access mandates, including ensuring an effective rights environment to enable openness. RLUK also convenes an Open Access Publisher Process Group (OAPP), which met during the year to discuss issues around publisher workflows.

Recognising our work around open access, David Prosser was invited to Chair the Board of the Directory of Open Access Journals.

Strengthening Inclusive Practice

RLUK members are committed to creating and maintaining inclusive organisations, structures, and spaces which celebrate diversity, welcome difference, and embed positive change. RLUK works with its members, stakeholders, and partners to take actions across our community that challenge structural inequalities and biases in collections, services, and access.

RLUK’s Special Collections and Heritage Network (SCHN) published a position paper in February 2025 on ‘Equity, diversity, and inclusion in the research library: a special and heritage collections perspective’. The paper underlined RLUK’s strong commitment to the values of equity, diversity, and inclusion and presented a set of objectives which will help member libraries and others work towards achieving EDI goals from a special and heritage collections perspective.

STRATEGIC ACTIVITIES

RLUK Decolonisation Group

The RLUK Decolonisation Group, consisting of members of the RLUK Special Collections and Heritage Network (SCHN) and the Collections Strategy Network (CSN), as well as other RLUK colleagues with expertise in the area of collection-based decolonisation began meeting in January 2022 to discuss issues of common interest for research libraries in this area. During 2024-2025, the RLUK Decolonisation Group worked to deliver another successful season of the RLUK Inclusive Collections, Inclusive Libraries seminar series as well as identify and begin the development of a new initiative that will support RLUK members in the area of skills development for staff involved in collection-based decolonisation. Its work aims to foster shared understanding, shape strategic direction, and clarify the roles and criteria involved in decolonising collections, ultimately helping research libraries develop more equitable and inclusive approaches to their collections and services.

Inclusive Collections, Inclusive Libraries

The Inclusive Collections, Inclusive Libraries (ICIL) seminar series aim to foster conversation around decolonisation and inclusive practice in collecting, describing, presenting, and engaging with content in research library collections. The seminar series held a number of talks during the year that explored the challenges around decolonisation within libraries as well as a number of issues concerning the development of inclusive and diverse collections. Delegates had the opportunity to hear case studies and talks on the use of digital storytelling and digital platforms for engagement and co-curation with underrepresented groups, on overcoming gender biased language when developing inclusive collections, and the nature of 'community' and its role for research libraries and their collections. Over the period 2024-2025, the seminar series attracted over 1,300 registrations from participants across the UK and internationally, including attendees from Europe, Canada, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa.

UK Print Book Collection (UK-PBC)

Ensuring the efficient management of print collections has become critical for libraries as pressure on space grows and as access to online resources increases. This has led to strong demand for a collaborative approach to ensure preservation and access for future scholars. Over the past year the Collections Strategy Network put in place the foundations for a national agreement for libraries to work together to retain sufficient print copies across the UK to preserve access to content. This work has been formalised through a partnership with SCONUL, the British Library, and Jisc, to form the UK Distributed Book Collection (UK-PBC).

In March 2025, a Programme Manager, Joanna Little, was appointed to build on the work already undertaken and to move UK PBC to business-as-usual. The scheme was officially launched in October 2025.

Green Libraries

In August 2024, RLUK formally joined the Green Libraries Campaign, which is a UK-wide, cross-sector programme focused on the contribution of librarians, information, and knowledge professionals to the sustainability agenda and increasing awareness of environmental issues for the wider public by providing accessible resources and events.

RLUK members have significant physical and digital estates, both of which offer challenges in moving towards net zero targets. From large library buildings at the heart of university campuses to extensive digital holdings we seek to meet the information needs of users in a sustainable and responsible manner. RLUK is pleased to be working with Green Libraries partners to help support our members and the wider sector around this key issue of sustainability.

Green Libraries Week ran from 7 to 13 October 2024 and was followed by the second Green Libraries Conference at the British Library's Knowledge Centre on 25 November 2024, for which RLUK contributed to the organising committee.

PARTNER RELATIONSHIPS

British Library

RLUK continues to support the British Library's Open and Engaged. Conference as part of Open Access Week. Open and Engaged 2024 was entitled Empowering Communities to Thrive in Open Scholarship. The event centred on leveraging the power of communities in the axis of open scholarship, open infrastructure, emerging technologies, collections as data, equity and integrity, skills development and sustainable models to elevate research of all kinds for the public good.

The British Library continues to be a key partner through both work on the green agenda and through activity to support the UK Print Book Collection.

The National Archives (TNA)

RLUK has continued to work closely with TNA on the TNA-RLUK Professional Fellowship Scheme, which facilitates shared learning between TNA and individual RLUK members with the purpose of overcoming some of the collective challenges facing research and cultural organisations. Fellows for the sixth (2025-26) round of the Professional Fellowship scheme were announced in July 2025, with their projects investigating pressing issues around the long-term accessibility and preservation of library and archival content as well as the development of inclusive collections.

Jisc

RLUK has continued to work closely with Jisc, being represented on the the Research Licensing Strategy Group, the Publisher Negotiations Expert Group, Learning Content Expert Group, OA Stakeholders Group, Library Hub Community Advisory Board, Digitisation for Digital Scholarship project working group, and Digital Archival Collections working group. Jisc is a key partner in the delivery of the UK Print Book Collection.

IARLA

We continued to work with international partners under the framework of the International Alliance of Research Library Associations (IARLA). IARLA met throughout the year to discuss the effect of AI on libraries, support for open infrastructure, and EDI issues. The IARLA Virtual Reading Room Working Group also met to focus on issues around the sustainability of VRR and VTS services as well as on international developments in the area.

UK Reproducibility Network (UKRN)

RLUK is an affiliate member of the UK Reproducibility Network (UKRN) and joined their Stakeholder Engagement Group (SEG) in 2024, as the only library organisation in the SEG. RLUK represents its members and provides a voice for Research Libraries in wider discussions with other stakeholders including publishers, researchers and funders on research reproducibility. These have included discussions around how we could collectively enable better research practices and rewards, and where this work and these roles intersect with other parts of the research ecosystem which libraries play a critical role in.

RLUK and the Hidden REF

RLUK is a supporter of the Hidden REF. The hidden REF is challenging preconceptions about which roles are important in research and libraries have many hidden roles. RLUK supported The Hidden REF's successful proposal to the Research England Development Fund. RLUK also shares the Hidden REF's belief that we will advance research if we recognise the contribution of everyone involved in the conduct of research. RLUK actively participated in the Hidden REF competition in 2024 as a reviewer. This was a community-driven, national event that raised awareness of NTOs and hidden roles, and provided a platform for understanding them.

NETWORKS

Associate Directors' Network (ADN)

The RLUK Associate Directors Network is a professional network for RLUK members in a Deputy Librarian or Associate Director role. It aims to provide a forum for discussion and sharing of experience, the opportunity to participate in the business of RLUK and to aid succession planning. Co-convenors of the network during this period were Phil Cheeseman (Lancaster) and Ruth Murphy (King's College London).

The ADN met regularly during a series of monthly informal catch-up sessions, which provide valuable touchpoints for meeting new members and providing broader network support.

The ADN launched a pilot reciprocal mentoring scheme in February 2025. This scheme established mentoring partnerships for 11 members of the Associate Directors Network and early career library staff, who work at other member institutions. The scheme explored themes related to career journeys and career development and is part of the wider work being undertaken by the network on workforce development.

Collections Strategy Network (CSN)

The RLUK Collections Strategy Network (CSN) is a professional-peer network for colleagues who are responsible for collection strategy within an RLUK member library. It acts as a forum for discussion, knowledge sharing, peer development, and harnesses RLUK members' collective experience and expertise. Suzy Cheeke (Bristol) and Jane Saunders (Leeds) were co-convenors for the CSN until the end of 2024, when they were succeeded by Ruth Dale (Nottingham) and Sarah Thompson (York).

The network met both in person and virtually during the year to discuss updates from the various sub-groups including ILL, Metadata and Open Infrastructure as well as Print Storage and OA Monographs.

The group also discussed next steps with ACS, UK PBC and the Big Five Publishers. The network also hosted a monthly Read & Publish Coffee Morning with participation from the OSN and OAPP.

Digital Scholarship Network (DSN)

The RLUK Digital Scholarship Network (DSN) is a professional peer network for RLUK members involved in the development and delivery of Digital Scholarship services within member libraries, by Lesley Gray (Cambridge) and Jodie Double (Leeds). Jodie became co-convenor of the DSN from January 2025 when Gavin Boyce (Sheffield) stepped down.

The DSN continued to meet regularly with a mix of in person and online, informal virtual cafe sessions. These provide an opportunity for meeting new members and providing broader network support. DSN members have also shared and updated their platforms and digital scholarship benchmarking inventories.

Events included the results of the Digital Shift Maturity Survey and a joint SCHN/DSN hybrid meeting which took place in Glasgow on Thursday 10 October on the topic of AI in Special Collections and Heritage.

DSN colleagues continued to collaborate with the US Digital Library Federation for a Digital Transatlantic Skills meeting on Critical AI Literacy in October 2024.

New Directors' Network (NDN)

The New Directors Network (NDN) continues to provide an informal forum for mutual support for recently appointed Library Directors at RLUK member institutions. As well as a well-used group mailing list, the NDN met virtually and in-person throughout the year.

Open Strategy Network (OSN)

The RLUK Open Strategy Network (OSN) was launched in 2022 as a professional peer network for RLUK members leading Scholarly Communication, Open Science, Open Research, Open Scholarship and related activities within member libraries. The network was co-convened by James Bisset (Durham) and Ruth Mallialieu (Oxford) during 2024/25. Key topics investigated through the year included support for green OA and repository infrastructure.

NETWORKS

Special Collections and Heritage Network (SCHN)

The RLUK Special Collections and Heritage Network (SCHN) is a professional peer network for RLUK colleagues leading cultural heritage activities within member libraries. Kevin Bacon (Collections Senior Manager, University of Sussex) and Angela Houghton (Associate Director, Cultural Collections and One University, University of Sheffield) will be leading the SCHN over the next 2 years. The SCHN met regularly during the year and discussed equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) principles, sustainability, and creative approaches to engagement. They also published a position paper on 'Equity, diversity, and inclusion in the research library: a special and heritage collections perspective'.

MEETINGS

RLUK Members' Meeting

The 2024 RLUK Members' Meeting was hosted by the University of Edinburgh on 7-8 November 2024. The Meeting opened on the afternoon of 7 November with a session on Values and Voices, sharing RLUK's new values: Ambitious, Collaborative and Ethical and hearing from colleagues who weren't able to join the meeting. The second day focused on Horizons with a mix of AI, from Gavin McLachlan (Edinburgh) and Ben Johnson (Strathclyde) with insights around research innovation.

RLUK25 Conference

The RLUK25 Conference, Champions of knowledge: Libraries as beacons of trust and integrity was held in person at Spaces at the Spine in Liverpool, 19-21 March 2025. The Conference explored the philosophical and pragmatic challenges for research libraries and their role in upholding the values of trust and integrity.

This was the first in person RLUK conference since 2019. Keynote talks were delivered by Lucy Everest (University of Liverpool) and Christopher Smith (AHRC) as well as Ciaran Talbot (University of Manchester), Mahaletchumy Arujanan (International Service for the Acquisition of Agribiotech Applications) & Emmanuel Boakye (founder, African Reproducibility Network). Michelle Charters, Head of the International Slavery Museum closed the conference.



PRESENTATIONS AND PUBLICATIONS

Conferences

Kamposiori, Christina, “Virtual Reading Rooms: transforming access to collections through remote technologies”, Archives West Midlands ‘Digital Progress Programme’ Virtual Seminar, 13 March 2024.

Kamposiori, Christina, “Embedding diversity and inclusion in research library recruitment practices”, CALC25: Critical Approaches to Libraries Virtual Conference, 13-15 May 2025.

Kamposiori, Christina, “Equality, diversity, and inclusion in the research library: looking at recruitment practices”, Neurodivergent Library and Information Staff Network Virtual Event, 10 July 2025.

Nixon, William, “Next Generation Repositories” Open Learning: Open Science, Open Libraries, Madrid, Spain, 1 October 2024.

Nixon, William, “The Value of Informal Professional Networks for Developing Leaders: A Case Study from the LIBER Emerging Leaders Programme” LIBER 2025, Lausanne, Switzerland, 2 July 2025.

Publications

Nixon, William, “Revisiting the RLUK Digital Shift Maturity Survey: Reflections on the Use of ChatGPT 4o”, 28 July 2025, RLUK Blog.

Prosser, David, “End of big deals is a chance to build a better publishing system”, 22 January 2025, Research Professional.

Prosser, David, “Looking to the Future – Mapping the Environment for Research Libraries” 14 August 2025, RLUK Blog.

