

Annual Librarian Survey Report

June 2026

Foreword



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The challenges facing academic libraries are not new, but the way the sector is responding to them is shifting.

Across the conversations we've had over the past year, one theme has been consistent: the need to balance immediate constraints with longer-term transformation.

This white paper, based on the results of our sixth Annual Librarian Survey, offers a snapshot of what has shifted, what has persisted and what is genuinely new.

At Kortext, we see listening as essential to building effective partnerships, and insights from this survey help us better understand both the pressures you're facing and the direction you're moving in.

This year's findings highlight a sector that is becoming more measured in its response to change. Spending may have stabilised, but affordability remains a core challenge, particularly in relation to digital content.

At the same time, priorities are evolving.

Student engagement is under real pressure in ways that digital expansion alone won't resolve. Generative AI is no longer a distant concern, but something libraries are actively navigating, with genuine questions still unanswered around accuracy, academic integrity and the impact on student learning.

Thank you to everyone who took part. This survey is one of the most important ways we stay connected to what matters to you, and we don't take that lightly.

I hope you find the paper a useful reflection of where the sector stands today.

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Introduction

The sixth Kortext Annual Librarian Survey, intended for academic libraries in the UK, was conducted during May and June 2026.

It incorporated both quantitative and qualitative questions to provide a snapshot of current challenges and trends in the higher education sector.

The survey was not restricted to Kortext customers. We received 71 responses, of which 77% were current Kortext customers and 23% were not Kortext customers.

Highlights from the survey findings were shared in our summer webinar, 'Library Priorities 2026: Insights and Perspectives', on 23 June 2026.

In this paper, we present the results of the Kortext Annual Librarian Survey 2026, with comparative data from our previous surveys where available.

Please note:

For survey results, percentages have been rounded to one decimal place.

Key findings

Finance:

With financial pressure continuing across the sector, libraries report mixed changes in digital content spend, with some increasing investment while others reduce or hold budgets in response to rising costs.

Content:

The results show continued growth in digital content, with more libraries increasing the proportion of their digital collections, even where overall spend remains constrained.

OA and OERs:

Open content is becoming increasingly important, with libraries placing greater emphasis on integrating OA and OERs into collections and reading lists, often as a response to budget pressures.

Data:

Data use is growing, with more libraries turning to analytics and highlighting the increasing value of supplier-provided insights in decision-making.

Engagement:

Student engagement is declining, with libraries highlighting ongoing challenges around access, usability and changing behaviours, particularly in digital environments.

Generative AI:

Responses reflect a cautious approach to generative AI, with limited adoption to date and ongoing concerns about accuracy, academic integrity and the impact on student learning.



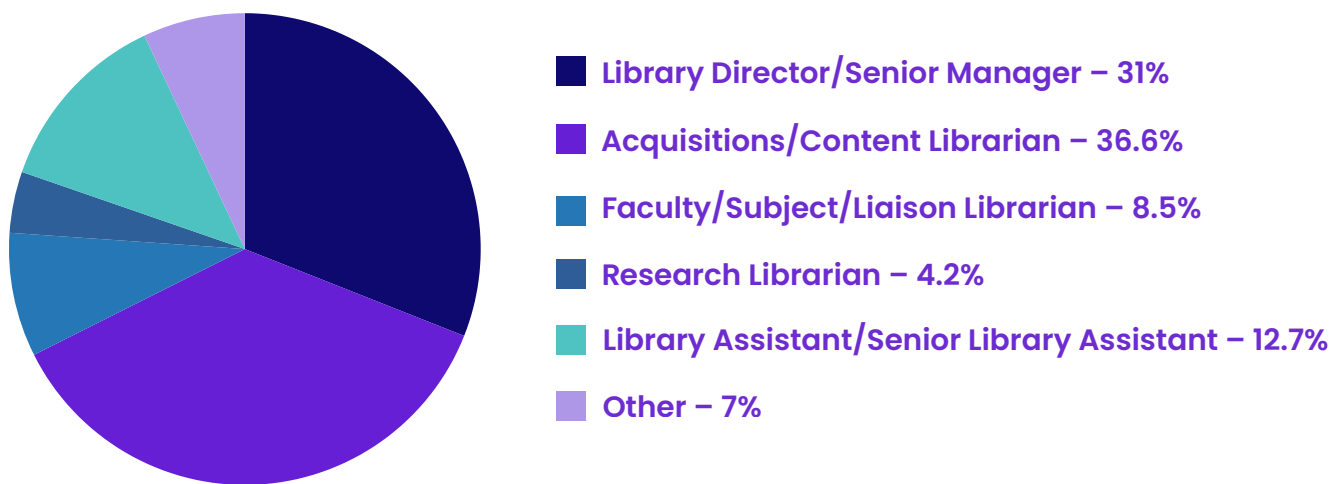
1. Who responded to our survey?

We received 71 responses to this year's survey.

Our respondents had the option to remain anonymous, unless they wished to leave their details to enter a prize draw. We have preserved the anonymity of all respondents here.

However, we asked respondents to indicate their job role and the type of institution in which they work to establish some context for our overall survey results.

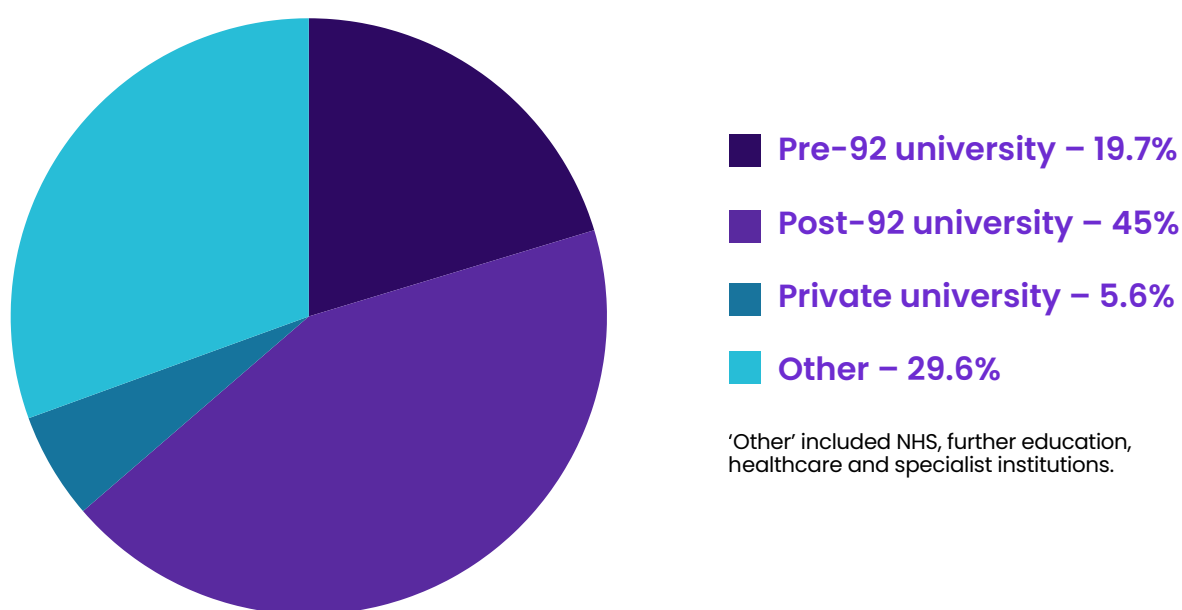
Which category best describes your job role?



Other' included Systems Librarian and Medical Librarian.

2. Where do our respondents work?

Which category best describes your institution?

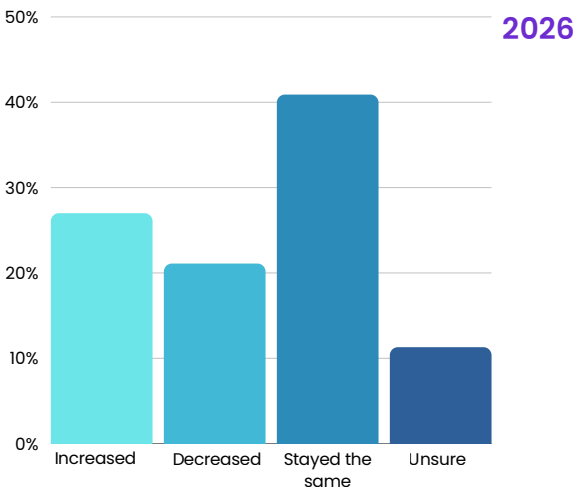


These two questions revealed that Library Directors/Senior Managers and Acquisitions/Content Librarians were more likely to respond to our survey, with over 60% of respondents in these two categories. Just under half of respondents work at post-92 universities, followed by 19.7% at pre-92 universities.

3. How are libraries purchasing content?

In the last 12 months has your library’s digital content spend:

- Increased – 27%
- Decreased – 21.1%
- Stayed the same – 40.9%
- Unsure – 11.3%

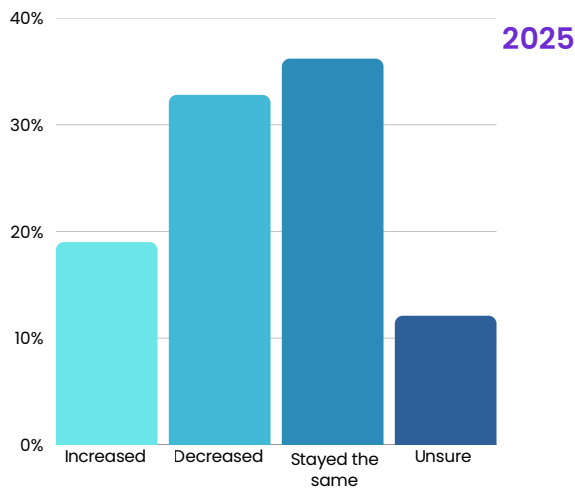


Conclusion:

Almost half of respondents said their digital content stayed the same in the last 12 months.

This represents a shift from 2025, where a higher proportion of libraries reported decreased spend, and fewer reported increases, indicating a more stable or recovering position in the last 12 months.

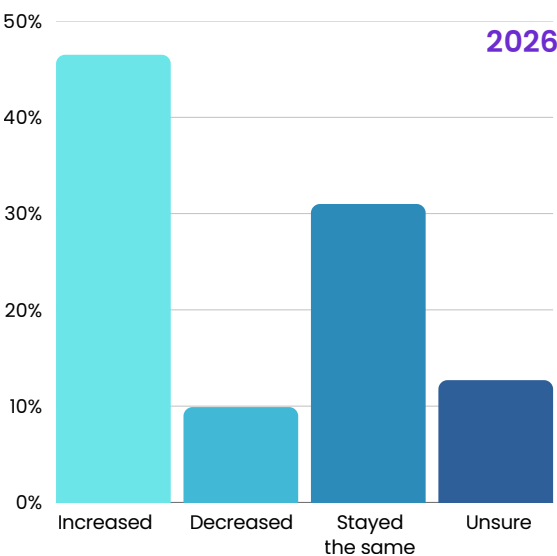
- Increased – 19%
- Decreased – 32.8%
- Stayed the same – 36.2%
- Unsure – 12.1%



4. What are the trends in content provision?

In the last 12 months has the proportion of digital content in your library:

- Increased – 46.5%
- Decreased – 9.9%
- Stayed the same – 31%
- Unsure – 12.7%

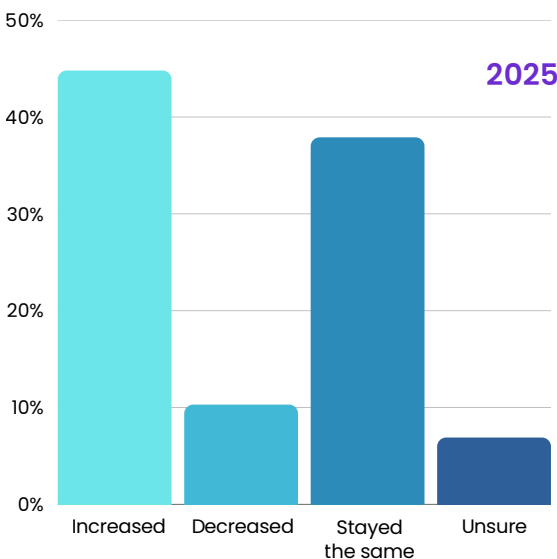


Conclusion:

Almost half of respondents said the proportion of digital content had increased in the last 12 months.

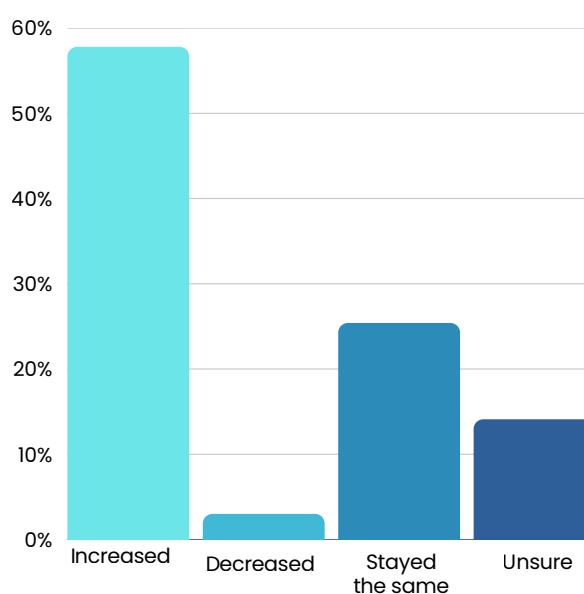
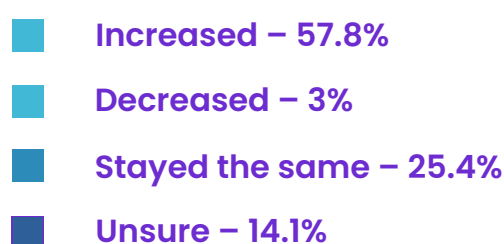
This shows a broadly consistent position with 2025, with a slight increase in the proportion of libraries reporting growth in digital content and fewer reporting no change.

- Increased – 44.8%
- Decreased – 10.3%
- Stayed the same – 37.9%
- Unsure – 6.9%



5. What is the importance of OA and OERs?

In the last 12 months has the importance of open access (OA) and open educational resources (OER) at your library:



Conclusion:

Over half of respondents said OA and OER content had become more important in the last 12 months.

There is a slight decrease from 2025, when 67.2% of respondents said OA and/or OER content had become more important in the last 12 months.

'I have noted that the use of Open Access content by teaching staff substantially exceeds content from our subscription databases.'

'Decreased budgets leading to non-renewal of subscriptions and loss of access to journal content. With this loss of access and decreased ability to pay for required content, OA materials naturally become more important'

Quotes from 2026 survey respondents

5. What is the importance of OA and OERs?

We asked respondents to share an example of how open access (OA) materials and open educational resources (OER) is being used at their library.

Six common themes emerged from respondents' answers:

Using OA as a cost workaround

"We have increased instances where the costs... are prohibitive so we have looked to whether OER alternatives are available."

Filling gaps in eBook availability

"Where the e-book is unavailable or prohibitively expensive, we look at OER alternatives."

Supporting tight budgets

"Budgets are tight so we are relying more and more on OA material to expand our collections."

Embedding into teaching and reading lists

"Academics have been asked to consider OER content for reading lists instead of paid for titles."

Driving awareness and staff engagement

"There have been webinars introducing OERs and Pressbooks to staff."

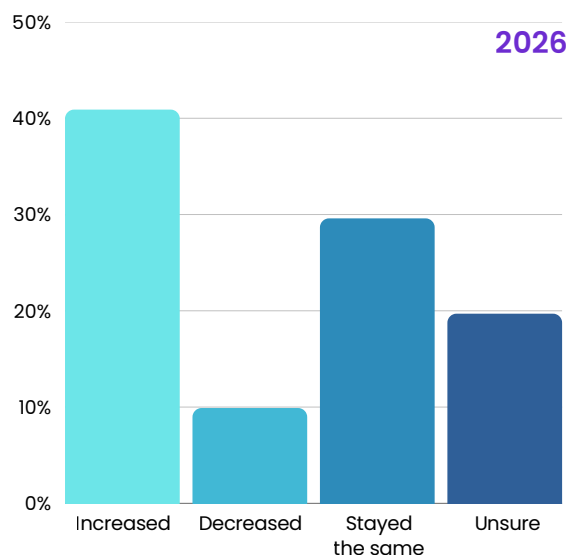
Replacing subscription usage

"I have noted that the use of Open Access content by teaching staff substantially exceeds content from our subscription databases."

6. What are the trends in data usage?

In the last 12 months has your library's use of content usage and/or student engagement analytics

- Increased – 40.9%
- Decreased – 9.9%
- Stayed the same – 29.6%
- Unsure – 19.7%

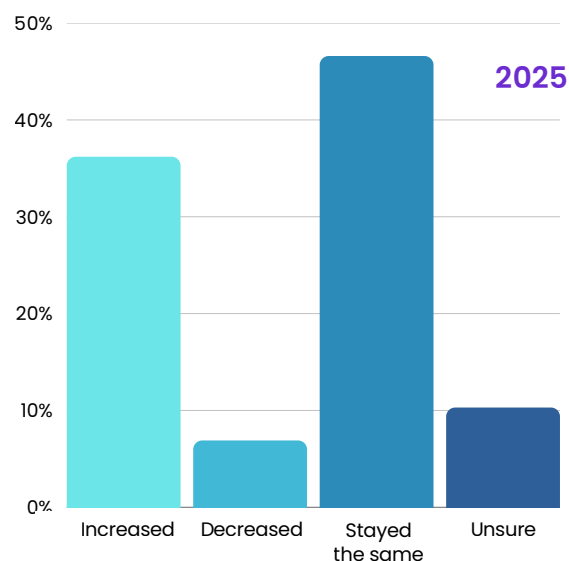


Conclusion:

Almost 41% of respondents said their use of data analytics had increased in the last 12 months.

Compared to 2025, responses have shifted away from stability towards a more mixed and uncertain picture, with fewer reporting no change and more reporting increases.

- Increased – 36.2%
- Decreased – 6.9%
- Stayed the same – 46.6%
- Unsure – 10.3%



7. What is the value of data?

How valuable do you find the content usage and/or student engagement analytics provided by your suppliers?

Extremely valuable – 25.4%

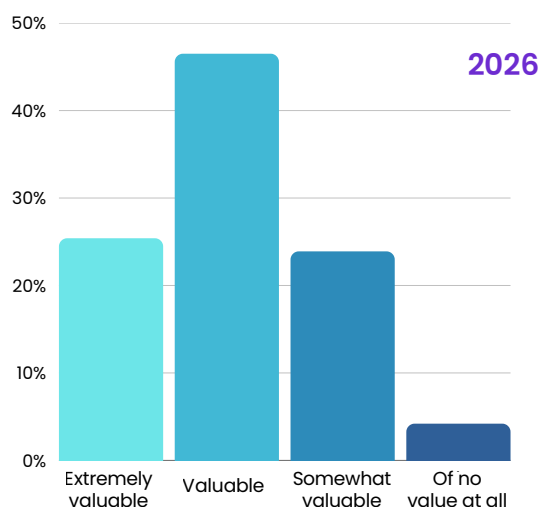
Valuable – 46.5%

Somewhat valuable – 23.9%

Of no value at all – 4.2%

Conclusion:

Over two-thirds of respondents found data analytics provided by suppliers extremely valuable or valuable.



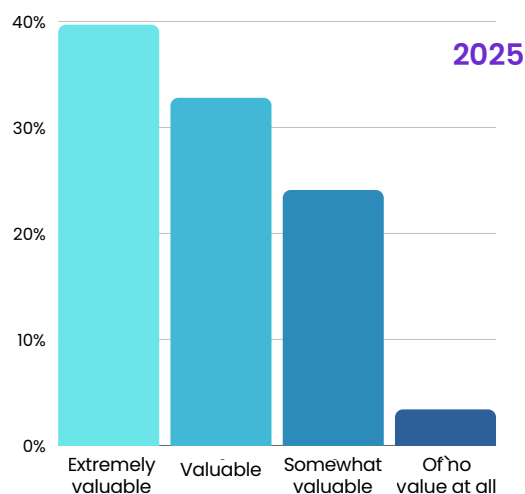
More respondents in 2025 (+14.3%) found data analytics 'extremely valuable' compared with our 2026 survey results, indicating a shift towards the 'valuable' category this year.

Extremely valuable – 39.7%

Valuable – 32.8%

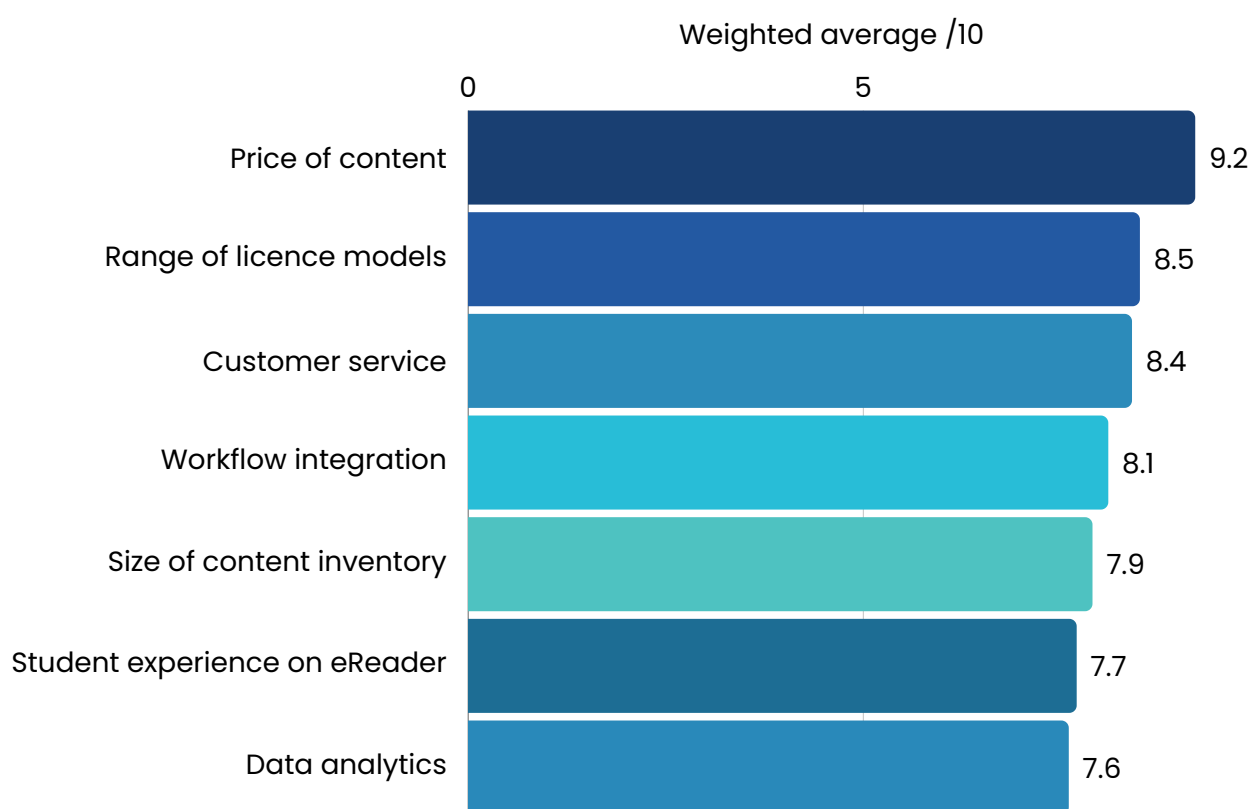
Somewhat valuable – 24.1%

Of no value at all – 3.4%



8. What is important when selecting a library supplier?

When selecting a library supplier, how important are the following in your decision-making? (score each out of 10, 0 = not important and 10 = very important):



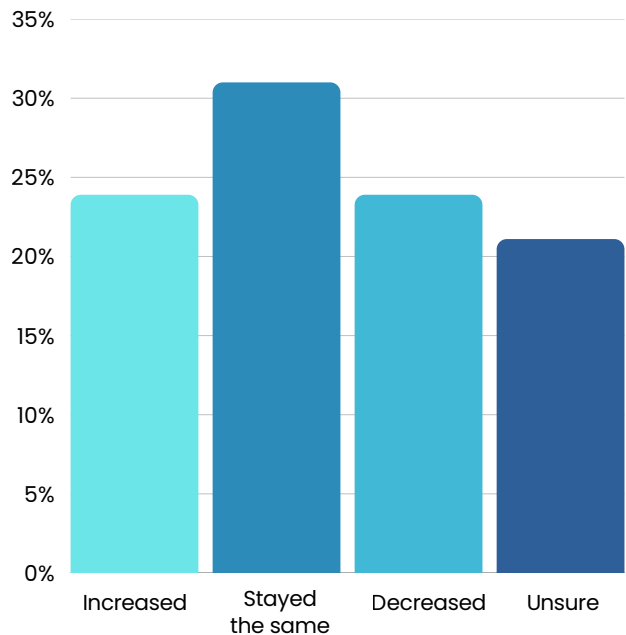
Conclusion:

Price of content proved the most important factor when selecting a library supplier, with other factors demonstrating relatively equal importance in library supplier selection.

9. How are students engaging with library resources?

In the last 12 months, has student engagement with your library resources:

- Increased – 23.9%
- Stayed the same – 31%
- Decreased – 23.9%
- Unsure – 21.1%



Conclusion:

Almost a third of respondents said student engagement with library resources had decreased in the last 12 months.



9. How are students engaging with library resources?

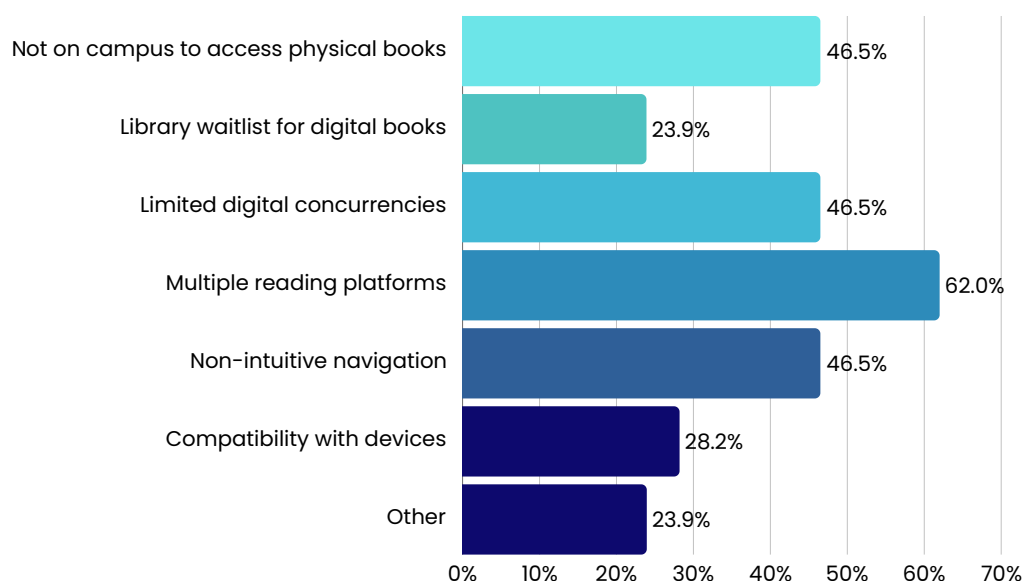
We asked respondents to share recent strategies employed to drive student engagement with library resources.

Some common strategies were:

Social media campaigns	Email campaigns
Library pop-up events or drop-ins	Working closely with academics
Embedded reading lists	1:1 tutorials or drop-ins
Workshops and inductions	Subject or video guides
In-curriculum teaching	Improving discovery and access
Student ambassadors	Promotional events and activities

10. What are the main barriers to access?

What barriers do your students currently face when accessing library resources?
Select all that apply:



The responses given for 'Other' can be grouped into the following themes:

Platform and usability issues
(e.g. multiple systems,
inconsistent access experience)

Student preferences and
behaviours (e.g. favouring print,
avoiding eBooks)

Time, awareness, and skills gaps
(e.g. limited engagement,
understanding of resources)

Access restrictions and licensing
limitations (e.g. downloading,
printing, device compatibility)

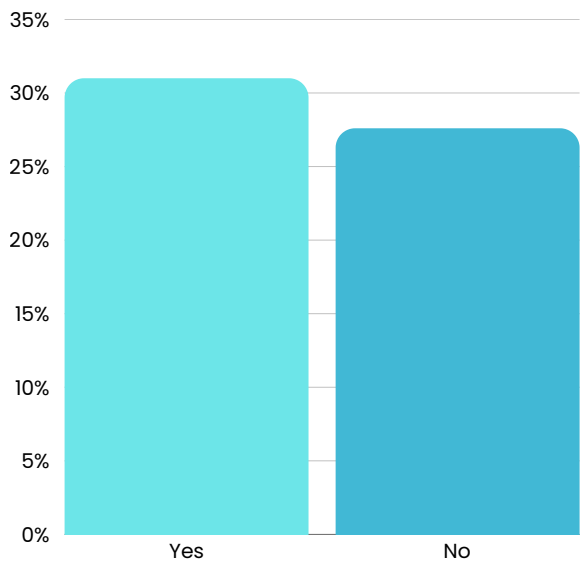
11. What is the outlook for library funding?

Do you think your library will be adequately funded to meet student needs for the next academic year?

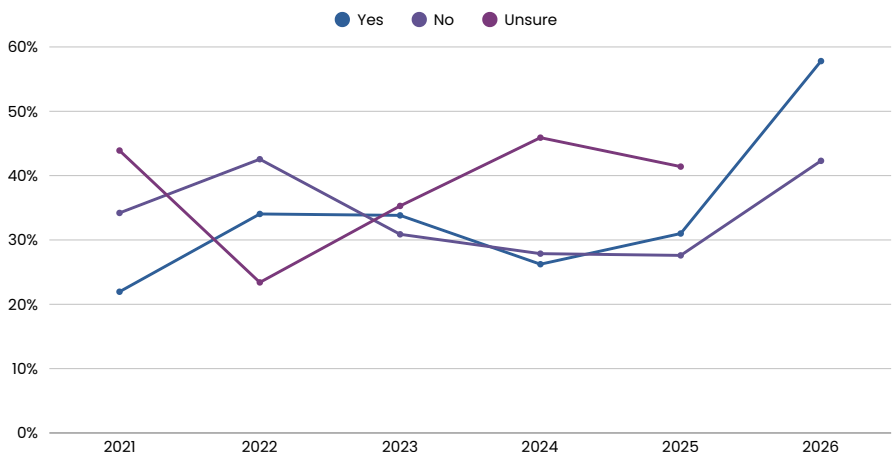
- Yes – 58%
- No – 42.3%

Conclusion:

Over half of respondents thought their library would be adequately funded next academic year.

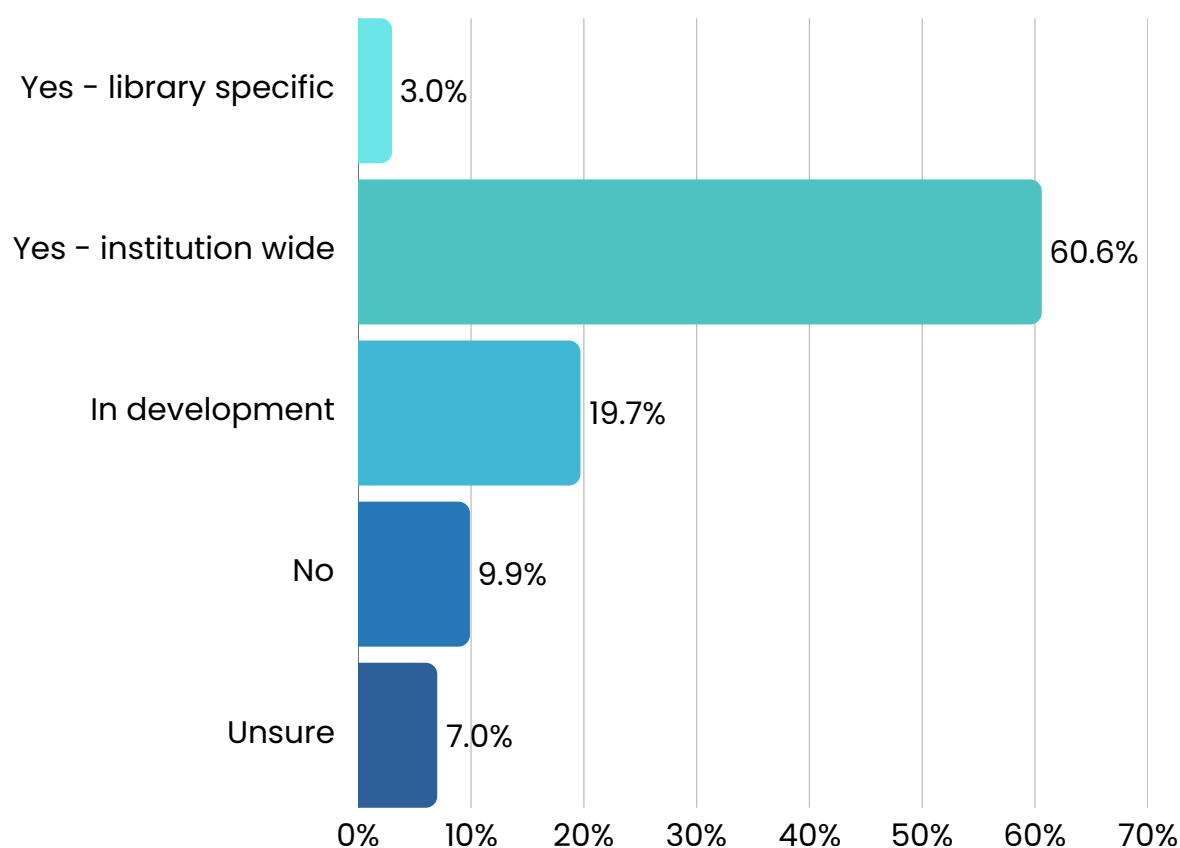


Mapping the 2026 response against the previous five years of our survey shows that sentiment has shifted from uncertainty to a more clearly defined and increasingly confident outlook.



12. What is the impact of generative AI?

Does your library currently have formal guidance or policy relating to the use of generative AI?

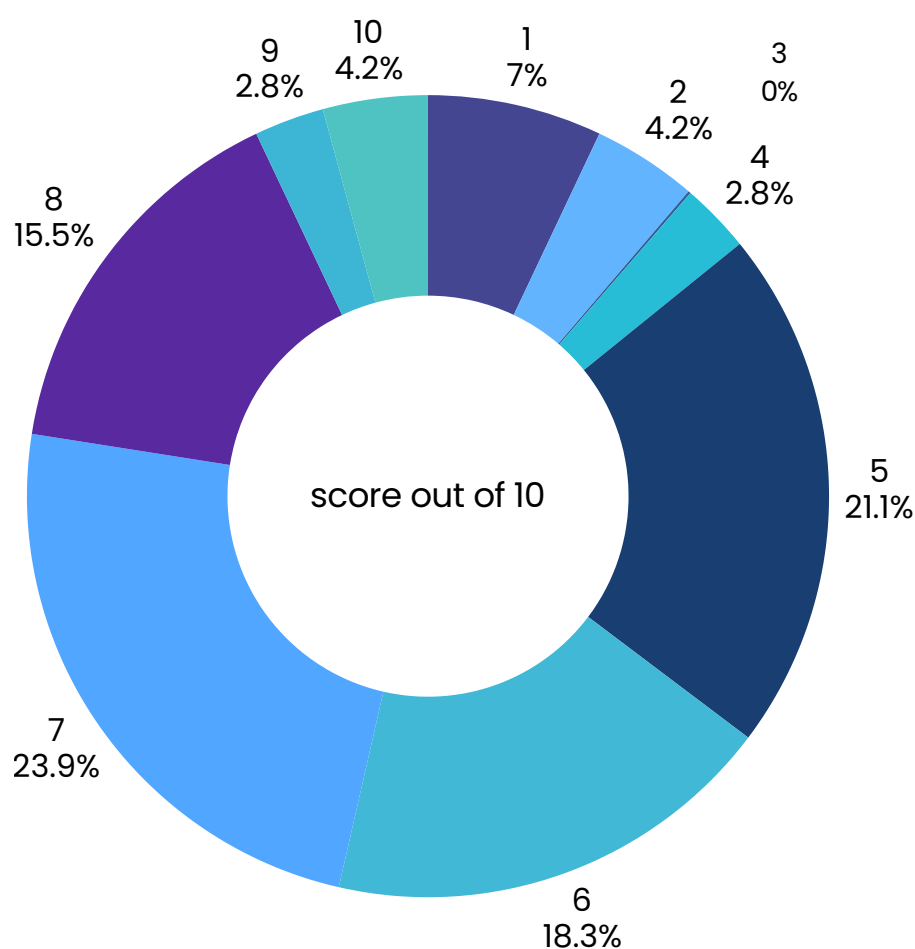


Conclusion:

Most respondents report institution-wide guidance on generative AI, with very few having library-specific policies.

12. What is the impact of generative AI?

How confident do you feel your library staff are in supporting students with responsible use of generative AI? (score out of 10)

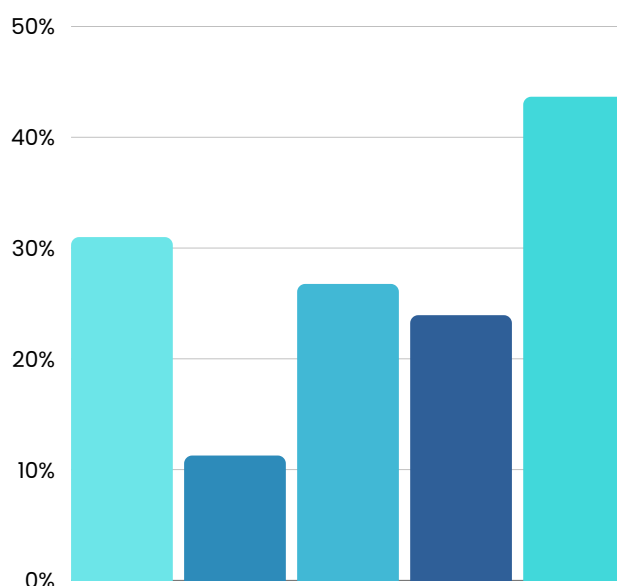


Conclusion:

Confidence levels are generally moderate to high, with responses clustering between scores of 5 and 8, peaking at 7 (23.9%).

12. What is the impact of generative AI?

Are you currently using AI tools in any of the following areas? (select all that apply):



- Content discovery – 30.99%
- Collection development decisions – 11.27%
- Student support – 26.76%
- Research support – 23.94%
- Not currently using AI – 43.66%

Conclusion:

The results show that while generative AI is being used in some areas, adoption remains limited, with many libraries not yet using AI tools and current use focused on a small number of practical applications.

We asked respondents to share the opportunities and concerns they associate with the use of generative AI in the library context.

Responses were equally divided between the opportunities and concerns associated with generative AI. We've included a selection of these on the following pages.

12. What is the impact of generative AI?

While some respondents highlighted opportunities to improve efficiency and streamline workflows:

'Admin tasks will be quicker to leave more time for in depth research and user experience projects.'

Others pointed to the potential for AI to enhance discovery and access to information:

'Enhanced discovery and access to information.'

'Researchers receive support in searching for suitable literature. They also receive possible help from AI for their research questions.'

Some respondents also noted opportunities to improve services and processes:

'Enhance cataloguing and metadata processes and service delivery.'

'Automating routine work.'

However, concerns around accuracy and reliability were widely raised:

'Our main concerns/issues are with hallucinations and fake references/citations and plagiarism. We have been called in asked to find things that don't exist.'

Respondents also highlighted the impact on students' academic skills:

'Students relying on it too heavily for research and not checking citations.'

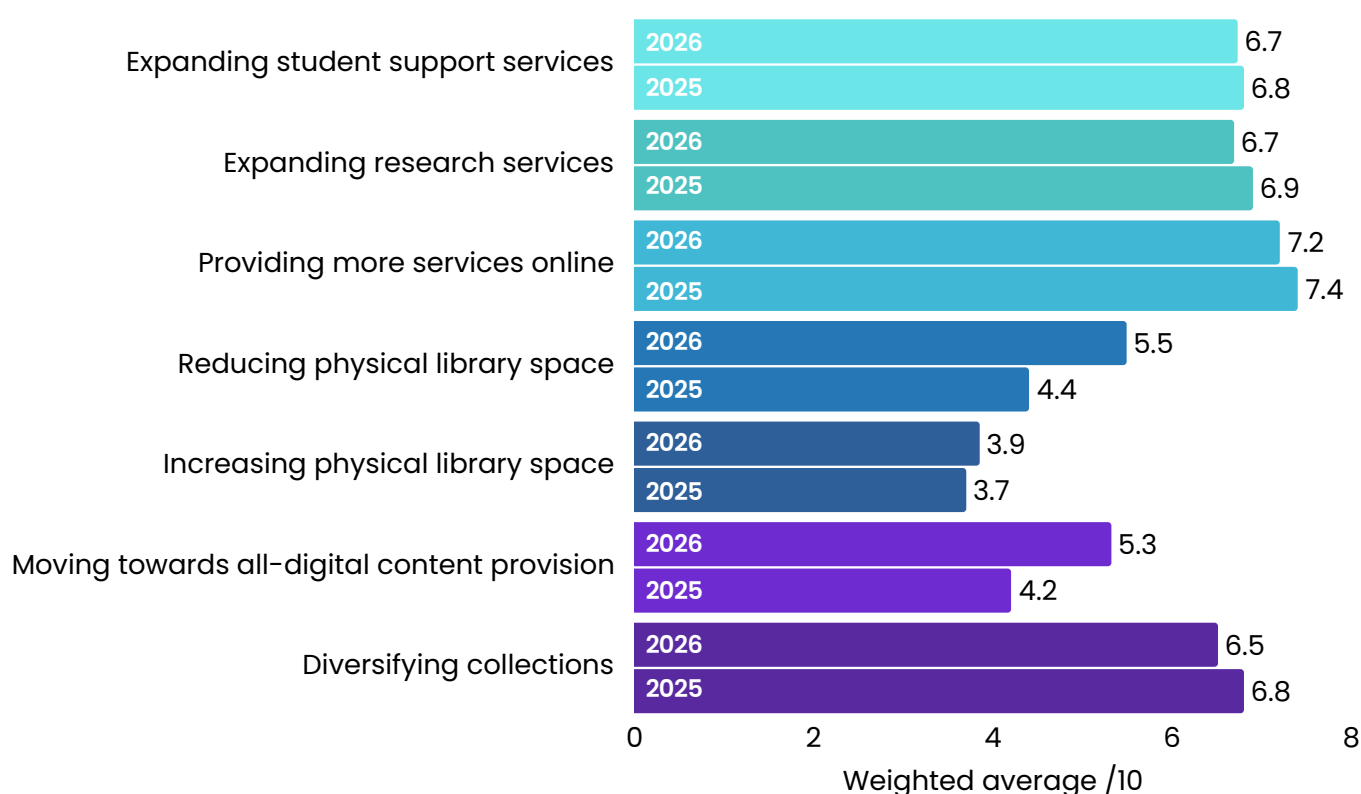
'A loss of the ability to think critically.'

There were also broader concerns around governance and risk:

'We are a medical library so readers need to be able to research for themselves without AI, as any incorrect AI-generated information may cause serious patient harm.'

13. How will the academic library evolve?

Looking ahead, how do you see your library evolving in the next 10 years in terms of (score each out of 10, 0 = no change and 10 = significant change):



In the chart above we have added data from our 2025 survey for comparison. Compared to 2026, the results are broadly consistent, with slight decreases across most areas. However, there is a small increase in emphasis on reducing physical space and moving towards digital content provision.

13. How will the academic library evolve?

1. Shift from collections to study space

'The movement in our library is towards reducing physical stock completely. The space is required for study.'

2. Continued move towards digital, but not fully digital

'All digital provision does not take account of inclusiveness so is unlikely to be absolute.'

3. Financial constraints shaping decisions

'Budgetary constraints will not enable us to instigate the change we need and desire.'

4. Hybrid model as the long-term direction

'A balanced mix of access to a comfortable and innovative physical study space with provision of a wide range of quality online resources is critical.'

5. Changing role of the library and staff

'Moving towards a more service based library is necessary to stay relevant.'

6. Student behaviour driving change

'Students are using fewer physical resources and expect 24/7 access to electronic content.'



Conclusion

Now in its sixth year, our survey highlights how academic libraries are continuing to adapt to a changing and often uncertain environment.

The results show that while spending has become more stable, financial pressure remains a defining feature of the sector, particularly around the cost and accessibility of digital content.

Despite this, respondents continue to point to an increase in digital provision as a key direction of travel. This reflects a change in how students access materials, with greater reliance on online resources and less dependence on being physically on campus.

Open content (OA and OER) is taking on a more central role in library strategy, with our findings showing a growing focus on using open resources to extend collections and support teaching and learning where budgets are under strain.

However, engagement challenges remain. Respondents highlight ongoing issues around discoverability, usability and fragmented access, all of which are affecting how students interact with resources.

Generative AI continues to be a significant and growing presence in the sector. Our respondents recognise its potential to enhance discovery and efficiency, but concerns around accuracy, academic integrity and its influence on student learning remain prominent.

We value every response we received. Thank you for helping us to understand your needs better and support you more effectively.

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