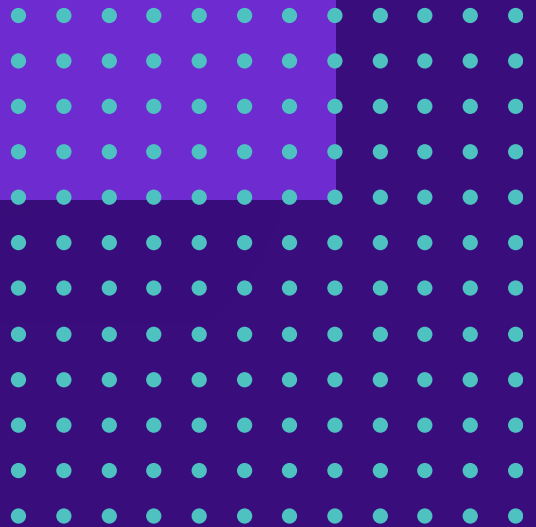


Annual Librarian Survey Report

May 2024



Foreword



Ronan Grimes Sales Director – Kortext

In this year's Annual Librarian Survey, the message is clear – academic libraries are being asked to do more with less, and the situation is likely to get worse.

At Kortext, we're acutely aware of the financial pressures: we talk to library customers every day about impending budget cuts and potential redundancies in higher education.

At the same time, students are grappling with the cost-of-living crisis. In this context, students needing to buy their own learning materials is unsustainable and inequitable.

Given this, the move towards open access seems inevitable. However, commercial content remains crucial now, as quality open access materials are developed over time.

By blending commercial content with open access, we can create an equitable learning environment. For example, an institution could upload self-produced content to the Kortext platform where it can be utilised with our suite of smart study tools.

Kortext can also leverage generative AI within a ring-fenced environment to help map content to the curriculum and identify additional relevant reading, saving librarians and academics time whilst surfacing diverse materials to provide an inclusive experience.

I'm excited by the possibilities that lie ahead. I believe that, by working in partnership, we can adapt and thrive together.

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Introduction

The fourth Kortext Annual Librarian Survey, intended for academic libraries in the UK, was conducted during April 2024.

It incorporated both quantitative and qualitative questions to capture the current state of and emerging trends within libraries in the higher education sector.

The survey was not restricted to Kortext customers. We received 81 responses, of which 73.7% were current Kortext customers and 26.3% were not Kortext customers.

The results of the survey were revealed in our spring webinar on 2nd May, during which they were discussed by a panel of sector experts including:

- Professor Janice Kay CBE, Special Advisor to the Vice Chancellor at the University of Exeter and member of the Kortext Academic Advisory Board
- Andrew Knight, Acquisitions and Content Services Manager at Imperial College London
- Jack Reid, Content and Discovery Librarian at the University of East London
- Amy Stubbing, University Librarian at Solent University.

In the following paper, we present the results of the Kortext Annual Librarian Survey 2024, supported by relevant insights from the panel discussion.

Please note: for survey results, percentages have been rounded to one decimal place.

Key findings

Finance:

The current financial climate in higher education is causing concerns about library funding and, consequently, the ability to meet student needs.

Content:

Academic libraries are increasingly investing in digital content, which supports flexible and inclusive learning.

OA and OER:

Funder mandates, transformative agreements, and budgetary constraints are driving the growth of OA content and OERs.

Data:

Academic libraries are leveraging data to ensure value for money, but could also be using data more to demonstrate their wider impact across institutions.

Engagement:

Students are demonstrating engagement with library resources, contrary to ongoing media narratives about a lack of student engagement in higher education.

Generative AI:

Concerns about generative AI amongst librarians have diminished compared to last year's survey results.



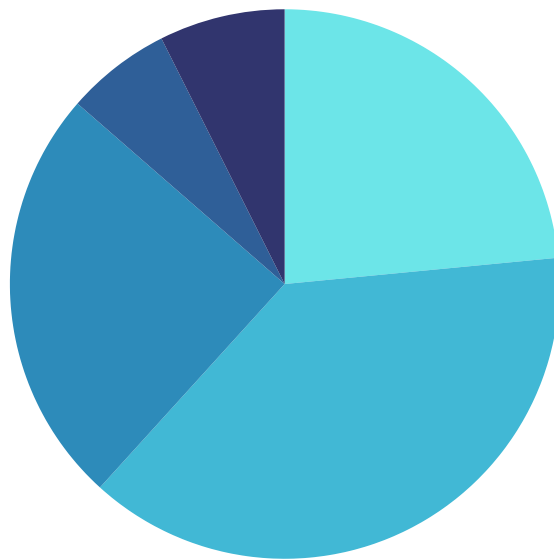
1. Who responded to our survey?

We received 81 responses to this year's survey, an increase of 19.1% on the previous year.

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?



- Library Director/Senior Manager - 23.5%
- Acquisitions/Content Librarian - 38.3%
- Faculty/Subject/Liaison Librarian - 24.7%
- Senior/Library Assistant - 6.2%
- Other - 7.4%

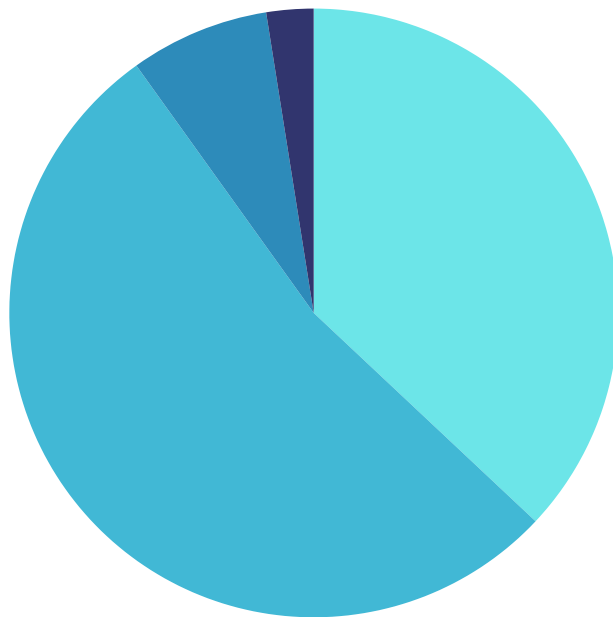
'Other' included job roles such as Library Systems and Customer Services.

2. Where do our respondents work?

Which category best describes your institution?

- Pre-92 university - 37%
- Post-92 university - 53.1%
- Private university - 7.4%
- Other - 2.5%

'Other' included specialist institutions.



These two questions revealed that Acquisitions/Content Librarians were more likely to respond to our survey than those in other job roles, although almost a quarter were in library leadership roles, and a similar percentage were in liaison librarian roles. More than half of our respondents work at a post-92 university.

3. How are libraries purchasing content?

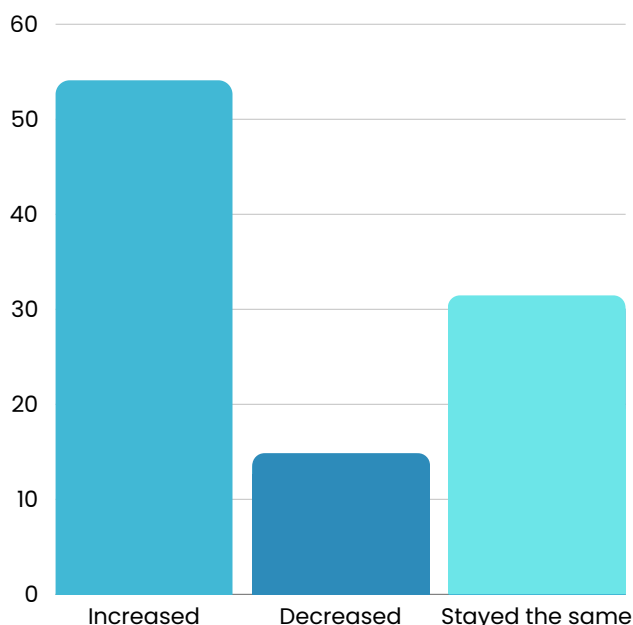
In the last 12 months has your library's digital content spend:

- Increased - 54.1%
- Decreased - 14.8%
- Stayed the same - 31.2%

Conclusion:

More than half of respondents reported an increase in spending on digital content in the last 12 months.

Despite this increase, survey respondents and our panel stressed the reality of the challenging financial climate in higher education.



"...I don't know where any extra growth is going to come from. Budgets are pretty much at capacity, I think, in our sector..."

- Andrew Knight

Moreover, panel members had also noticed a slight upward trend in the usage of print resources.

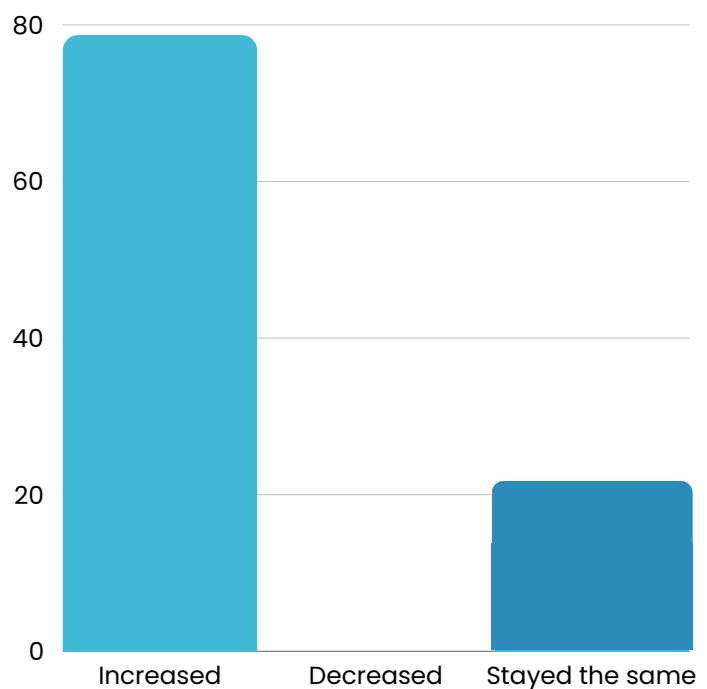
"But oddly what we've seen at least in the last 18 months is this line increase in print. It's not taken over, it's not ... rising significantly, but it's rising a bit."

- Jack Reid

4. What are the trends in content provision?

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

- Increased - 78.7%
- Decreased - 0%
- Stayed the same - 21.3%



Conclusion:

More than three-quarters of respondents said their proportion of digital content increased in the last 12 months.

Our panel identified two key drivers for the continuing importance of digital content.

First, to meet the requirements of flexible course delivery.

"...we're doing a lot more hybrid teaching now. We've got a lot of exclusively online courses ... I think, certainly for us, digital dominance is inevitable."

- Andrew Knight

Second, to provide equitable and accessible learning resources.

"... if you take into account the access and participation piece and the EDI element, I think digital has to be a priority..."

- Amy Stubbing

5. What is the importance of OA and OERs?

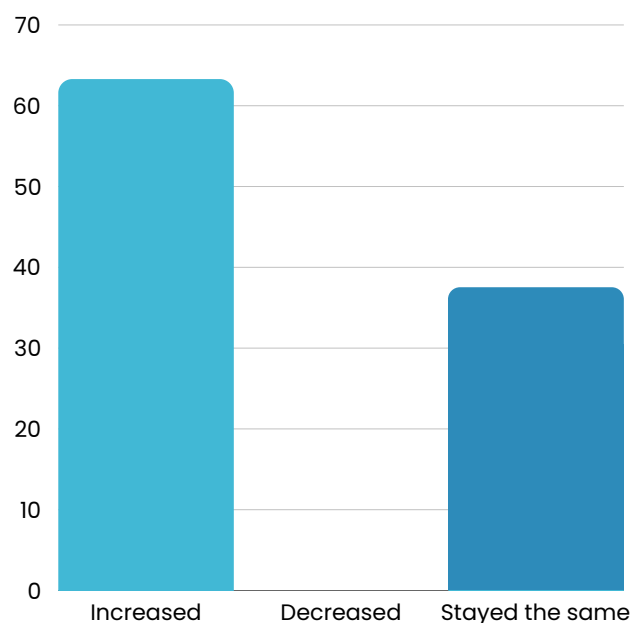
In the last 12 months has the importance of Open Access (OA) materials and/or Open Educational Resources (OERs) at your library:

- Increased - 62.3%
- Decreased - 0%
- Stayed the same - 37.7%

Conclusion:

The majority of respondents said OA/OER content increased in importance at their library in last 12 months.

Our panel commented that financial constraints mean OA/OER content in library collections is likely to continue growing.



"...for any librarian who is low on funds, OA and OERs represent a more sustainable and more equitable model. I think the importance will carry on increasing."

- Andrew Knight

However, there may need to be investment in library staff time and resources in order to create quality metadata representing a hidden cost associated with these materials.

"... there is now so much content and often we find the metadata is quite poor ... This is a massive consideration for us at the moment – how do you actually make this content discoverable and viewable?"

- Jack Reid



5. What is the importance of OA and OERs?

We asked respondents to share an example from their own institution.

Six common reasons for growth in OA/OER content emerged:

Integration into the library discovery service

“We have added OA databases in the discovery solution based on user requests.”

Increased promotion

“We increased promotion of OERs, and the university created a dedicated portal to share resources with colleagues.”

Driven by financial constraints

“I think importance of OA will grow next year as our budget was very challenging this year, but it’s going to be even worse next year.”

Impact of transformative agreements

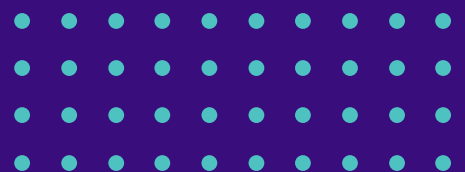
“Use of OA journal articles ... is gradually increasing as a larger proportion of new journal articles are published OA as a result of Read & Publish Agreements.”

REF and funding council policies

“This is mainly dictated by REF, and funding council and institutional OA policies.”

Institutional impetus

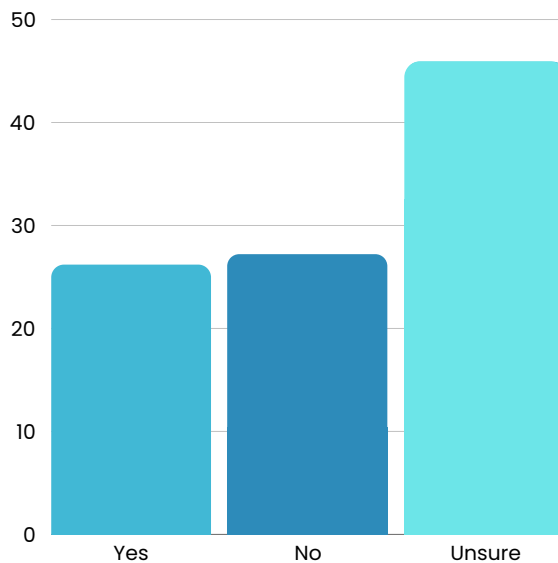
“Clear steer from university leadership that research must be more prominent, and OA is part of this.”



6. What is the outlook for library funding?

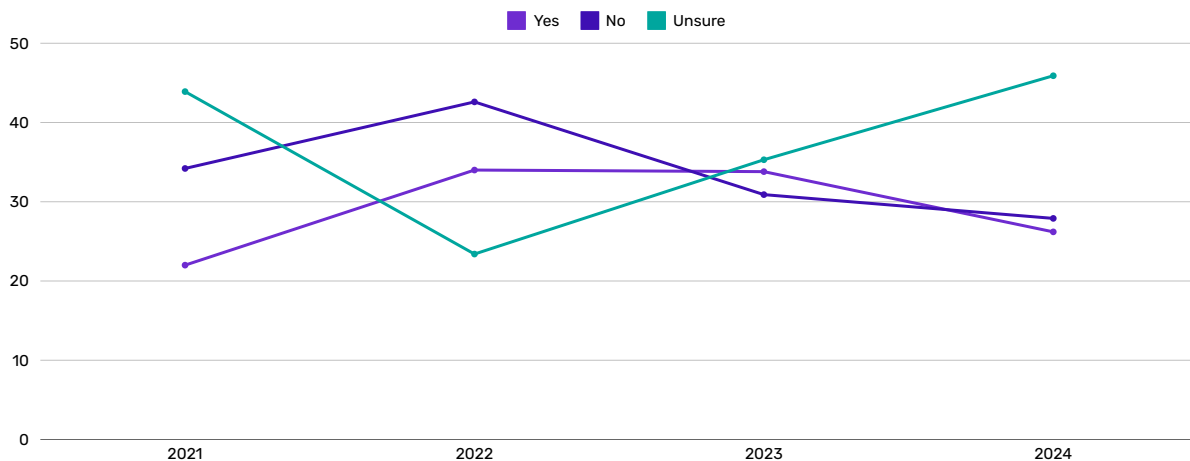
Do you think your library will be adequately funded to meet student needs for the next academic year?

- Yes - 26.2%
- No - 27.9%
- Unsure - 45.9%



Conclusion:

Only around a quarter of respondents thought their library would be adequately funded next academic year.



We can map this year's response against those from the previous three years of our survey, demonstrating a growing uncertainty about library funding.



6. What is the outlook for library funding?

Building on this, our panel explored how libraries can best present their case for funding, with perspectives from both university leadership and library management.

For Professor Janice Kay, there were four aspects to consider:

Need

"... if you look at the work on priorities of higher education institutions at the moment ... just below cybersecurity at number one, it's student experience and that's around getting more applications and more admissions."

Not falling behind

"Institutions really don't want any more dropouts, non-continuing students, if nothing else because of the sheer millions that some institutions are currently losing in terms of withdrawals..."

Stewardship

"...there's also an argument around stewardship, being able to demonstrate effective spend and bang for your buck."

Innovation

"...the capabilities of AI and large language learning models ... around assessment and promoting learning."

6. What is the outlook for library funding?

For Amy Stubbing, it was vital for the library to understand university-level goals.

"...the really core thing from the library perspective when we're trying to present our budget requirements ... is speaking the language of the university..."

That means being able to demonstrate how funding library services and resources impacts on access and participation, retention rates, and student engagement.

However, Amy points out the library may struggle to be involved in ongoing institutional discussions about these areas, limiting opportunities to evidence positive impacts.

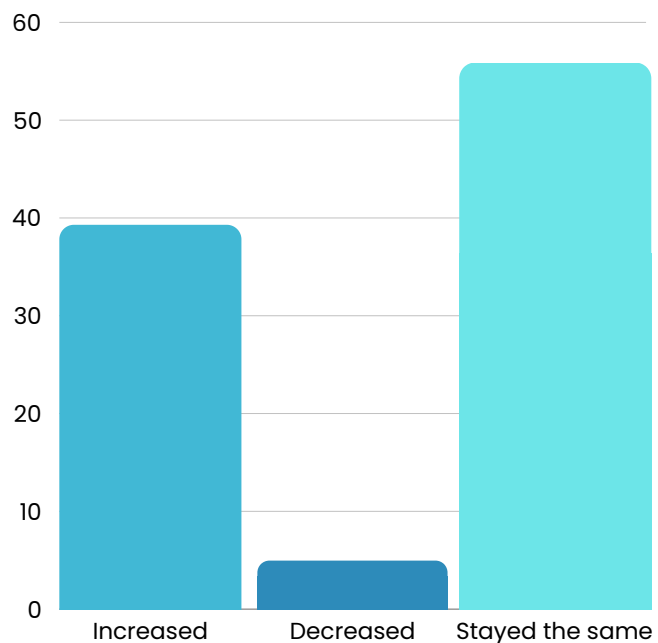
"... often we're not within the infrastructure ... at the right kind of level to input that."



7. What are the trends in data usage?

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

- Increased - 39.3%
- Decreased - 4.9%
- Stayed the same - 55.7%



Conclusion:

Fewer than 5% of respondents said their use of data analytics had decreased in the last 12 months.

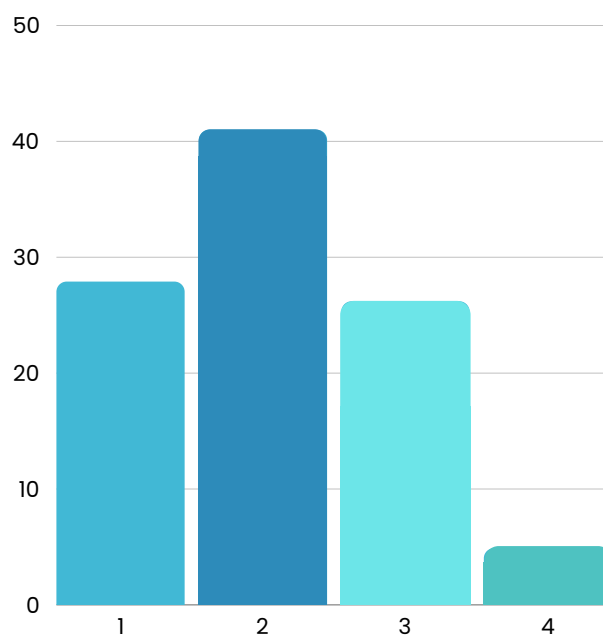
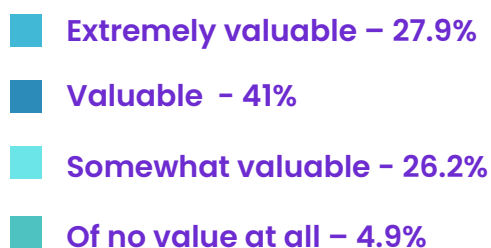
Further to this, our panel discussion emphasised the vital role of data in order to analyse library resource provision and ensure effective spending in the current economic situation.

“...the importance of value for money is so crucial now with these budget constraints. We have to use data and make it useful. We have access to so much of it...”

- Jack Reid

8. What is the value of data?

How valuable do you find the content usage/student engagement analytics (beyond COUNTER 5 data) provided by your suppliers?



Conclusion:

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

In the panel discussion, Amy Stubbing also spoke about the value of library data across the wider institution.

“There’s so much that the library data can help us to change on a university level on the teaching and learning side that we’re not doing yet... [it] can be used for predictive analysis and to really understand the level of engagement happening with a specific area of teaching.

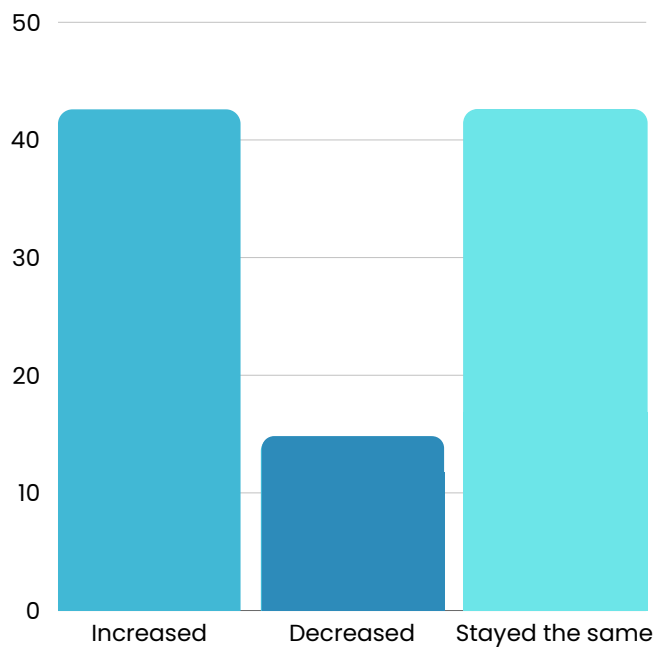
“It means that we can start making changes to modules halfway through if we know there’s really low engagement with a specific year group.”

Read more from Amy about the untapped potential of library data in her [Wonkhe article](#).

9. How are students engaging with library resources?

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

- Increased - 42.6%
- Decreased - 14.8%
- Stayed the same - 42.6%



Conclusion:

Fewer than 15% of respondents said student engagement with library resources decreased in the last 12 months.

Our survey indicated a positive trend in student engagement with library resources, with most respondents saying that engagement had been stable, or increased.



9. How are students engaging with library resources?

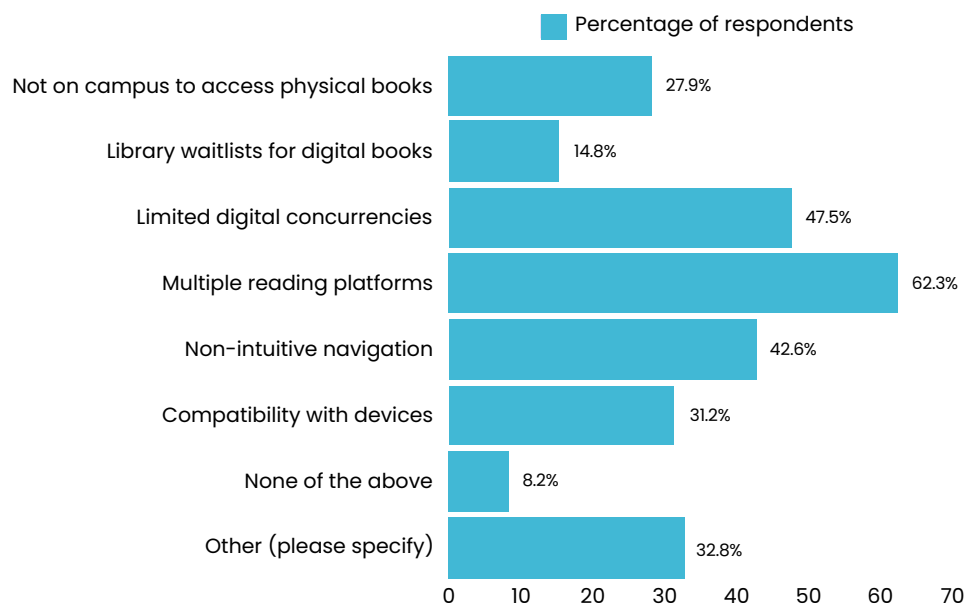
We asked respondents to share an example of how they had encouraged student engagement with library resources in their institution.

Some common strategies were:

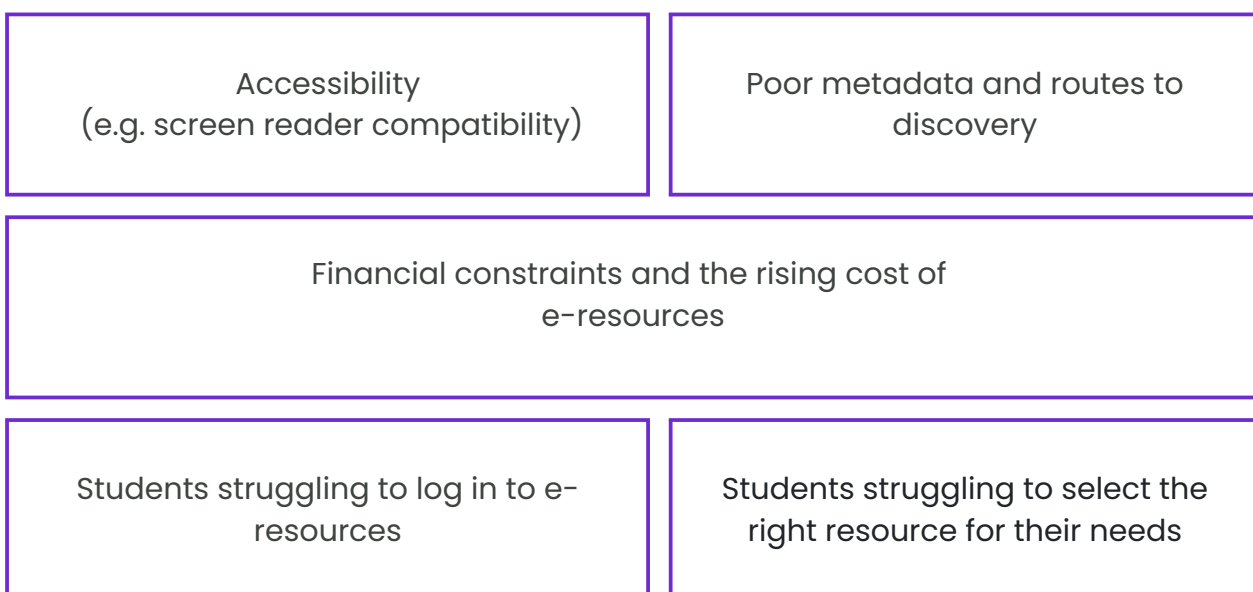
Social media	Increased promotion (e.g. digital displays, posters, VLE)	Library pop-up events or drop-ins
Embedded reading lists	Subject/video guides	Working closely with academics
Increased in-curriculum teaching	1:1 tutorials	Optional workshops
Improving library systems/discovery service	Kortext student ambassadors	UX projects (e.g. questionnaires, focus groups)

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 areas:





11. How can we address barriers to access?

During our panel discussion, Andrew Knight shared the experience of Imperial College London as a new Kortext customer.

“Since we came over to Kortext last year, we’ve started looking at things like are there different models available? Can we get better value for money? How do we increase engagement?”

Simon Mavin from Kortext explained that, although traditionally associated with the 1:1 eTextbook model, our offer has evolved in response to customer feedback.

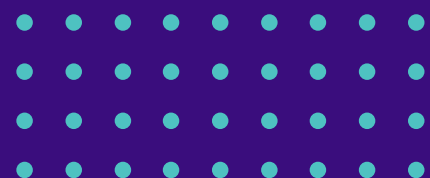
“...we support a range of library models and have different options around concurrency ... as well as being on SUPC Lot 5, we’re also on Lot 4.1 and APUC Lot 1 in Scotland...”

Imperial and Kortext are also working closely together to streamline integration into existing library workflows, as Simon observed.

“...we recognise that for libraries to work with Kortext and to purchase from us, it’s not just about price – it’s about how easy we are to do business with...”

For Andrew, the key to overcoming barriers is partnership, with student experience placed at the centre of everything.

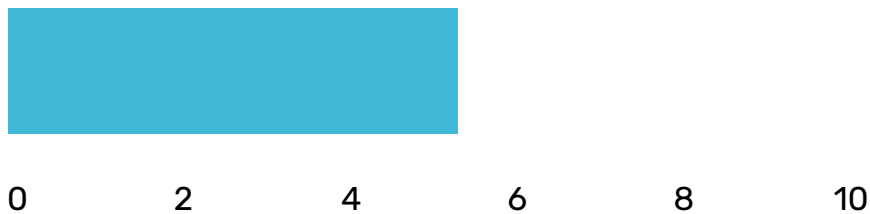
“We’ve got to make sure our users get what they need. The next step is for us to work together ... as a sector to see where we can find improvements and really enhance that book experience. That’s something that I’m looking forward to doing over the coming years.”



12. What is the impact of the cost-of-living crisis?

The cost-of-living crisis has led to more students undertaking paid employment and/or commuting longer distances, while spending less on learning resources.

To what extent has this impacted on your library?
(score out of 10, 0 = no impact and 10 = significant impact)



This year, we included a new survey question about the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on students and, by extension, on libraries.

This question was included in response to survey findings from Save the Student and AdvanceHE/HEPI.

“...we have seen a 17% increase in the average student's living costs. The proportion of surveyed students that have used food banks has nearly doubled – up from 10% to 18%. And nearly two-thirds said they skip meals to save money.”

[Save the Student, Student Money Survey 2023](#)

“...three quarters of our sample feel their studies have been affected by the cost-of-living crisis, a figure that is disproportionately higher among some more vulnerable cohorts.”

[AdvanceHE/HEPI, Student Academic Experience Survey 2023](#)

12. What is the impact of the cost-of-living crisis?

We asked respondents to share an example of how the cost-of-living crisis has affected their institution. Some reported an noticeable impact:

“Students are definitely expecting more from our services. Also, students are less likely to return resources borrowed.”

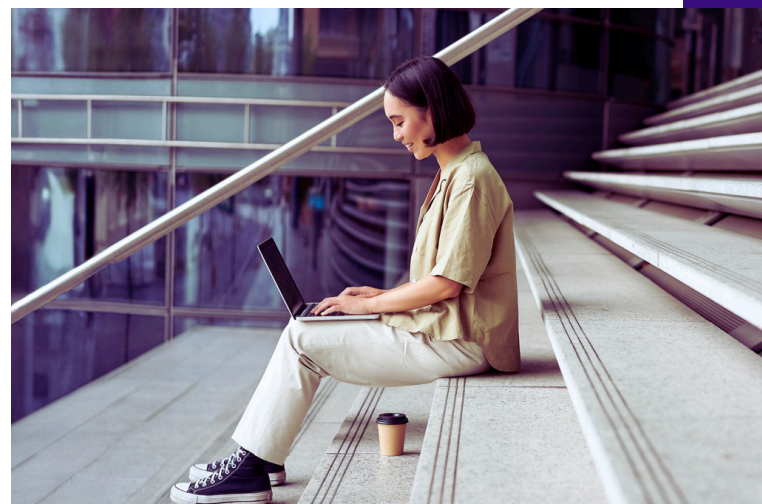
Some already have policies in place to supply students with their learning resources:

“We adopt an e-first policy and an additional costs policy which means students shouldn't have to buy any additional learning resources.”

“We use Kortext to provide essential textbooks to our students which mitigates them from having to buy their own copies in most cases.”

Others wanted to provide more resources for students, but felt constrained by external factors:

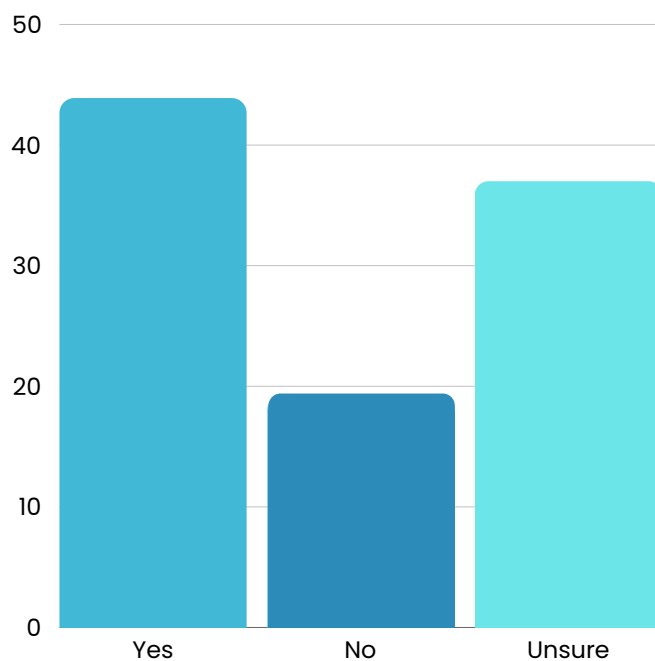
“We feel a commitment during these difficult times to provide the students with the learning materials that they need so they are not burdened with extra costs, however this can prove challenging when our own budgets are stretched and the cost of resources is rising.”



13. How are libraries supporting student well-being?

Do you see the role of your library changing with regard to student well-being in the foreseeable future?

- Yes - 43.9%
- No - 19.3%
- Unsure - 36.8%



Conclusion:

Over 40% of respondents thought their library's role regarding student well-being would change.



13. How are libraries supporting student well-being?

We asked respondents to share their thoughts on academic libraries supporting student well-being.

Most respondents felt the library had a key role to play as a student-facing service:

“It’s such a huge issue – we need to help wherever we can.”

However, others were cautious about taking on this role when specialist services already exist within universities:

“My concern is the library will be a ‘one stop shop’ which covers many things, rather than a specialist department that is staffed by library professionals.”

Some strategies that libraries were adopting to support student well-being included:

“...more well-being spaces to try to provide different environments to suit a wider range of student needs.”

“...new collections for well-being, mental health, EDI, etc.”

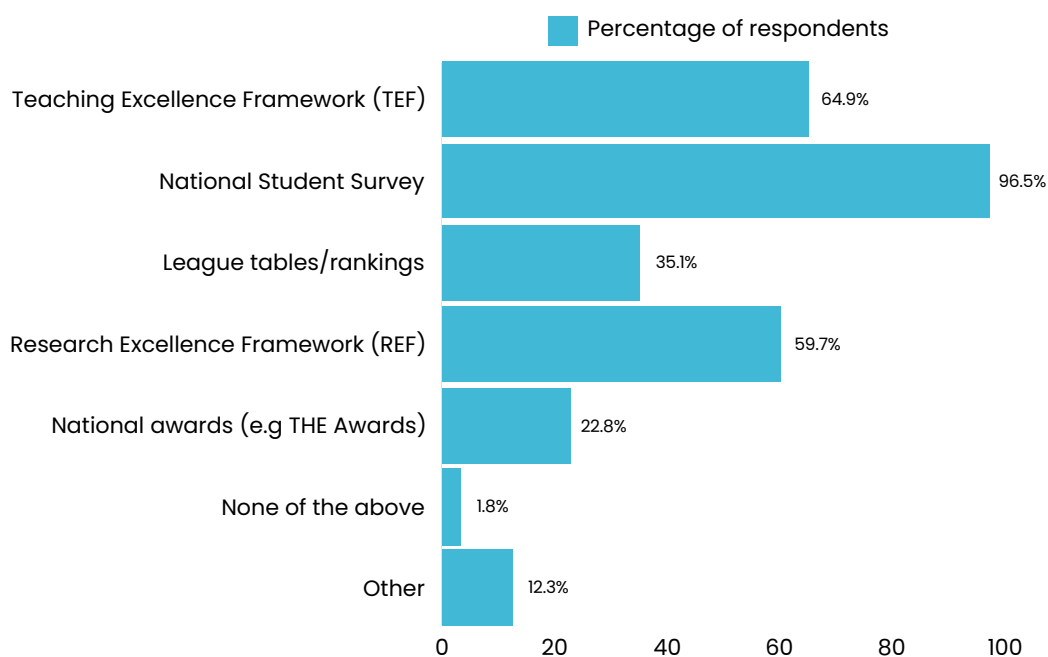
“...events to promote stress management.”

The overall view was that the library is, and should remain, a safe and inclusive space:

“I believe that the library has always been a safe space for students and I hope this can continue...”

14. How do external measures affect libraries?

With institutions increasingly being measured for experience, outcomes and impact which of the following is a regular consideration in your library role?
Select all that apply:



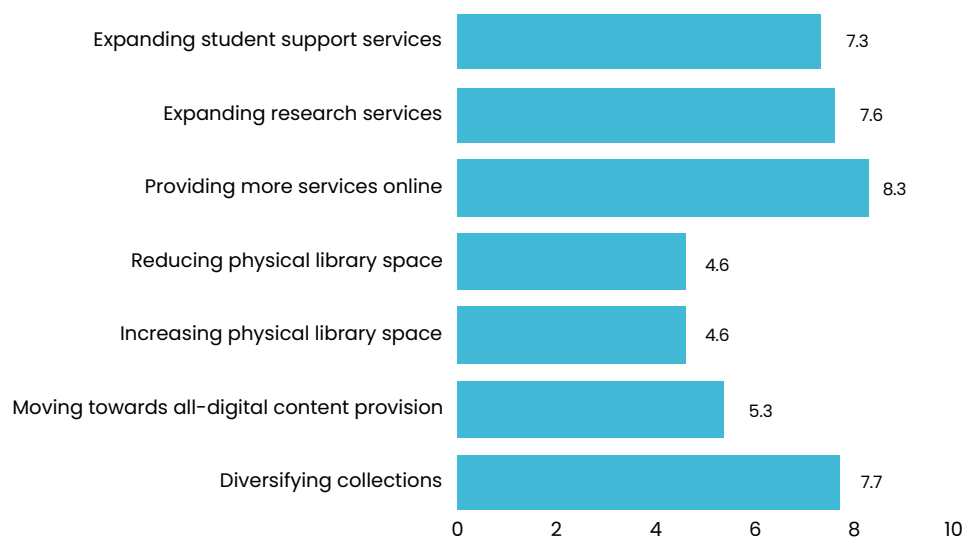
'Other' included access and participation plans, the Knowledge Excellence Framework (KEF), and customer service excellence.

In our panel discussion, Professor Janice Kay commented on the valuable role libraries play in relation to external measures like the NSS, the TEF and OfS Condition B3.

"...learners who are engaged are less likely to drop out, more likely to complete ... So what is the library's role here? It's about who's at risk of dropping out and forestalling that, but also to predict who's studying well and why."

15. 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)



All our panellists were optimistic about the future of the academic library.

“We have the need for a third space that the library represents, even in organisations like universities, it’s never going to go away, and the need for stewards of data and information is always going to be needed and probably is going to grow.”

- Amy Stubbing

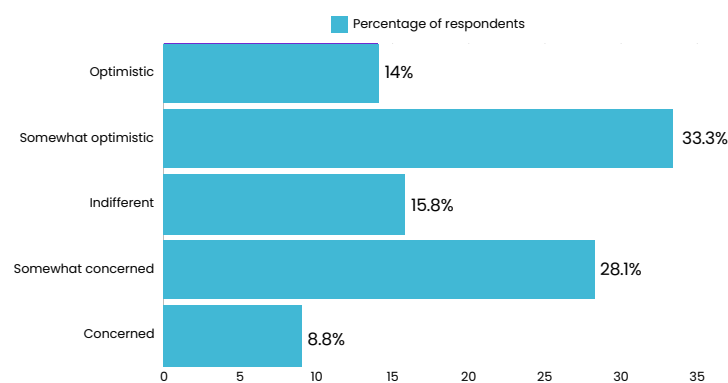
There was also agreement that libraries must be able to adapt to changing institutional needs.

“...libraries of the future are going to be agile. They're going to be responsive. They're going to be student centres and student centred.”

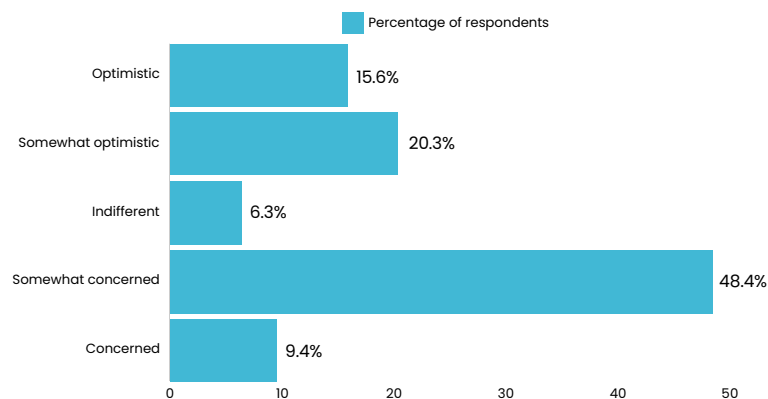
- Professor Janice Kay

16. What is the impact of generative AI?

More than a year after the public release of ChatGPT, how do you feel now about generative AI tools and their potential to: impact learning and teaching; impact the library; and improve institutional efficiencies?



We can compare this to last year's survey in which we introduced a question about the potential impact of generative AI tools, following the launch of ChatGPT in late 2022.



Based on these findings, respondents appear to be feeling more optimistic overall (47.3% in 2024; 35.9% in 2023) and less concerned overall (36.9% in 2024; 57.8% in 2023) about generative AI.

16. What is the impact of generative AI?

We asked respondents to share their thoughts on the impact of generative AI at their institution.

The majority of comments were positive, seeing benefits for learning and teaching (albeit with some caveats):

“There are many opportunities but need to educate students about the boundary between learning tools and cheating.”

“It's an emerging, adapting technology which has the potential to assist in teaching and learning but access to and use of gen AI needs to be equitable...”

Many respondents felt generative AI could improve the efficiency of library workflows and services:

“I think AI offers the opportunity to be more efficient with administrative elements of our role and develop our services to help students faster and more effectively.”

“...it is exciting to see the ways that it can be used ethically to assist us – for example, to help with tasks that are more monotonous, so we can focus more on customer service and our students' experience.”

Whilst some saw benefits for accessibility and inclusion, despite concerns about a digital divide:

“I feel there could be a positive impact – specifically for students with SpLD.”

“Still a digital divide. Will probably currently benefit the more advantaged students.”

16. What is the impact of generative AI?

However, many respondents expressed concerns about generative AI and academic integrity:

“It opens another avenue for students to bypass their own learning and just obtain a qualification.”

“Beneficial tool, but student cheating is already rife, so difficulties will emerge in determining whether genuine work has been submitted.”

Respondents’ worries about generative AI tools ‘hallucinating’ were aligned with the need to help students develop their critical thinking skills:

“Use of AI tools can provide misleading information and references to articles that don’t actually exist!”

“I am concerned that, without good critical thinking skills, AI could be misused/misinterpreted/wrongly trusted.”

Further, some respondents were concerned about copyright infringement and data protection:

“...many tools created do not meet data protection standards and content creation is of poor quality and not backed by evidence.”

There was also a feeling that generative AI tools thus far hadn’t been as revolutionary as initially anticipated:

“The initial buzz around GenAI hasn’t materialised in the competency of these tools which aren’t as world-changing as we were led to believe.”

16. What is the impact of generative AI?

For some respondents, generative AI was seen as a possible threat to library funding:

“Worryingly some senior managers think ‘everything is available via Google or AI now’ which affects the library profile and potentially future funding.”

With fears that the development of AI could lead to de-skilling and job losses in HE:

“The impact on potential loss of skills and knowledge in higher education in the future.”

“AI potentially de-skills staff and makes them reliant/dependent/complacent.”

There was also a common theme that respondents found it challenging to keep up with the fast pace of technological development:

“Think we have to embrace [these tools] to make the most of them, but also do not have the staff and/or time to really investigate and understand the potential.”

“...to honest I don't think we, or the senior university management, know what we're doing about ChatGPT, how to use it, how to change assessments...”



Conclusion

The survey results and reflections from the panel discussion suggest that academic libraries are caught between competing demands – although this is nothing new.

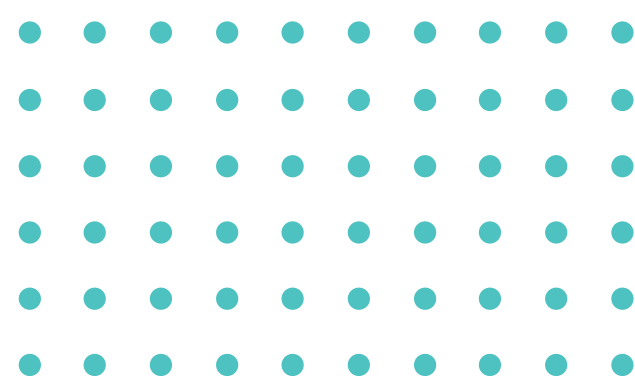
On one hand, they are facing budgetary constraints in the context of a higher education sector experiencing significant financial challenges.

These pressures are driving libraries to look for alternative ways of providing content, such as OA content and OERs. However, in reality, these are not entirely cost-free options.

On the other, the cost-of-living crisis and increasing awareness of student well-being mean that academic libraries may be required to provide more resources and services.

Despite the ongoing challenge of doing more with less, our panel were optimistic about the future outlook for academic libraries stressing their importance in supporting institutional goals around access and participation, retention, student experience and outcomes.

The road ahead won't be easy. For us, and for our panel members, the key to success lies in partnership – working together to survive the new normal.



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