

Higher Education Skills Survey Report 2018



In partnership with:



The library
and information
association

Executive Summary

This report has been put together based on research conducted through e-survey and semi structured interview to understand better the current landscape and skills requirements within Higher Education (HE) libraries and how that will change in the future. CB Resourcing, a specialist recruitment consultancy focusing on the areas of information, records and knowledge management, research and analysis, librarianship, technology and digital recruitment, has worked with the CILIP, the library and information association to develop a current understanding of skills in the sector, challenges experienced now and how that may develop or change in the future.

We have explored the importance of traditional skills and what skills gaps currently exist. We have established that the environment within HE libraries is highly affected by technology. The service that HE libraries provide is key in enabling the university to develop and grow student numbers. Today's HE librarian must have a broad range of skills in the toolkit to draw from, covering everything from general management, subject expertise and technical skills to persuasion, advocacy and influencing skills. To be effective in this environment librarians need to have an excellent customer service focus, strategic view point and an ability to be adaptable and resilient to an ever-changing environment.

Space within the library and effective management of it has a high focus and will continue to be of importance into the future as technologies develop and customer requirements change. Utilisation of artificial intelligence, data mining and text analysis technology to support and assist students with research is a developing area which will grow in importance in the near future.

Introduction

This research was conducted by CB Resourcing to better understand the current skills and requirements for working within the Higher Education Sector. CB Resourcing is a specialist recruitment consultancy focusing on the areas of information, records and knowledge management, research and analysis, librarianship, technology and digital recruitment. Working with CILIP we developed an e-survey which was sent out to Heads, Directors and Managers of Libraries. We had six specific aims in mind:

- Understand the current skills requirements and gaps in Higher Education sector library teams
- Gain an understanding of how leaders develop their own skills
- Get a picture of the need for professional accreditation and professional registration
- Get a picture of how the current environment library teams operate in covering both the physical space, services provided and technology used
- Look at future changes and anticipated challenges
- Understand where the skills gaps may lie in the future

With this information we hoped to provide a current snapshot of the sector and what the leaders working within it saw as key developments and disruptive events that would shape the future, specifically over the next five years.

Data Collection Methods

An e survey was developed using Survey Monkey to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. It was tested and refined several times using key contacts in the Higher Education sector and within CILIP. The survey was then sent out via direct email campaigns to every Library Director in the UK from our client contacts and via third parties – CILIP and SCONUL.

On completion of the initial analysis from the survey it was felt more depth research was needed in certain areas to better understand them. Semi structured telephone interviews were conducted with a number of the survey respondents who were happy to participate further.

Analysis

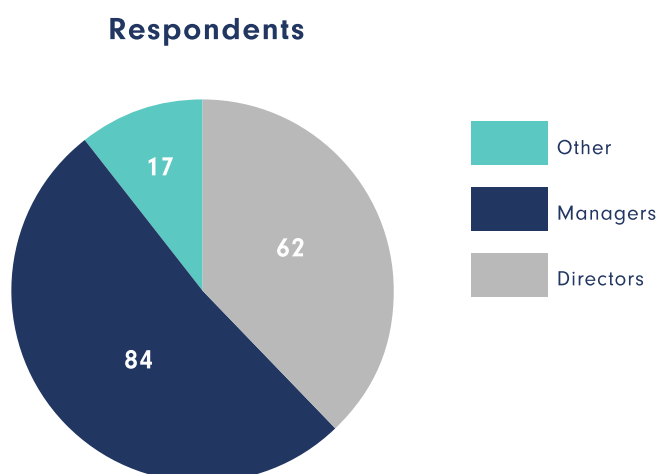
Setting the scene

We had 283 complete responses to the survey. 163 of those had leadership responsibilities or held a specific leadership post. Figure 1 below illustrates this.

Another 84 respondents were subject specialists and the remaining respondents were Library Assistants or equivalent. As the aims of the survey initially were to understand the challenges of leadership in academic library services and the environment that leaders work within we have only considered those 163 respondents holding positions with a leadership focus in this analysis.

Those with leadership responsibilities were categorised into three areas.

Figure 1



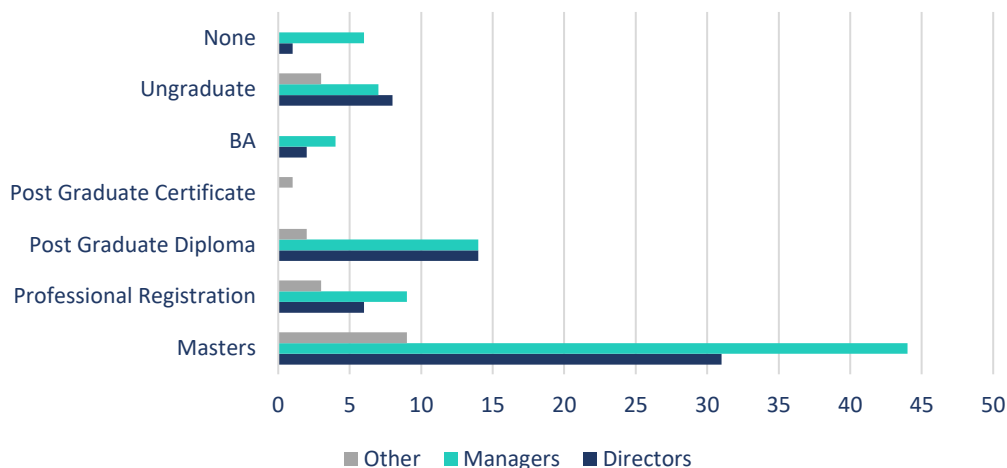
Those who categorised themselves as 'other' sometimes held two posts – subject librarian and team manager or else they were the only Librarian and did not have any team of librarians around them or held management responsibilities inside and outside of the library.

We looked next at experience and education in order to better understand the respondents in these roles. The majority of respondents, 77%, had over 16 years' experience, 15% had 11-15 years' experience and of the remaining 8% less than 1% had 1-5 years' experience. This shows us that those responding to the survey, due to the length of their service, had seen many changes in their environment from the impact of technology to changes in the political environment affecting funding. We can conclude that with this experience these people would provide considered and informative insights into the areas we were seeking information on.

When looking at education we firstly asked respondents about their information or library management qualifications, the results of which are contained in figure 2 below.

Figure 2

Qualifications in Library & Information Management



Those that did not hold a library or information management qualification held post graduate qualifications in other subjects such as historical research, classics, history, foreign languages, philosophy, technology. A significant number of respondents (71%) held both an information or library qualification and another post graduate qualification. 16% of those with a library and information management qualification also held teaching qualifications such as post graduate certificates or diplomas in education, adult learning or teaching and learning.

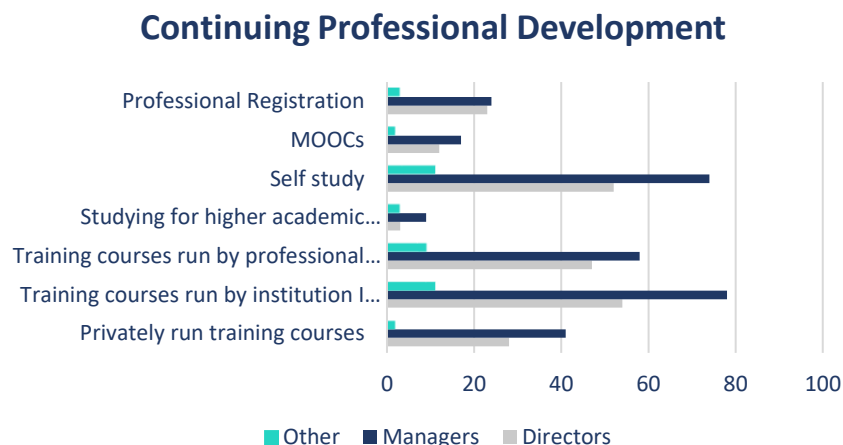
From the interviews undertaken it was clear that a popular route into a library career was to study for a library and information qualification in order to professionalise a career once the person was already working within a library. Some took a job in the library after graduating from another degree, others developed their role within the library and then went on to further study.

The most popular level of qualification for these leaders was Masters level with a total of 52% of the 163 respondents holding this level of qualification. This was followed by Post Graduate Diploma (18%) and Professional Registration (11%). It is possible that because our group of leaders have a lot of experience, their qualifications were completed a while ago and routes to qualification have changed since. So we asked our interviewees what developments they observed as new graduates joined their team. All confirmed that gaining a Masters level qualification in library and information was, by far, still the most popular route taken to establish a professional status within the library

We also asked about continuing professional development (see figure 3 below) and what was interesting here was the focus on achieving professional registration. Granted, the most popular methods were either self-study related or training courses run by the institution the respondent worked for, but a quarter of respondents were actively seeking professional registration. This is interesting as when compared to those who currently hold

up to date professional registration (just 9% of 163 respondents) it seems that there is a renewed focus on working towards and achieving professional registration.

Figure 3



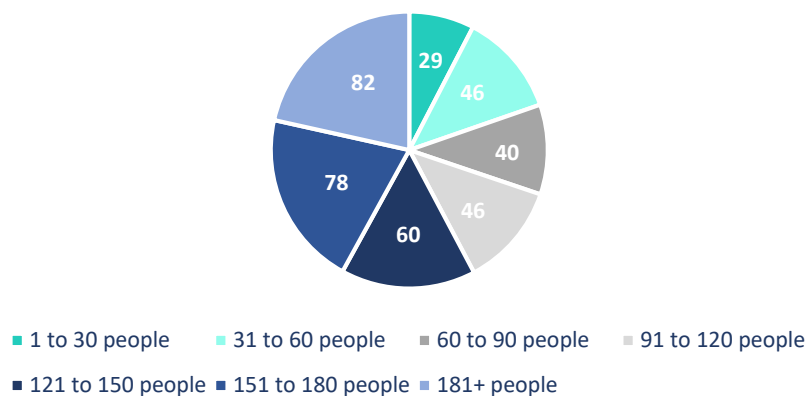
When we discussed professional registration with interviewees there was a mixed response regarding its importance within the profession. The message that clearly came through was the need to follow routes that gave the individual what they needed to develop their career and gave the best value for money. Those interviewed did confirm the apparent rise in popularity of professional registration as a new route to professionalise a person's career. Some had seen individuals choose this route over the Masters route as a more accessible way for them to achieve professional status within their roles. Whilst interviewees would not necessarily recommend that individuals do this instead of completing a Masters, there is a general recognition that there are fewer and fewer universities teaching librarianship. It has also been noted that professional registration is not as daunting as it used to be. Obtaining chartership is more accessible with the route to achieving chartership status clearer, easier to understand and requirements more relevant than they have been in the past.

We also asked in general about the importance of belonging to a professional body. The message about the need for relevancy and cost effectiveness for an individual was repeated over and over again. All those interviewed saw the value of belonging to a professional organisation as long as it was relevant to the individual's career aims and objectives.

Finally in this section, setting the scene for the rest of the report, we looked at library teams, their size, location and management. Figure 4 below shows the percentage of library teams that were spread across several sites according to the size of their teams. The larger the team the more likely the team will be based across multiple locations – 82% of those teams with more than 181 people were based across multiple sites.

Figure 4

Percentage of library teams across multiple sites



The analysis of library teams gives us a picture of the environment that the leaders and their teams are operating in. This information can help us to understand better the information gathered on skills needed now, and in the future, as we will see further on in the report.

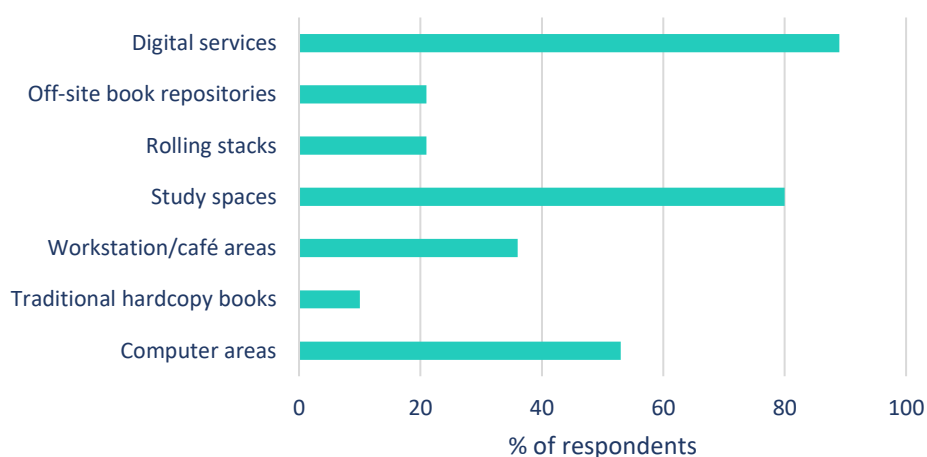
The library now

We will look in more detail at the library now, how it has grown over the last five years, how it is used by its customers, where it gets its funding from and what technology services it offers.

Firstly, we asked respondents to consider the areas where the library had grown in the last five years. Figure 5 below shows where our respondents have seen this growth.

Figure 5

Growth areas in the last 5 years



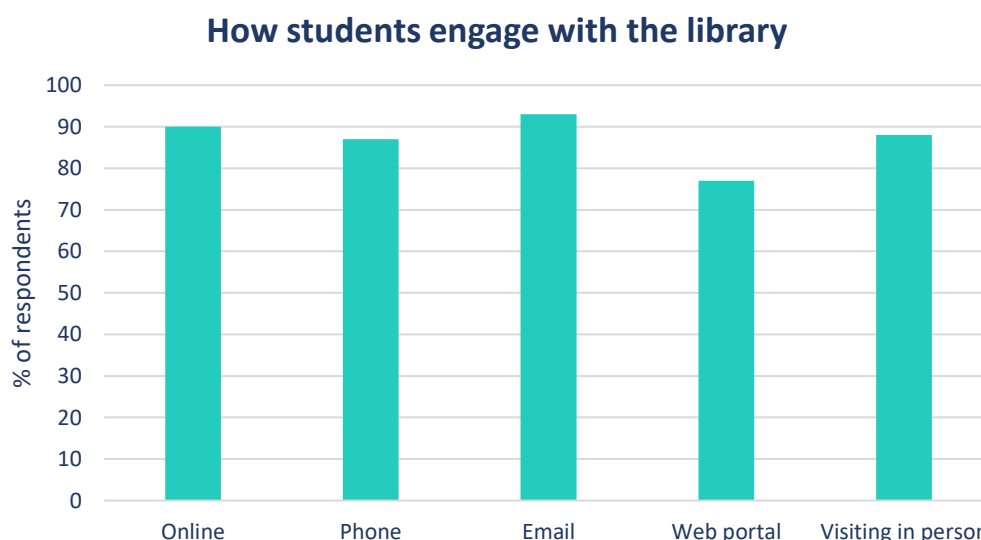
Digital services have come out top with 89% of respondents choosing it as a growth area. They are closely followed by study spaces at 80% and then by computer areas at 53%. This is a good picture of how the use of space in the library has changed. The traditional image of the library full of shelves with books and journals has transformed into open areas, dedicated spaces for specific activities like study spaces and café areas or use of technology i.e. computers, laptops etc.

Interviewees confirmed the growth in study spaces as a top change. In fact, the management of space within the library to proactively meet student requirements was considered a highly important priority with dedicated resource allocated to the research of needs, management of use and creation of strategic policies to ensure the space was used to its optimum and met closely users' (staff and students) needs. Indeed, as the competition for attracting new students between universities increases, the library's offerings and its ability to support and meet students' needs is an important selling point.

In terms of other areas of growth, some universities catering for mature students still had a range of more traditional services available (i.e. hardcopy books) as there was still a strong need from their customer base for them.

The chart below in figure 6 illustrates how the library's customers, in this case students, currently use the library.

Figure 6



What we can see here is that, from the librarian's point of view, from all of the options available to engage with the library there is no real preferred route. Physically going into the library is just as popular as using the phone and only slightly less preferred than going online or using email. What has become clear from the interview sessions is that the physical use of the library is as complex as it is popular. There is increasing demand for quiet study spaces, group work space, meeting and network space, to name a few. The ways to engage with the library directly reflect how the library is used with the facilities on offer such as study spaces, café areas, 24/7 access etc. as noted in figure 6 above.

Facilities on offer and how they are used are part of the environment that impacts on the skills needed within the library. Where the library gets its funding from and where its budget sits also can have an impact on skills needed. Negotiation, influencing and advocacy skills may need to be stronger if the budget is part of a much larger budget managed by a different area, for example. Figure 7 below gives us an overview of where our respondents' budgets were located.

Figure 7

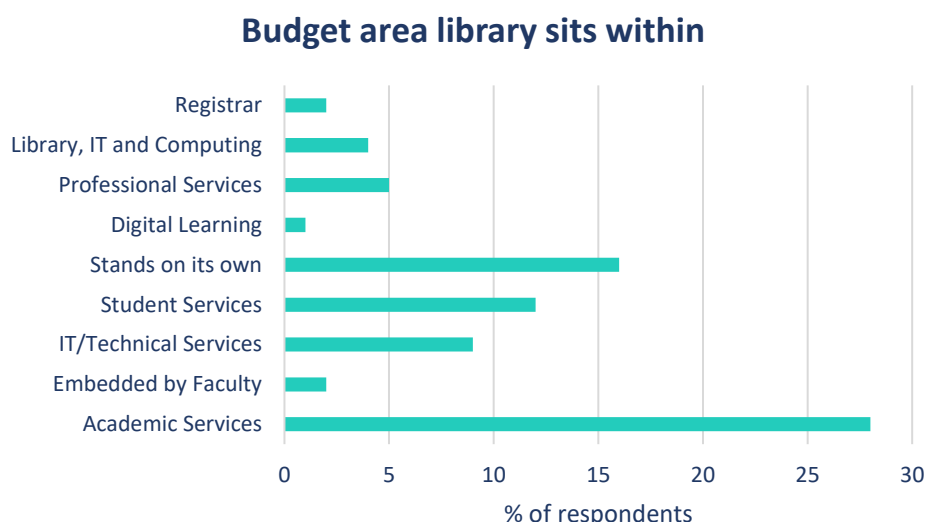
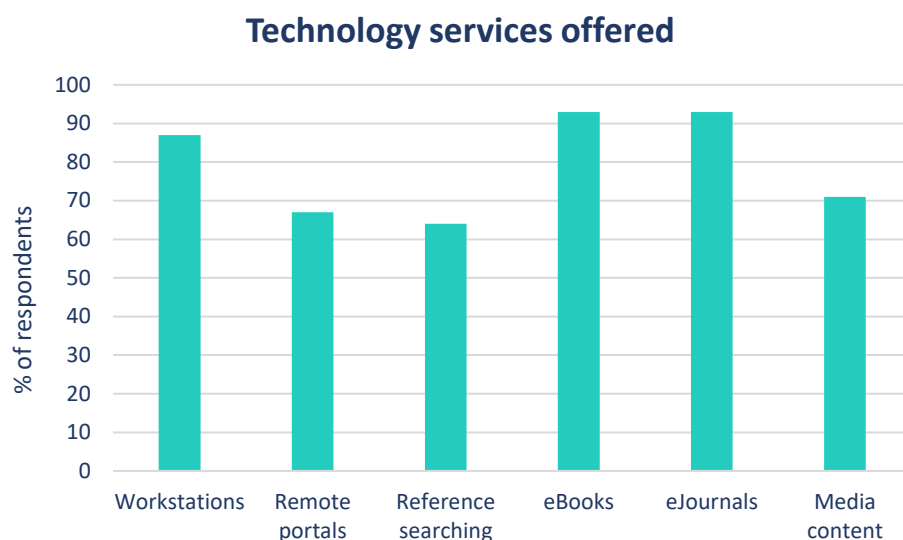


Figure 7 paints an interesting picture. Budget locations appear to be quite fragmented from institution to institution though a good portion of them, 28%, are held under academic services. This would seem to imply that competing for budgets and funding is quite complex particularly when the library more often than not is a part of a much larger area. Only 16% of our respondents had the budget for the library standing on its own. From the interviews, competition for budget and the complexity of gaining budget differs from institution to institution, reflective of the picture painted in figure 7. What did come through from the interviews was the importance of being able to put together a strong, relevant and to the point business case to gain new budget. Good general business skills with a clear understanding of how to match requests for budget to university goals clearly and effectively was considered extremely important. In some institutions persuasion and influencing skills were more needed than in others.

With the impact technology is having around the world on people's lives we felt we needed to look at technology services within the library and what was offered for students to use. Figure 8 illustrates the main responses and figure 9 analyses in more depth the various additional services respondents mentioned under the title 'other'.

Figure 8



eBooks and eJournals come in top at 93% of respondents' libraries offering these services, closely followed by workstations and then media content. All choices are generally quite high; there is nothing below 60%. Clearly technology services offered by the library are extensively used. What would be interesting to investigate in further study would be student preferences and whether there are other services not yet offered that would be useful to that group.

We asked our respondents to identify other technology services that they provided which were not listed in the main section. Figure 9 below provides further information here.

Figure 9

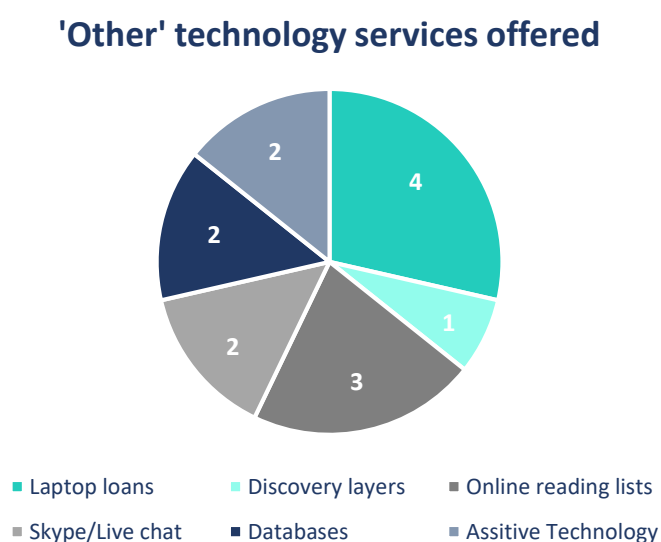


Figure 9 gives the percentage of respondents who identified the technology services above under 'other'. These six were the top ones noted. Other services mentioned, but in no significant quantity included:

- LibGuides
- Digital Preservation
- Virtual Learning Environments
- Digitisation
- Publications and Research Data Repositories

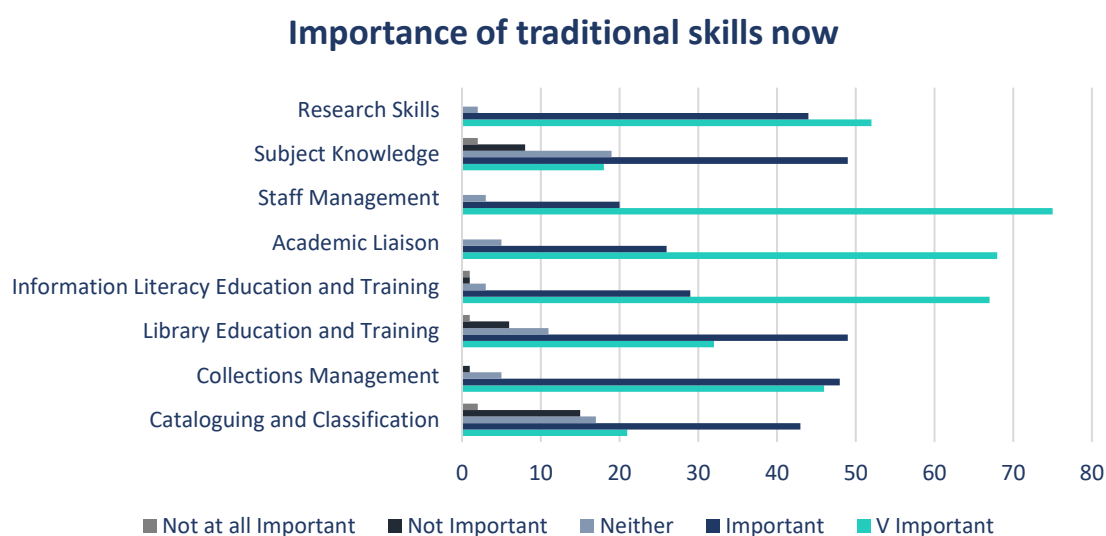
From the interviews, providing technological support for students and staff to facilitate research was becoming an important strategic area. Supporting activities through text recognition software, text and data mining and applied computing statistics to replace traditional textual analysis were examples given. Librarians who have a good understanding of the technologies and are able to act as a 'broker service' for students and staff are increasingly needed.

This further confirms the supposition above that technology services are an important part of the library's service offering. We will see in more depth, further on in the report, the impact this has on skills needed in the library and skills requirements for the future.

How has the library developed and changed?

In looking at how the library has developed and changed over the last five years we hoped to get a picture of the changing environment and its immediate impact on skills and skill requirements. We firstly considered the importance of traditional skills in the current environment. Figure 10 gives an illustration of how important our respondents found these skills.

Figure 10



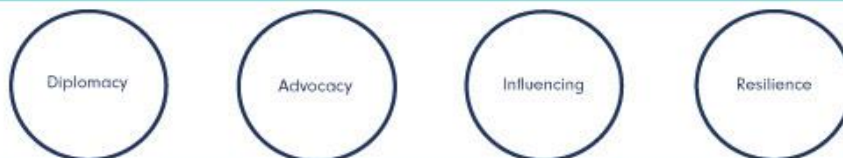
What clearly stands out is that people management, academic liaison and information literacy education and training have come out as the most important skills with 75%, 68% and 67% of our respondents respectively listing them as very important. All of the other skills listed appear to have an important place in today's Higher Education library although cataloguing and classification seem to have had a mixed bag of responses.

Exploring these traditional skills further in the interviews, traditional skills have their place within the library however technology is changing how they are used. This is particularly the case with cataloguing and classification, with a lot of the work being automated or outsourced. Even though this is the case, there is still a need for an understanding of the process and so the skill is still considered important. Information literacy and digital literacy are more and more important, as are research skills, as the library seeks to support its customers as completely as possible in order to assist the university in increasing student numbers. Subject knowledge varies in its importance from university to university. Requirements for traditional skills now are more service led, so a good understanding of the process or method is important and anything that can be used to support customer needs, such as knowledge/utilisation of research methodologies or subject knowledge, is important.

Working within the academic environment, interviewees noted a need to work with peers in other departments in environments that are often complex and political. Achieving what is needed for the library is about promoting its services and illustrating its value to the university and its goals. The four skills noted above provide a strong matrix of resources from which to draw on to achieve progression in this situation. Resilience is of value in most customer focussed roles. It was noted that it is important to be able to deal with difficult situations and unhappy customers that can develop when the library space is being used in so many different ways at the same time.

General business skills were also seen as important: the ability to think and plan strategically, look at the whole picture and prepare for future changes and developments. Sound financial management and budgeting skills, good promotional skills in terms of marketing the service and good people management skills were also seen as highly important general business skills. This ties in with what we saw earlier on in the report – the complexity of winning budgets, management of budgets and proving the value of the library in line with university business goals being important skills to have. It is also reflective of the way universities have changed the way they function over the last 10 or so years to operate more like businesses.

In looking at new skills, soft skills are increasingly required. Those that were noted time and again from our respondents included:



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Other skills identified as important now and in the future were:

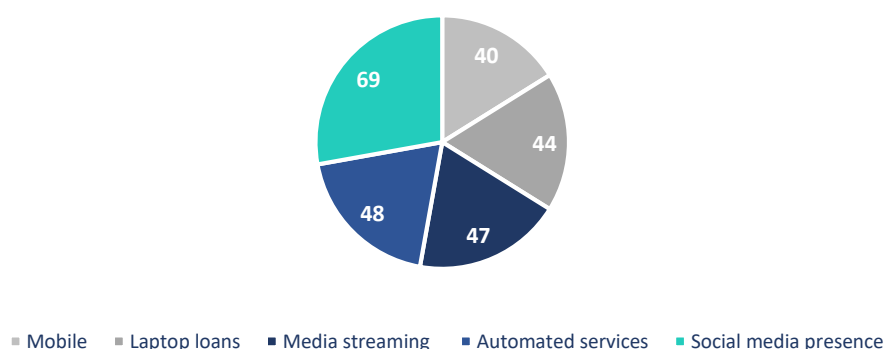
- Project Management
- Research support
- Repository Management
- Digital skills/literacy
- Teaching
- Data analysis
- Working with AI (artificial intelligence)
- Developing metadata standards
- Coding skills
- Experience of working with IT systems

Teaching has been seen earlier on in the report as an important skill with 15% of our leaders who already hold a library or information qualification taking it as a second qualification. Interviewees also identified the importance of teaching skills to facilitate information and digital literacy training. Technology related skills feature strongly here - from the general ability to work with digital information and systems, to more specialised areas such as coding and working with AI. We have seen earlier on in the report from the interviews that technology, a broad understanding of it and an ability to either broker it or use it to support customers completing their higher education qualifications, is highly important.

Continuing with the theme of technology we also asked about what technology services were now common place that were not around 5 years ago. We found that whilst we had a good response to the question, a significant number of people commented that most of the technology had been in place 5 years ago and some even longer. What they had seen was an increase in usage in the last 5 years. With this in mind, we need to view these results in figure 11 more as an increase in usage measurement rather than new technology that has appeared. Other technology that has developed significantly in the last 5 years included online chat, iPad loans and BYOD (bring your own device) support.

Figure 11

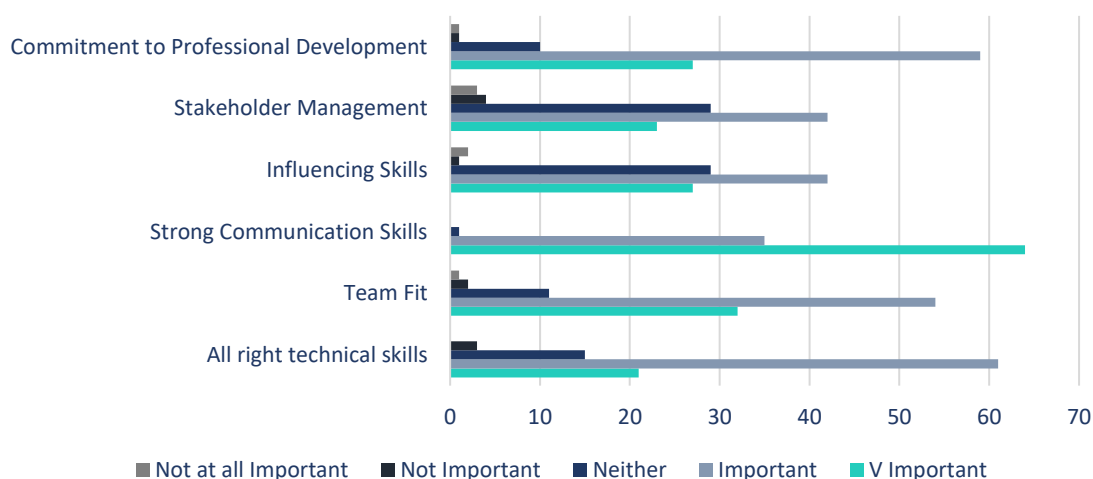
Technology use that was not there 5 years ago



We next moved on to look at the key drivers for hiring new staff and important skills/attributes targeted. Figure 12 below illustrates how important certain attributes were in the hiring process.

Figure 12

Important attributes in hiring



Strong communication skills came out top with over 95% of respondents listing it as very important or important. Team fit, commitment to professional development and having all the right technical skills listed on the job description for a particular role came out as important also. Although soft skills have come out as important from other questions here, stakeholder management and influencing skills in particular have received a bit of a mixed bag of responses with less of a definitive focus when compared to other attributes. 29% of all respondents in both cases saw the skills as neither important nor unimportant. 69% of respondents saw influencing skills as important or very important and 65% of respondents saw stakeholder management as important or very important.

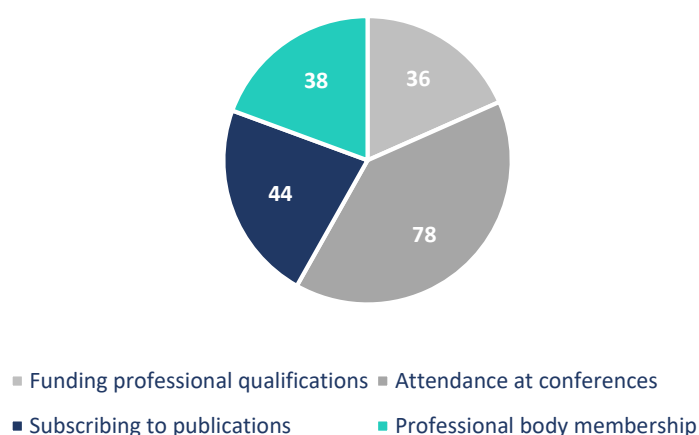
When we explored this further in the interviews conducted, the mixture of response on soft skills was more down to what was appropriate from the perspective of the person answering the questions. Whilst everyone recognised the importance of having soft skills in today's library environment, those that focussed on more technical service areas of the library saw them as important for certain job functions and not for others.

Other attributes mentioned as important in considering whether to hire someone were relevant work experience even if only voluntary for a short time, the 'right attitude' and commitment to work, resilience, political awareness, listening and teaching skills.

We also asked about the support institutions gave to continuing professional development. Figure 13 below gives a picture of what institutions are doing for their library staff.

Figure 13

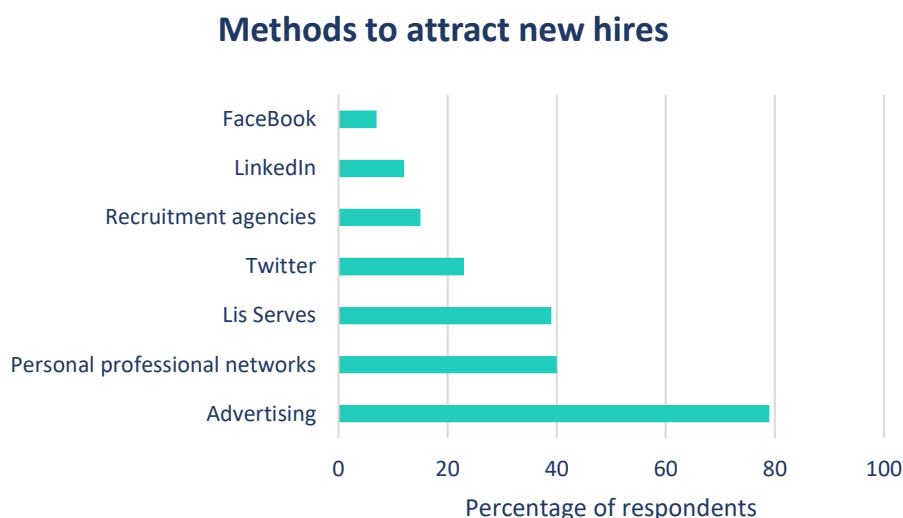
How institutions are supporting staff development



The biggest area here is funding attendance at conferences with 78% of respondents identifying this as an area where their institution helps with continuing professional development. Other areas identified were the provision of internal courses, study day allowance and secondments. From the interviews, everyone who took part was able to get funding for what they needed as long as an effective and concise business case was put together.

Figure 14 below illustrates how our respondents go about finding people with the right skills. What is clear is that direct advertising methods are the most popular with 79% of our respondents identifying this as a method they use. Some noted specifically web advertising either through the institution's website or via job sites such as jobs.ac.uk or indeed.co.uk

Figure 14

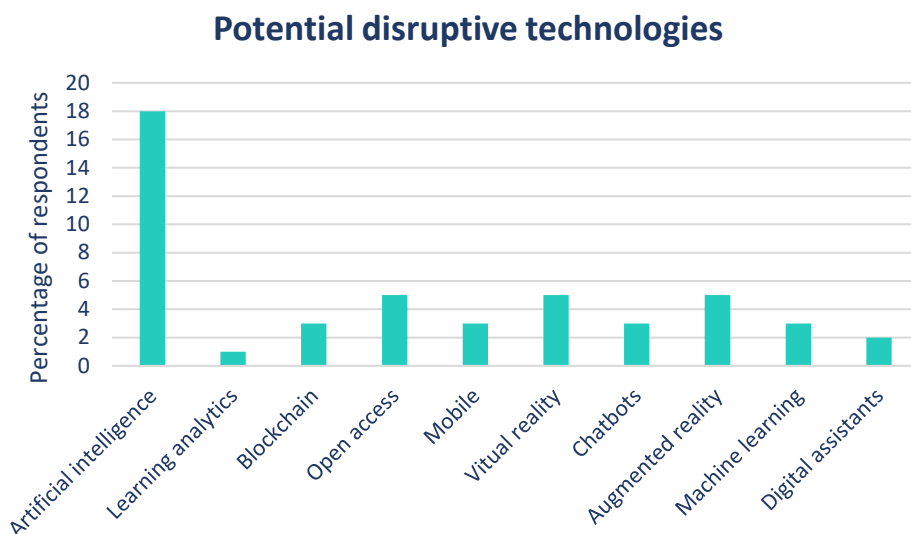


Professional networks and Lis Serves are the next most popular, suggesting professional networks have a great deal of importance in the hiring process. When seeking further clarification on this from the interviews, whilst there was a recognition of their usefulness, clear HR procedures were carefully followed when going through the hiring process.

The future for HE libraries

With technology developing ever faster and having an impact on working practices, we thought it important to look at what technologies would bring about substantial change for libraries in the future. We asked what technologies were going to have this disruptive impact in the near future. Figure 15 below gives an overview of the technologies mentioned and whether our respondents felt their impact would bring about significant change.

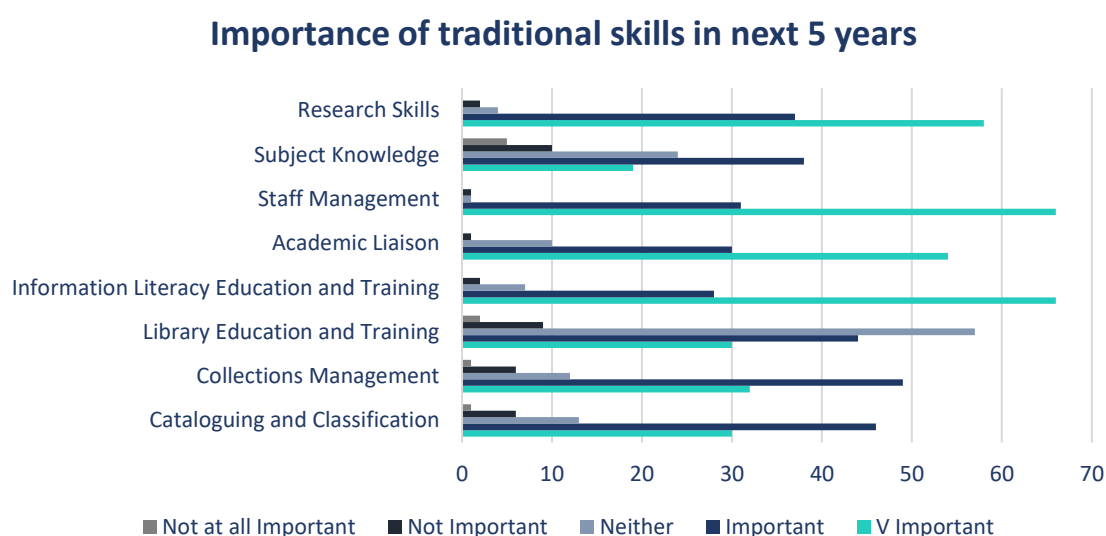
Figure 15



Whilst we did not have a lot of people wanting to commit to predicting the future in answering this question, we did get an interesting list of technologies from those that did. In addition to those in the chart above, also mentioned was digital preservation, open research technology, computer gaming, algorithmic discovery, general data protection regulation, different supplier models and voice search. Artificial intelligence (AI) stands out as far and above the tech in everyone's minds that is going to have a significant impact in the near future. It's a technology that can be applied to any area with a multitude of uses. A number of the other technologies mentioned also come under, or have links, with AI technology, for example machine learning and digital assistants.

Considering the continuous change in the environment and in particular the swift changes due to technological developments, we asked – "Will traditional skills change in importance in the next 5 years?" Figure 16 below illustrates the responses from our respondents.

Figure 16



Coming out top is staff management with 97% of our respondents finding it very important or important. This is closely followed by research skills (95%), information literacy education and training (94%) and academic liaison (84%). Library education and training will drop in importance with 57% of our respondents finding it neither important nor unimportant compared with 11% who found it neither important nor unimportant now. From the interviews this was put down to the fact that if these skills are needed, they can be taught. Conversely, cataloguing and classification will increase in importance in the view of our respondents with 76% now finding it very important or important in the future compared with 64% who consider it very important or important now. Respondents voiced concerns that there will potentially become a skills gap in the future. As mentioned earlier on in the report, although a number of traditional skills have been affected by the onward march of technology, there is still a need to maintain an understanding of the process and principles behind them.

We asked our respondents to tell us what skills gaps they thought would appear in the future. Digital, data manipulation and analysis skills continue to be of concern going forward. The ability to be able to make use of, manipulate and support new technologies that are coming out, in particular AI through data mining and management, data literacy, coding and analytical skills. The effects technology will have on traditional services and skills will also create skills gaps for example – digital archiving, skilled cataloguers in the digital environment, metadata coding and management. General management skills such as budget management will also potentially be in short supply.

Looking forward we asked what factors would boost employability now and in the future. The most important factor noted was further training with 65% of our respondents identifying this as important. Changes to library courses to keep pace with changing needs and technological developments were also considered as important with 52% of respondents identifying them as important factors. Also, of note was being able to embed yourself within a department with 44% identifying it as an important factor. Also mentioned were teaching qualifications, management and leadership skills, active professional development, adaptability and flexibility, good collaboration skills and being open to change.

Conclusion

To re-cap, our aims from conducting this research were to:

- Understand the current skills requirements and gaps in Higher Education sector library teams
- Gain an understanding of how leaders develop their own skills
- Get a picture of the need for professional accreditation and professional registration
- Get a picture of how the current environment library teams operate in covering both the physical space, services provided and technology used
- Look at future changes and anticipated challenges
- Understand where the skills gaps may lie in the future

We have used both e-survey and semi structured interviews to research the area, find information on and gain understanding around these aims. What we have found is that today's HE librarian needs to be multi skilled with a broad range of soft, business management and technical skills in their toolkit to draw on when needed.

Technology continues to develop at a fast pace and it is important to both the existence of the library and the university that they are able to offer the most suitable range of services to encompass all their user needs now and in the future. Artificial intelligence is a big focus and the ability to understand it and use it to support learning and research programmes is becoming more and more important.

Keeping skills up to date with this ever-changing environment and showing a commitment to doing so is key in developing and progressing a career in HE librarianship. Whilst there is funding available from institutions to support this, individuals need to be able to argue and write relevant business cases to gain approval. Professional body membership and professional accreditation facilitate the process of keeping skills up to date whilst keeping individuals informed of what is happening outside of their institution with their peers in HE and other sectors.

The library space and its use continue to develop and change with shifting customer requirements. Keeping pace with change and staying ahead of the curve by looking ahead at where needs may be in the future, is essential in order to support the university growing its student numbers.

Digital related skills and general business management skills will be a continuing focus. Traditional skills will remain important but need to be seen and developed within the context of the digital environment. A strong customer focus with excellent customer service skills will always be of value.



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