

Review of Senate House Library – report received

Final decision delayed to allow time for options to be developed in more detail

On 12 December 2008, the Collegiate Council, which comprises the Heads of the 19 Colleges of the University of London and the Dean of the School of Advanced Study (SAS), received the Final Report of the Review of Senate House Library (SHL), undertaken by CHEMS Consulting.

The Review, following extensive consultation with the Colleges and other stakeholders, provides three options for the future for further consideration. Recognising the interdependence between SHL and the SAS libraries (which together comprise the University of London Research Library Services, ULRSL), these relate to them all. The options are:

- **Option 1** – Refocus the current provision of ULRSL.
 - *1a* – Introduce efficiency changes and best practices, based on the existing convergence agenda, to produce a substantial reduction in the financial deficit without a significant drop in the level of service. With no increase in college contributions, there will continue to be a deficit.
 - *1b* – Achieve a balanced budget through significant changes to configuration and greater loss in service provision.
- **Option 2** – Develop ULRSL as an expanded network of arts and humanities libraries, working in collaboration with other research libraries. This proposal is being developed by SAS.
- **Option 3** – Merge the operations of ULRSL with UCL's own library, to create a new service run by UCL, with guarantees provided over access and services. This proposal is being developed by UCL.

None of these options involves breaking up or selling off any significant part of the collections. The review noted, however, that such measures might become unavoidable if no agreement is reached on any one of them.

At its meeting the Collegiate Council decided to delay making a final recommendation to give sufficient time for the latter two options to be developed in more detail. In the meantime, the Collegiate Council agreed to the immediate implementation of the efficiency savings identified for option 1a, insofar as they are compatible with the other two options, as a necessary prerequisite for the success of either of them.

SAS and UCL have been given a deadline of 12 March 2009 to complete their respective proposals. All the options will be resubmitted to a special meeting of the Collegiate Council to be held in April 2009. Finally, the Collegiate Council's recommendations will be considered by the University's Board of Trustees at its meeting on 13 May 2009.

Background

Senate House Library (SHL), founded in the 1870s, occupies purpose-built space in Senate House. The SHL collections contain over 2 million items, including ca.260,000 books and manuscripts in 60 discrete Special Collections. The seven Institute libraries of SAS provide a further million items to enrich the research resources at the centre of the University.

SHL is funded primarily by the 19 Colleges of the University of London, which are the owners and the chief beneficiaries of its services, with free access to all members of the University. The Institute libraries are supported through Higher Education Funding Council

for England (HEFCE) special funding. The collections complement, rather than compete with, College collections by providing a wider, more research-focused range of material.

Since 2003, following a decision of the University Council, SHL and the SAS libraries have been engaged in a convergence programme to form the University of London Research Library Services. The CHEMS review endorses this process and recommends its continuance. ULRLS is one of the main central, shared services of the Federal University.

The financial difficulties facing ULRLS are not new, but were brought to a head by the withdrawal of HEFCE special funding from SHL as a result of a [HEFCE review](#) carried out by Sir Ivor Crewe. The SHL budget for 2008–09 shows a deficit of £1.4m and, when the five Senate House-located SAS libraries are added, this becomes £1.8m.

The Review

The Crewe Report also recommended that a fundamental review should be undertaken of the future role of SHL. In March 2008 CHEMS Consulting was appointed to carry out the work, with [terms of reference](#) set by the Heads of Colleges Committee.

The review involved consulting widely with Colleges and other interested parties in order to find out what they valued about SHL and how they thought it could be improved. CHEMS Consulting received submissions from six specialist interest groups and were also sent over 1,600 responses to a petition urging Colleges to save SHL.

Four criteria were noted as important for assessing options for the future of ULRLS: (1) any future position must be financially sustainable; (2) access should be maintained as optimally as possible, in line with users' needs; (3) coherent shared collection development policies between libraries should be encouraged; and (4) it must be managerially achievable in a reasonable time without major disruption to users.

Next steps

While work continues on options 2 and 3 for the April Collegiate Council meeting, the implementation of the efficiency savings identified for option 1a will begin immediately. The Council has appointed a small group, chaired by the Vice-Chancellor and including two Heads of Colleges, the Dean of SAS and the Director of ULRLS, to oversee this.

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