Preservation Advisory Centre

RLUK Research Libraries UK

In safe hands? The challenges for RLUK to make preservation a collaborative work

The below represents a consideration of where we have come from, where we are, and where we might go after three years of the successful joint training programme between RLUK and the British Library Preservation Advisory Centre. The document itself, along with this final workshop, and all the outputs of the joint programme will be evaluated by RLUK in the context of its current Strategic Plan.

This text is also intended to provide the jumping off point for discussions at this workshop. Your reflection on and response to it will help RLUK consider where and how to take preservation activity forward.

Introduction

All of us are aware of the many and conflicting pressures currently placed on major research libraries. Both within the UK and more widely, there is the need, no less pertinent because of its perennial nature, to offer a unique approach to supporting research and teaching and yet to share the burdens. This has come to be known as 'collaborating to compete'. It is not a cynical phrase: instead, it puts under scrutiny how and where research institutions need to change and develop, individually and together, and in what direction, to continue to excel in their provision of resources to researchers and students.

In this, there are major strategic issues to be addressed, many of which are only too familiar to previous generations of librarians, such as funding constraints, lack of space and reduced levels of staffing. Equally the growth in published output year on year renders these limitations even more acute and clearly removes any hope of any individual research library achieving a collection which could be considered even remotely comprehensive.

Another key driver gaining strength in the past decade has been the shift from print to digital for many types of resource. As our users become accustomed to the instant availability which this has the potential to offer, there is an increased expectation that older resources too will be made accessible in this format: the choices and challenges around digitisation have to be addressed, including issues such as financial resource for in-house digitisation, the availability and appropriateness of externally digitised copies e.g. through Google Books or commercial suppliers, what we now mean when we speak of our 'library collections' and the broader relationship with the print materials.

Nonetheless, it is generally accepted that, even where a book has been digitised, it is important to retain a limited number of copies within the national library framework as a resource for scholars in the future who may require access to the physical material for a number of reasons. This principle can be seen very clearly worked out within the framework of the UKRR. Similar arguments usually apply to archival materials, though the fact that these are by definition unique can lead to a different assessment of the options and benefits.

Preservation as policy

Related to this, but seemingly far less prominent within the strategic thinking of UK research libraries at present, is the question of long-term preservation. As research libraries grapple with a complex and fast-changing environment and attempt to redefine their strategic priorities in order to address the evolving needs of their user community, it is perhaps an appropriate moment to once again take a long-term perspective of resource provision – particularly as regards paper-based materials – and factor this into those strategic decisions. How do we ensure sustainable and continuing access to physical materials in the digital age? What are the risks, for example, from acid paper? And do we need to reconsider our approach to collaboration among UK research libraries if we are to satisfactorily address these issues and meet the needs of the research community in the long-term?

These issues have been at the foundation of the work that RLUK has been undertaking with the British Library Preservation Advisory Centre, in a programme of training, workshops and strategic events designed to provide skills and, more importantly, new thinking around the role and context of preservation and its practitioners. The days of piecemeal assessment of individual items from a collection as the rationale for conservators' relatively isolated activity may well be numbered, and rightly so, as such an approach sits somewhat at a remove from the direct needs of users and from the overarching strategic plans of the institution. Collection managers, for their part, have not succeeded in creating a dynamic sense of co-curation with those most able to provide expert advice on how to ensure collections as a whole are kept in optimal shape for access by researchers in years to come.

This divorce between the two communities continues, despite a number of nationally-funded initiatives over the past decade and a half. There follows a survey, brief but touching on the essentials, of the issues and actions which, taken together, provide a launchpad towards the goals we would be advised to have. And for RLUK, as an interdependent community of practitioners, policy makers and research-based institutions, a breakthrough at the policy level would represent most decisively a clear piloting for the future.

Collaborative Collection Management (CCM): the infinite shelf?

At various times, CCM has been suggested as the long-term solution. In the early days of the British Library Preservation Advisory Centre (formerly National Preservation Office), acid paper (and preservation more generally) was seen as a key driver for coordination and collaboration in collection management.[1] However, in practice, various other factors have proved more potent drivers, including lack of space and lack of money, which seem to remain constant throughout. Even so, starting with the Follett report[2] in 1993, we can also see a series of national initiatives which, focussing on researchers' needs, identified the interdependence of the UK's research libraries in meeting those needs. Both resource discovery and physical access to those actual resources were seen as equal priorities, and extra funding followed, largely as a result of the Anderson report (1996).[3]   The Research Support Libraries Programme (RSLP) was also set up, and proved remarkably influential in pushing forward an agenda of cooperation between research libraries and changing the nature of the discourse. After all, since it envisioned a National Union Catalogue for the UK and access to those

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[1] **Ratcliffe, F.W.** *Preservation policies and conservation in British libraries.* British Library (1984) p. 61

[2] **Follet, B** *Joint funding councils' libraries review project group: report (the Follet report)* HEFCE (1993) http://www.ukoln.ac.uk/services/papers/follett/report/

[3] **Anderson, M** *Joint funding council's library review report of the group on a national/regional strategy for library provision for researchers (The Anderson report)* HEFCE (1996) http://www.ukoln.ac.uk/services/elib/papers/other/anderson/

information resources wherever they are held, then it was a logical next step to articulate the idea of a 'distributed national collection of research resources'.

In 2002, RSLP received a report on *Barriers to resource sharing among higher education libraries.*[4] This report set out very clearly the historical context outlined in the previous paragraph, surveyed the principal areas of collaboration for each area of library activity, and proposed a framework for analysing the different degrees of collaboration in which libraries typically engaged. At the highest level was 'deep resource sharing': the report found few examples of this but did consider that

> growth in genuinely collaborative collection management would probably be the best indicator of deep ('level 3') resource sharing. If the implementation of a properly coordinated and managed distributed national collection strategy (DNC) is ever to be achieved, it is also likely to be the *most* important.

The report was also very realistic about the obstacles to achieving this (the 'barriers' of the report's title), describing it as a 'significant cultural change within higher education'; nonetheless this was recommended as the preferred way forward.

Since then, there have been a number of initiatives, projects and reports in the area of CCM, many with active engagement and facilitation from RLUK. CoFoR kicked off in 2002[5] and successfully concluded a CCM agreement within the field of Russian and East European Studies in 2004, whereby each participant specified very precise subject areas that were of particular interest and procedures were set in place for potential transfer of unwanted materials. This fed directly into a number of other projects including COCOCREES, CoCoCMaN and the CCM Programme. This last, funded by the RIN and RLUK, had an advocacy brief, supporting the idea of the UK Distributed Research Collection, and acting as a hub for CCM activities generally.

In 2005, CHEMS Consulting was commissioned to produce a report on *Optimising storage and access in UK research libraries: a study for CURL and the British Library,* (the Fielden report)[6] which presented yet again the arguments in favour of CCM and came out very strongly in favour of creating a 'national repository where last copies of research materials will be preserved in perpetuity and made easily accessible for all UK researchers should they need them.' It also evaluated five different models for achieving this and recommended one which placed the British Library at the heart of a 'National Research Reserve'. It also noted how Scotland was exploring the concept of a collaborative academic store for Scotland (CASS) which would improve access to research materials for Scottish researchers by ensuring retention of unique materials which might otherwise be discarded.

The Fielden report had recognised that immediate space savings could most easily be achieved by concentrating on periodical holdings (indeed it admitted that its analysis of the five models was 'primarily based on periodical storage'), and the availability of many titles in electronic format has further encouraged libraries to consider disposing of their print holdings. And so, starting in 2007, the UK Research Reserve (UKRR)[7] began work on creating a 'distributed national research collection' of periodicals. UKRR provides a coordinating mechanism which ensures that at least three sets of each periodical title considered for disposal by individual libraries are retained within the UK, thereby allowing other libraries to dispose of their print holdings. UKRR also recognises that mechanisms need to be in place for the scheme to continue running after the initial funding has ceased, and is working with SUNCAT to ensure that holdings information is accurate and publicly available.

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[4] **Higher Education Consultancy Group and CHEMS Consulting** *Barriers to resource sharing among higher education libraries* RSLP (2002) http://www.rslp.ac.uk/circs/2002/barriers.htm

[5] http://www.rluk.ac.uk/node/79

[6] **CHEMS Consulting** *Optimising storage and access in UK research libraries: a study for CURL and the British Library* CURL (2005) http://www.rluk.ac.uk/files/CURL_BLStorageReportFinal-endSept2005.pdf

[7] http://www.ukrr.ac.uk/

As successful as UKRR has been, less certain, perhaps, is the commitment of the individual member libraries to undertake active preservation activities on those volumes which they hold for the national research community in the long-term. This open question, as well as the likely prospect that there will be no short- or medium-term top-down funding for transposing a UKRR-like methodology to dealing with monographs, means that any further progress in this area – i.e. preservation activity in a distinct collection management context – will have to be of a grassroots nature. This will be of particular importance when it comes to institutions deciding on what constitutes a sound business model, as explored below.[8]

The fact that digitisation increases the prospect for the growing importance of print materials, rather than their decline, was most recently underlined in an OCLC report *Cloud-sourcing research collections: managing print in the mass-digitized library environment.*[9] This explores the hypothesis that

> the emergence of a mass-digitized book corpus has the potential to transform the academic library enterprise, enabling an optimization of legacy print collections that will substantially increase the efficiency of library operations and facilitate a redirection of library resources in support of a renovated library service portfolio.

The study focussed on a statistical analysis of the digitised material held by the HathiTrust Digital Library and the shared print holdings of the ReCAP project (Columbia, Princeton and NYPL's shared storage programme). Malpas concluded that

> there is sufficient material in the mass-digitized library collection managed by the HathiTrust to duplicate a sizeable (and growing) portion of virtually any academic library in the United States, and there is adequate duplication between the shared digital repository and large-scale print storage facilities to enable a great number of academic libraries to reconsider their local print management operations.

Reduced space requirements and reduced ongoing costs while retaining access to both digital surrogate and physical original is the prize offered, though the report is under no illusions regarding the changes required, both within individual libraries and in the broader (inter)national infrastructure to achieve this goal. This challenge is summed up very nicely in the executive summary:

> It is our strong conviction, based on the above findings, that academic libraries in the United States (and elsewhere) should mobilize the resources and leadership necessary to implement a bridge strategy *that will maximize the return on years of investment in library print collections* while acknowledging the rapid shift toward online provisioning and consumption of information. *(our emphasis)*

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[8] Although this summary has focussed on CCM activity in the UK, it is important to note that there are some very successful examples of CCM and/or joint storage facilities in other countries.

An OCLC report, *Library storage facilities and the future of print collections in North America* (Payne 2007 http://www.oclc.org/url/?404;http://www.oclc.org/programs/publications/reports/2007-01.pdf) identified approximately 70 high-density storage facilities in North America, of which 11 are shared facilities, and many of these operate on a CCM basis (deduplication and shared ownership). Another OCLC report: *Shared print policy review report* (Malpas 2009 www.oclc.org/research/publications/library/2009/2009-03.pdf) reviewed the policies/structures of 18 'shared print agreements', of which 15 were in North America. In Victoria, Australia, CARM (operated by CAVAL, a not-for-profit company) offers storage facilities with shared ownership. In the Paris region, a number of university libraries, including the Sorbonee, use the Centre technique du livre de l'enseignement supérieur (CTLes) shared storage facility at Marne la Vallée, which permits both segregated and integrated (i.e. shared ownership) deposits.

[9] **Malpas, C** *Cloud-sourcing research collections: managing print in the mass-digitized library environment* OCLC (2011) http://www.oclc.org/research/publications/library/2011/2011-01.pdf

Although OCLC seems very interested in taking this work forward through its 'Shared Research Collections' project, all involved need to take note of the various studies which have analysed the factors which can lead to the success or failure of CCM projects. These include *Barriers to resource sharing among higher education libraries* (2002),[10] Schonfeld (2010)[11] and Malpas (2009).[12] Key factors include:

- Sound business and economic models
- Clarity of expectations, i.e. a formal agreement which clearly sets out the rights and obligations of the participants
- Clear benefits to each participant, including an ongoing financial rationale for participation
- A willingness by participants to engage with radically different models of service provision
- A framework within which participants feel that they retain some effective control over the programme as a whole and what happens to the shared assets
- Equitable arrangements for sharing work and costs

Preservation – beyond the workbench

RLUK has long maintained interest in preservation issues. It has had a significant association with the British Library Preservation Advisory Centre. RLUK was also instrumental in realising the scope for effective digital preservation at the collaborative library level with the CEDARS project, making some of the first systematic forays for the library sector in this respect, again partly in conjunction with the then NPO under the eLIB programme (Day, 1998).[13] RLUK was also a founding member of the Digital Preservation Coalition, whose work has done a considerable amount to inform the advancement of digital preservation activity in the UK and beyond. However, the immediate occasion for the present programme – an assessment of the threat to collections from the threat of acid paper – led to a consideration not only of providing practical training (the how to) but also of potentially changing the background culture of preservation (the reasons why).[14] There are several reasons for this: first of all, the recognition that we want to provide our members with targeted information and evidence to help make collection management more efficient at the institutional level, especially during times of financial duress. Secondly, that this might be done precisely by a more systematically applied understanding of collection complementariness (revisiting the Distributed National Bibliographical Resource by any other name). Finally, that it is above all about meeting not just our own expectations but those of the research community. In the final analysis, the researcher community has an expectation of the resources community, namely that material will be made available. This, rather than (but not excluding) cost savings is what shared services is about. This too is why we need to operationalise, beyond the relatively few current examples, the networked, as much as the network effect, of RLUK as a membership organisation.

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[10] **Higher Education Consultancy Group and CHEMS Consulting** *Barriers to resource sharing among higher education libraries* (2002) RSLP http://www.rslp.ac.uk/circs/2002/barriers.htm

[11] **Schonfeld, R** *System-level strategic planning for collections management and preservation* (2010) http://www.bl.uk/blpac/pdf/dareschonfeld.pdf

[12] **Malpas, C** *Shared print policy review report* OCLC (2009) http://www.oclc.org/research/publications/library/2009/2009-03.pdf

[13] **Day, M** *CEDARS: Digital Preservation and Metadata* UKOLN (1998) http://www.ercim.eu/publication/ws-proceedings/DELOS6/cedars.pdf

[14] The initial research into learning needs resulted in two reports:
Arthur, J *Report on focus groups to identify preservation needs of RLUK libraries* British Library Preservation Advisory Centre (2009) http://www.bl.uk/blpac/pdf/rlukfocus.pdf
Arthur, J *Survey on preservation training requirements* British Library Preservation Advisory Centre (2009) http://www.bl.uk/blpac/pdf/survey.pdf

During the course of the training programme, it became increasingly evident that preservation and collection management activities were not always bound together dynamically, that conservators often operated in a way that foregrounded the individual work, and also that many collection management strategies did not invariably have preservation statements or a view on the active role of preservation embedded within them. As a result, in August 2011, a survey of RLUK members was conducted to establish with greater precision what measures were in place to bring preservation activities formally within the ambit of realising institutional aims, and what resources were available to do so.

Analysing the results revealed some very interesting incongruities, gaps as well as commonalities across the RLUK consortium as a whole. 21 completed survey instruments were received from the 30 libraries who were RLUK members at that time. The questions we asked ranged from 'Does your library have one or more formal, written policy/strategy documents covering conservation or preservation?' to 'When deciding to withdraw items from stock do you check whether the item is held elsewhere in the UK and /or Ireland?' as well as others on environmental issues, staff skills and total annual budget for conservation and preservation (please see the appendix for the full range of questions and outputs).
Some of the more noteworthy points to come out of the questionnaire were:

■ Nearly 50% of those answering said that they do not have a formal mechanism in place for prioritisation around preservation and conservation
■ 68% do not have a strategy for dealing with brittle paper
■ Only 27% have one or more formal written policy or strategy documents covering conservation or preservation regarding all physical materials, including those on open shelves
■ A relatively low 36% said they always checked when deciding whether to withdraw items from stock, whether the title is held elsewhere in the UK and/or Ireland
■ More encouragingly, 59% responded by saying that when they digitised library materials, the workflow included a prior conservation assessment

For the most part, where a formal preservation policy existed, it related to special collections material only. However, as the RLUK Unique and Distinctive Collections strand (UDC)[15] has recently highlighted, it is increasingly relevant to consider the role that unique as well as special collections, can play in providing an institution with the foundations for particular research profiles and therefore in attracting students, academics and ultimately funding. Such unique collections may be dispersed on the open shelves, and this is particularly true of late 19th Century material. However, such collections, whether special or unique

> Can also be a liability to the holding institution: they take up space, they require specialist care and servicing, their use may be slight (or by externals only). They may find it difficult to compete for institutional attention with high-performance computers or stem cell laboratories, especially in a critical funding environment for the humanities subjects that gain most benefit from them.[16]

It is this confluence of the requirement to provide scientifically-based preservation care for such collections in the round and the need to persuade and inform officers higher in the library command structure about how to realise the identified value of such collections that now challenges our strategic approach to preservation.

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[15] http://www.rluk.ac.uk/content/unique-and-distinctive-collections

[16] **RLUK** *Unique and distinctive collections: revised project plan* RLUK (2011)
http://www.rluk.ac.uk/files/UDC%20Project%20Plan%20revised%20post%20Board%2011%20Oct.pdf

Addressing the long-term future of research collections in the UK

In the two previous sections, a number of factors were identified which suggest that UK research libraries need to radically rethink their approach to managing their collections. These include:

- Significant constraints in both budget and space.
- The changing needs of the user community ('researchers').
- The availability of many texts in digital format and the growing expectation among users that most material will be made available in this format.
- The concomitant increase in value of local print holdings and the potential need to preserve and collect judiciously accordingly, against the larger dispersed national collection.
- The risks to the National Research Collection, from acid paper, particularly where such material is not stored in an area with strict environmental controls.
- The risk of losing 'last copies', whether through active discard or by a failure to undertake the necessary steps in conservation and preservation.

Despite the successes of the UKRR, we should also note the absence of ongoing structures committed to the long-term preservation of the National Research Collection which would permit these issues to be more profoundly addressed in a coordinated and structured way. The past decade has seen many significant initiatives and projects which have achieved a great deal, but mainly with short-term funding and without the continuity required to achieve the radical transformation in national provision that the circumstances now demand.

As stated, the collections most at risk lie not in Special Collections but in the 'bread-and-butter' materials published between 1850 and 1970 which form the bulk of our research collections and deliver essential support for much research activity, particularly in the arts and social sciences. Some recent work at Leeds[17] is very interesting in that it shows one institution thinking holistically about the whole collection management cycle, taking a realistic attitude to what can be achieved locally, and prioritising certain collections for long-term retention (and therefore active preservation). Leeds also explicitly acknowledges the implications of this strategy: that such an approach can only be fully implemented within a framework which facilitates CCM at a national level, coordinates the National Research Collection as a whole and ensures the safeguarding of the full spectrum of material for the user community. This chimes with the views repeated in so many of the reports reviewed in the section on CCM, and seems particularly close to the position taken by Roberts at a NPO seminar in 1989[18] where he suggested

> If we are seriously to consider a coordinated approach to the national conservation problem, then we shall need to undertake an information gathering exercise, and to carry out local evaluations and surveys, to draw up criteria in determining priorities, all as preliminaries to formulating a cooperative strategy.

RLUK would suggest that, as a community, we need to:

- Push for formal written policies to be formulated and adopted in all RLUK libraries, covering at least all physical materials.
- Encourage a sense of pervasiveness in terms of preservation training for all staff who will come into physical contact with materials to increase practical knowledge of the first steps which can be taken to address common forms of damage.

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[17] **Clifford, B** *Heritage or legacy? Devising a framework for strategic management of collections* (2010)
http://www.bl.uk/blpac/pdf/dareclifford.pdf

[18] **Roberts, B.F** *Towards a national preservation policy 1. In: Preservation policies: the choices: proceedings of a seminar at York University 28 – 29 June 1989* NPO (1990)

- Continue to develop the ability to interrogate and utilise online aggregations of metadata, as in the Copac Collections Management Tools,[19] to provide the ever more precise ability to shape collections with confidence, taking into account both local and national needs.
- Work more assiduously to 'de-silo' not only content but also staffing structures that impinge on the wide range of niche activities that are present in the ecology of preservation (see the enclosed mind map) - many during training noted that they worked in relative isolation from parts of their institutions that still had a direct overall impact on collection care.
- Radically reconsider the relationship between digitised surrogate and original book, assessing what combination of these can best meet the needs of the research community and what that implies for our collections as a whole.
- Decide for which categories of material, the physical originals must without question be preserved as part of the National Research Collection with access for scholars as required.
- Ensure that resource discovery tools are capable of guiding users to the material they need, whether digital or physical.
- Establish mechanisms which will allow individual libraries to take responsibility for long-term retention and preservation of specific titles and signal this to the wider community.
- Devise and implement permanent structures which will coordinate activity around the National Research Collection and provide the guarantees which must underpin any collaborative activity on this scale.

To conclude, let us return to the roots of this discussion, right back in 1984, and remind ourselves of Ratcliffe's call to action:

> The fact is that there is a crisis, the national heritage is at risk and it cannot be secured on the basis of existing resources. Yet that is not the whole answer. The conservation problem is a national one and it will not be solved by any one library   It will depend on cooperation, on the goodwill of libraries working together   [20]

Michael Emly, Head of Collection Services, University of Leeds
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[19] http://copac.ac.uk/innovations/collections-management/

[20] **Ratcliffe, F.W.** *Preservation policies and conservation in British libraries.* British Library (1984) p. 67

Appendix

RLUK/British Library Preservation Survey 2011

The survey was circulated to the 30 organisations who were members of RLUK at the time, 21 organisations responded which is a response rate of 70%. One organisation returned two copies of the survey, bringing the total of responses to 22.

1. Does your Library have one or more formal, written policy/strategy documents covering conservation or preservation? (Respondents were asked to select all that applied)

Covering all library collections	6	20%
All physical materials ((including those on open shelves)	6	20%
Special Collections and/or Archives separately	11	37%
Digital material separately	3	10%
Other sub-collections	1	3%
None	3	10%

2. Have you carried out a formal assessment of the state of your library's stock?

Fairly comprehensive	5	23%
Special Collections and/or Archives only	12	55%
Limited	2	9%
None	3	14%

3. What proportion of your research collections is held in appropriate environmentally-controlled conditions?

Most	7	32%
Special Collections and/or Archives only	14	64%
Less than we would wish	2	9%

4. Do you know what proportion of your research stock is affected by brittle paper?

75% +	0	0%
50 – 75%	2	9%
25 – 50%	3	14%
Less than 25%	10	45%
Don't know	7	32%

5. Do you have a strategy for addressing the problem of brittle paper?

Yes, for all collections	3	14%
Yes, for Special Collections and/or Archives only	4	18%
No such strategy	15	68%

6. Do you have a formal mechanism in place for prioritisation around preservation and conservation?

Yes	12	55%
No	10	45%

7. When deciding to withdraw items from stock do you check whether the title is held elsewhere in the UK and/or Ireland? (some responded to more than one)

Always	8	35%
Usually	3	13%
Sometimes	4	17%
Never	1	4%
Not applicable	7	30%

8. When you digitise library materials, does the workflow include a conservation assessment prior to digitisation?

Always	13	59%
Sometimes	8	36%
Never	1	5%

9. What is your total annual budget for conservation/preservation (including staff, equipment/supplies, commercial contractors and consultants)?

£0	3
£1 - £10,000	5
£10,001 - £50,000	5
£50,001 - £100,000	3
£100,001 - £500,000	1
£500,001 - £1,000,000	2
£1,000,000 +	3

10. How many FTE staff in the following categories do you *typically* have whose primary duties relate to preservation/conservation?

	0	0.25 - 5	6 - 10	11 - 20	20+
A Professional conservation/preservation staff (e.g. conservators)	8	9	3	1	1
B Support staff (e.g. technical assistants/interns)	10	9	1	1	1
C Volunteers	4	6	1	1	0

11. How many of the staff included in question 10 are on project/external funding?

	N/A	0	1	2	3	4	5
A Professional conservation/preservation staff (e.g. conservators)	8	7	5	0	2	0	0
B Support staff (e.g. technical assistants/interns)	10	9	2	0	0	0	1

12. Thinking about preservation and conservation in the broadest terms, including how they relate to other library activities, is there any gap between the skills which your staff possess and those which you believe are needed for your Library to function effectively?

Yes	7	32%
No	14	64%
Not known	1	5%