Sheffield Hallam University

Finding a sustainable future for academic libraries

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Outline

- My perspective

- Sustainability – definition and premise

- A deteriorating global outlook

- SWOT

- Taking action

- What we are doing at Sheffield Hallam

- Questions and discussion

Sustainability - definition and premise

"Humanity has the ability to make development sustainable to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."
From 'Our Common Future' (1987 UN World Commission on Environment and Development)

- Subsequently developed through Agenda 21 (Rio Earth Summit 1992) to the UN SDGs (from 2015).

- Higher Education has an important role to play in sustainability. Several good business, ethical and legal reasons to be sustainable, and changing expectations from stakeholders.

- To enable sustainability for our institutions, sector and beyond, we need to be sustainable as academic libraries

A deteriorating global outlook

- "A deteriorating global outlook" (WEF Global Risk Report 2024)

- Existential threats and polycrises : the climate emergency, economic downturn, conflict, cybersecurity, social polarisation, misinformation…

- 'VUCA' – Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity

- Sustainability becomes more important and harder to achieve

- For Higher Education, an incredibly challenging financial situation

- For individual institutions, difficult decisions on how to achieve a sustainable future and more make short-term efficiencies

- Reducing pay and non-pay budgets for academic libraries

Academic library strengths

- Professionalism and skill set

- Measurable positive impact on student experience, teaching and research excellence

- Library co-operation and collaboration at sector level at scale

- Partnership with wider knowledge community, and procurement

- Innovation and automation, technology and digital

- Role and recognition in response to the pandemic

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Academic library weaknesses

- Diminishing influence – misunderstood, taken for granted

- Resource budgets tied up with broken publishing model

- Missing the Google moment again with AI?

- Slow to respond to challenges and opportunities of sustainability

- Lack of nuance on impacts of digital

- Estate costs

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Opportunities and challenges

Challenges

- Shrinking budgets

- Fewer staff

- Skills gaps

- Conflicting priorities, diminishing bandwidth to take on new activity, and the difficulty of being precautionary

Opportunities

- Taking a more visible and active role in technology, AI, climate action, EDI

- Repositioning, telling our story and achieving relevance

- Realising unused potential to do more

Taking action

- Develop our own Futures Literacy and make sustainability a key goal
- Keep advocating for the role of academic libraries in achieving a sustainable future for our institutions and society
- Realise our potential as platform for education and understanding
- Expand our professional delivery of skills and literacies
- Share more, and be ambitious on infrastructure
- Accelerate Open
- Understand the environmental and social impact of digital, including Scope 3 emissions
- Influence and drive ethical AI
- Build resilience for physical and digital
- Everyone's business - think global, act local
- **What other action do we need to take?**

What we are doing at Sheffield Hallam

- Making sustainability part of our Library plan
- Contributing to our institutional Climate Action Plan
- Signed the CILIP Green Libraries manifesto
- Selected 'How to Save Our Planet: The Facts' by Professor Mark Maslin for our Big Read 2021/22
- Extended thematic collection development to the climate emergency
- Becoming carbon literate and exploring how we might deliver climate literacies
- Advancing Open Research, including rights retention, and participating in UKRN Open and Responsible Researcher Reward and Recognition OR4 project
- Journal pilot, withdrawn participation in T&F and IEEE agreements
- De-duplicating print book collection to release space, and participating in UKRR

Thank you for listening

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