

# An interview with the Chief Executive

*Lynne Brindley*

Lynne Brindley, Chief Executive



**Q. How is the British Library changing to connect with users?**

A. Improving the user experience, in the Reading Rooms, at exhibitions and online, is a strategic priority. This year we have met record levels of demand while exceeding user satisfaction targets. Our events programme continues to build a distinctive profile, with outstanding feedback from visitors, and our web presence is growing exponentially, recording almost 50 million hits from over four million user-hosts.



**Q. The digital revolution has caused upheavals across the information sector – how can the British Library remain relevant?**

**A.** That's the question at the heart of *Redefining the Library* – our new three year strategy. Our strategic priorities have focused us on developing our services and modernising how we work to build new connections with users and partners. The Annual Report gives a rich picture of all our activities.

**Q. Does the strategy change the services you provide?**

**A.** It does – take the opening of the Business & IP Centre last spring. With funding from the London Development Agency we physically remodelled a traditional Reading Room to provide networking areas, workshops and specialist IP support. Our rich database and patent collections have not changed but the way we deliver them has. We're now attracting a diverse range of individuals and SMEs, by providing support at each stage of the innovation life cycle.

**Q. Partnership and connection seem a focus – are they key to the strategy?**

**A.** Absolutely – partnerships have been a recurring theme across the year. With higher education and JISC we are digitising millions of newspaper pages and thousands of hours of sound. With Microsoft we will be digitising 100,000 of our out-of-copyright, 19th century books. And our recently launched content strategy consultation asks what we need to collect and who we need to connect with, to ensure future access to the widest possible array of source material, wherever it is in the world.

**Q. How will the content strategy change the Library?**

**A.** We anticipate that the consultation will result in calls to maintain our areas of historic strength, including our heritage acquisitions, and also to collect more from China, India and other emerging economies with burgeoning research programmes.

**Q. What effect will this have on the British Library's international position?**

**A.** It will enhance it. Our primary duty is to the British taxpayer and our collections must reflect the changing areas of research expertise across the world. Our cultural diplomacy role is also important and we have developed significant new agreements this year: with South Africa to assist in capacity building across Africa; with Iraq, to support the intellectual reconstruction of the national library; and with China to digitally re-unite collections and build digital capacity.

Personally, it has been a busy year too, with keynote speeches on redefining the library in Japan, the US and Canada, Australia and New Zealand. I am also advising the EU Commissioners on their emerging digital library programme for 2010.

**Q. And what about progress on the British Library's own digital library?**

**A.** We are painstakingly building our digital infrastructure so that we can handle digitised and 'born digital' materials on a huge scale for future access and long-term preservation. We are working with publishers on practical pilots for handling a variety of formats and helping to develop the implementing regulations for the Legal Deposit Libraries Act 2003 through membership of the Legal Deposit Advisory Panel.

**Q. Is this digital R&D the focus of the Library's research activity now?**

**A.** It is an important research area for Library staff but not the only one. A major achievement this year was being awarded Academic Analogue Status by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, for the first time recognising us as a research institution in our own right. It's testament to the expertise of our scholarly and curatorial staff and means we are now eligible for independent research funding.

**Q. So even in a digital environment you see staff expertise remaining at the heart of what the Library does?**

**A.** Certainly. Looking back over my five years' leadership of the Library the pace of change in the information environment has been incredible and we cannot afford to stand still. The British Library staff are the backbone of one of the UK's greatest institutions. It's thanks to their hard work and innovation that we are meeting or exceeding all our funding agreement targets and going forward so successfully.

This is an edited transcript of a video interview with Lynne Brindley. The complete interview can be seen on [www.bl.uk](http://www.bl.uk)