

Summary

BRITISH LIBRARY

Enabling access for everyone

The British Library's content strategy
2020–2023



The British Library

The British Library is one of the greatest libraries in the world, with vast collections that we make accessible to everyone, for research, inspiration and enjoyment. We build, curate and preserve the UK's national collection of published written and digital content, and we contribute to the global advancement of knowledge through our collections, by partnering with others and connecting people with information wherever it is held.

This document sets out the Library's strategy for how we continue to build our collection of contemporary published content, defined as printed and digital content published from 1945 onwards. Heritage Acquisitions are out of scope. They are governed by the Heritage Acquisitions Policy.

As the national library we have a central role to play in the knowledge economy of the United Kingdom – supporting research and innovation in business, industry and universities – and in generating

public good for wider society by encouraging individual learning, wellbeing, growth and mutual understanding.

Our overall strategy is set out in *Living Knowledge*, the vision statement which sets out our purposes and ambitions to 2023, and the strategy refresh *Living Knowledge – For Everyone* which refocused those ambitions in light of the challenges of national recovery and renewal that we face in 2020 and beyond.

The Content Strategy operates in the context of *Living Knowledge* and *For Everyone*, and supports all of the Library's purposes: **custodianship, research, business, culture, learning** and **international**. To align with *Living Knowledge*, our content strategy covers the period 2020–2023. It is underpinned by the role of the British Library as stated in the British Library Act and as a publicly-funded organisation that exists to help generate public value.

The Purpose of the Content Strategy

Content underpins everything the British Library does, from Reading Room services, document supply, and the network of Business & IP Centres around the UK, to exhibitions and learning.

The Content Strategy¹ aims to ensure the Library is collecting and providing access to content that is needed by researchers of all kinds – including academics, businesses, policymakers, practitioners and the wider public. It provides transparency by explaining the thinking behind what we acquire, and the principles that will inform selection in future.

It sets out the key principles and practices by which we continue to build the UK's national collection of published content. It determines:

- What contemporary content the British Library collects or connects to, why and for whom
- How that content is acquired and stored or how it is linked to
- How that content is made available to our users in the short and long term.

It is concerned with contemporary content published in the UK and globally across all formats, disciplines, subjects and languages. It covers all channels through which the content can be acquired, including Legal Deposit, voluntary deposit, purchase, donation and exchange. It also covers content held by other organisations to which the British Library connects, either permanently or for a fixed period.

Heritage Acquisitions are out of scope. They are governed by our Heritage Acquisitions Policy.

¹ The British Library in 2006 chose the term Content Strategy – rather than Collection Development Policy – to recognise the importance of digital content and the internet in our strategic response.

Reflecting and responding to external changes

The previous Content Strategy was published in 2013². A lot has changed in the seven years since then. We need to reflect and respond to key recent developments in technology, user behaviour and the publishing landscape: the greater role of Open Access content, for example, and the shift to digital publishing in many fields. Academic research is increasingly interdisciplinary, complex and fast-paced,

Approach

The Library is realistic about what we can achieve in this environment. It is not achievable, affordable or appropriate to collect everything – with the exception of Legal Deposit, we do not aim to collect comprehensively.

We aim to have coherent collections that are capable of supporting research, not to collect everything.

There are many other libraries and organisations that collect, store and preserve information, much of it available digitally online. We work in the context of this global network, which is why our 2013 content strategy included the principle that connecting to content held by others will become more important. This principle continues.

and in order to address the challenges faced by humankind we need to bring information together from different sources in more flexible, agile ways. Perhaps the greatest driver is the need to provide remote access to content – being able to access content from anywhere is something users have always wanted. Lockdown has brought that need into sharper relief.

Aim

The content strategy aims to ensure the Library is collecting and providing access to content that is needed by researchers of all kinds. In addition to UK Legal Deposit, we selectively collect or connect to contemporary content published internationally to meet user needs.

The key priority is to provide access to content using the most cost-effective means to help users access the information they need, now and in the future.

The purpose of the content strategy is to give staff, users and the public a clear sense of how the Library is taking forward its acquisitions activity. It is expressed in summary form as guiding principles.



Guiding Principles

These principles guide our decision-making. They aim to be flexible enough to adapt to changing circumstances and events, any such changes or exceptions will be governed by the Content Strategy Steering Group.

- 1** There is one British Library collection and content strategy decisions apply across all parts of the single collection for contemporary content.
- 2** Legal Deposit (print and digital) will continue to be the foundation of our collection building activity. We collect from all UK sources, representing the voices of the broad national spectrum. *The Collecting Framework for Legal Deposit* will guide our work in this area.
- 3** We will allocate our acquisitions budget going forwards to support our collecting and connecting priorities, which will be based on evidence of demand and value to researchers and which will change over time. By researchers we mean people conducting research for academic, business, professional development or personal reasons. Continuity of collecting will be taken into account where the value to researchers continues but must be balanced and evaluated against new collecting priorities, availability and resource levels.
- 4** We will develop more flexible and cost-effective ways of accessing content. Examples include but are not limited to: 'on-demand' access models, backfile purchase, and connecting to content held externally.
- 5** The decision to connect rather than collect will reflect the primary decision about archival intent (i.e. does the British Library need to ingest and preserve this content in the long term) and the permanency of access required (using agreed criteria). Archival intent will be based on considerations of collections held elsewhere and their intentions to retain and preserve, persistence, sustainability and Life Cycle Costs.
- 6** Beyond Legal Deposit, the primary decision is whether the content will be of value to the research community. This selection decision is followed by consideration of format, so that where digital format is available, we will prefer digital content over print as the format of choice, where our purposes are met. These include:
 - a** stability of access
 - b** preservation (archival intent)
 - c** content being the same/no loss of content between print and digital versions
 - d** accessibility (i.e. access for people with disabilities)
 - e** evidence of user preferences, within our limited resources.

Note on Legal Deposit: Where a UK publication is available with the same content in print and digital form, the Library will, by default, collect the print version unless transition to digital deposit has been agreed with the publisher. Transition from print to digital deposit is by mutual agreement between the publisher and the Legal Deposit Libraries³ collectively. Once a publisher who produces both print and digital content has transitioned to digital deposit the Library only continues to collect print copies where print is the only format available. We will in some instances prefer to collect in print where the significance of a print copy has been identified. This may be due to the physical structure of a book⁴. In a limited number of cases, we will acquire a print copy of a book received under Legal Deposit in digital form, where the significance of the content indicates that this is appropriate.

3 The Legal Deposit Libraries are the British Library, the National Library of Scotland, the National Library of Wales, the Bodleian Libraries University of Oxford, Cambridge University Library, and the Library of Trinity College Dublin.

4 For example a book with moving parts or containing other elements that cannot be adequately presented to a reader in digital form.

- 7** We will avoid duplication within the Library's collections and connecting activity, unless there is a clear and measurable benefit (for example, to preserve the Legal Deposit copy of high-use texts, or to enable us to offer a service we could not offer otherwise), and good return on investment (ROI).
- 8** We will take account of the collections held elsewhere that can be readily accessed by our users, and changes to such access and collections over time, in our decisions about what we will collect and how.
- 9** For licensed-in content we will prefer the instance/format which gives the widest possible access/permissions, where it is affordable.
- 10** Where the British Library has no preservation responsibility and where connecting will provide persistent access which can be maintained effectively, we will prefer to connect rather than collect. There will be exceptions, for instance where the content is unstable or where access cannot be provided in a persistent way.
- 11** We will improve and maintain the discovery of Open Access content⁵ in ways that will provide persistent access which can be maintained effectively over a reasonable time period. For instance, by use of Persistent Identifiers (PIDs), where these exist.

These Guiding Principles apply to all contemporary published content.

We have developed statements of intent that relate to each one: for example, under Guiding Principle 9, we aspire to increase the amount of licensed content available to our users beyond the Library's premises, over time. Statements of intent are given in full in Appendix of the longer, narrative version of the Content Strategy document at [bl.uk/about-us/governance/policies/content-strategy](https://www.bl.uk/about-us/governance/policies/content-strategy)



⁵ Open Access content is defined as content that has an explicit open license or license terms that at least allow sharing for non-commercial purposes.

Priorities

We have developed three types of priority – **overarching priorities**, **subject priorities**, and **areas of focus**. These are explained below.

Overarching priorities

The key priority is to provide access to content using the most cost-effective means to help users access the information they need, now and in the future.

For Everyone emphasizes and accelerates particular *Living Knowledge* themes. We set out the main priorities for the Content Strategy that follow from each theme below. These are given in more detail in the Content Strategy narrative document at bl.uk/about-us/governance/policies/content-strategy

1 Economic growth and innovation

a We will support UK entrepreneurs and small businesses by:

- Prioritising the content that is essential to running our Business & IP Centre service, namely practical business information and intellectual property information.
- Providing remote access to more of the content UK entrepreneurs, businesses and managers need, so that registered users can use it anywhere, 24/7, via our website or our British Library On Demand service.
- Providing access to information about sustainable business and the implications of individual behaviour on climate change.

b We will support economic growth and employment more generally by:

- Prioritising information to support skills development, learning, remote working, productivity and management – particularly for people who are currently under-served.

c We will support UK science, research and innovation by:

- Continuing to provide access to research-level content that delivers value to the research communities we serve, in all disciplines and using the most cost-effective means.
- Making more Open Access⁶ content available from our discovery systems for everyone to use.

2 Social and cultural renewal

a We will bring people together through libraries by:

- Continuing to provide the content that underpins our cultural events, exhibitions and other offerings in public libraries.

b We will increase access, engagement and diversity by:

- Engaging with a wide variety of people in forming our plans.
- Explaining our content and service offering in clear, simple words.
- Actively promoting our content and services to everyone who might want to use them, and using a variety of channels to reach people effectively.
- Making it easier for people of all kinds to use the Library onsite and online. This includes making more content available remotely, beyond the

⁶ Open Access content is defined as content that has an explicit open license or license terms that at least allow sharing for non-commercial purposes.

premises of the Library for registered users via agreements with publishers and using secure authentication technology, so that it can be accessed by our users from anywhere, 24/7.

- Building collections that reflect diversity in all its forms, and that are relevant to people of all kinds. We acknowledge that there is a long way to go to achieve this aspiration.

c We will contribute to the UK's international impact by:

- Continuing to support UK science, research and innovation with the content they need.
- Supplying content internationally via British Library On Demand.
- Continuing to develop international and touring exhibitions and events based on our content.
- Working collaboratively with other national libraries in the UK and globally.

Subject and interdisciplinary priorities

In 2013 we committed to developing a small number of subject priorities in each Discipline, based on the following criteria:

- The Library can offer particularly rich content and services for the researcher
- There is strong demand for content in the subject
- The subject is a priority of UK research funders
- The researcher is underserved by other providers.

These criteria suit an academic audience – but as the national library of the UK, serving many other audiences, we recognised that we needed to broaden our approach.

We have built upon these criteria by using the concept of public value, which takes account of the value that is generated not only for the user, but other stakeholders too. We have developed a definition of value which takes account of the value generated over the short, medium and long term, and a model of value that looks at the Life Cycle Cost of the content versus the benefits (value) that is generated, to inform decisions about our priorities.

We are using a consistent structured approach to developing our subject priorities and priorities (or 'areas of focus') for each Collection Area, which are sense-checked against the value model and co-ordinated across teams. Our priorities are subjects or areas where we want to develop our collecting and connecting activity over and above our Legal Deposit commitments. Our initial subject priorities include:

- Rapid-response collecting on Covid-19, to support access to scientific and practical information
- Data science: via connecting to datasets
- History of Medicine & Public Health Communication
- History of Science
- Psychotherapy & Counselling
- Education
- Government & Official Information
- Library & Information Studies
- Social Policy & Social Welfare
- Black Studies
- Business and management
- Practical business information to support our Business & IP Centres, focusing on market intelligence initially
- Intellectual Property.

Other priorities – such as the history, culture and literature of different countries, regions and peoples and the international perspective our collections can bring – are addressed in the areas of focus.

Areas of focus

Each Collection Area in the Library is developing areas of focus, where we aim to actively develop our contemporary published content in greater depth in the period 2020-2023, based on the same criteria and value model as the subject priorities. Collection Area priorities include the history, literature, culture and socio-political and socio-economic conditions of countries, regions and peoples, and provide

international perspectives on a wide range of subjects and themes. They all include common elements derived from the Guiding Principles, and are subject to the same Guiding Principles overall. They are expressed as statements in the Content Strategy narrative document on our website at bl.uk/about-us/governance/policies/content-strategy



Conclusion

Through our content strategy for contemporary published content, we aim to generate more public value for individuals, organisations, business and wider society, and to support the research infrastructure of the UK in this time of national recovery and renewal, and beyond.

Our content strategy underpins our aim to enable access for everyone to the information they need – reliable information for individuals, organisations, and communities – whatever their background, characteristics or location.

For further information and more detail about our plans, please see the Content Strategy narrative document on our website at bl.uk/about-us/governance/policies/content-strategy.