



LIBRARY
HSILIRB

Knowledge without borders

How we made a difference with
our global partners in 2023/24



Contents

Introduction	1
Knowledge Matters	2
Partners around the world	3
Global impact – map	10
Professional leadership and skills exchange	12
Protecting collections at risk	18
A message from our Chief Executive	24
Our plans for the coming months	25

Hello

Dumela

Bonjour

Hallo

Привіт

Hola

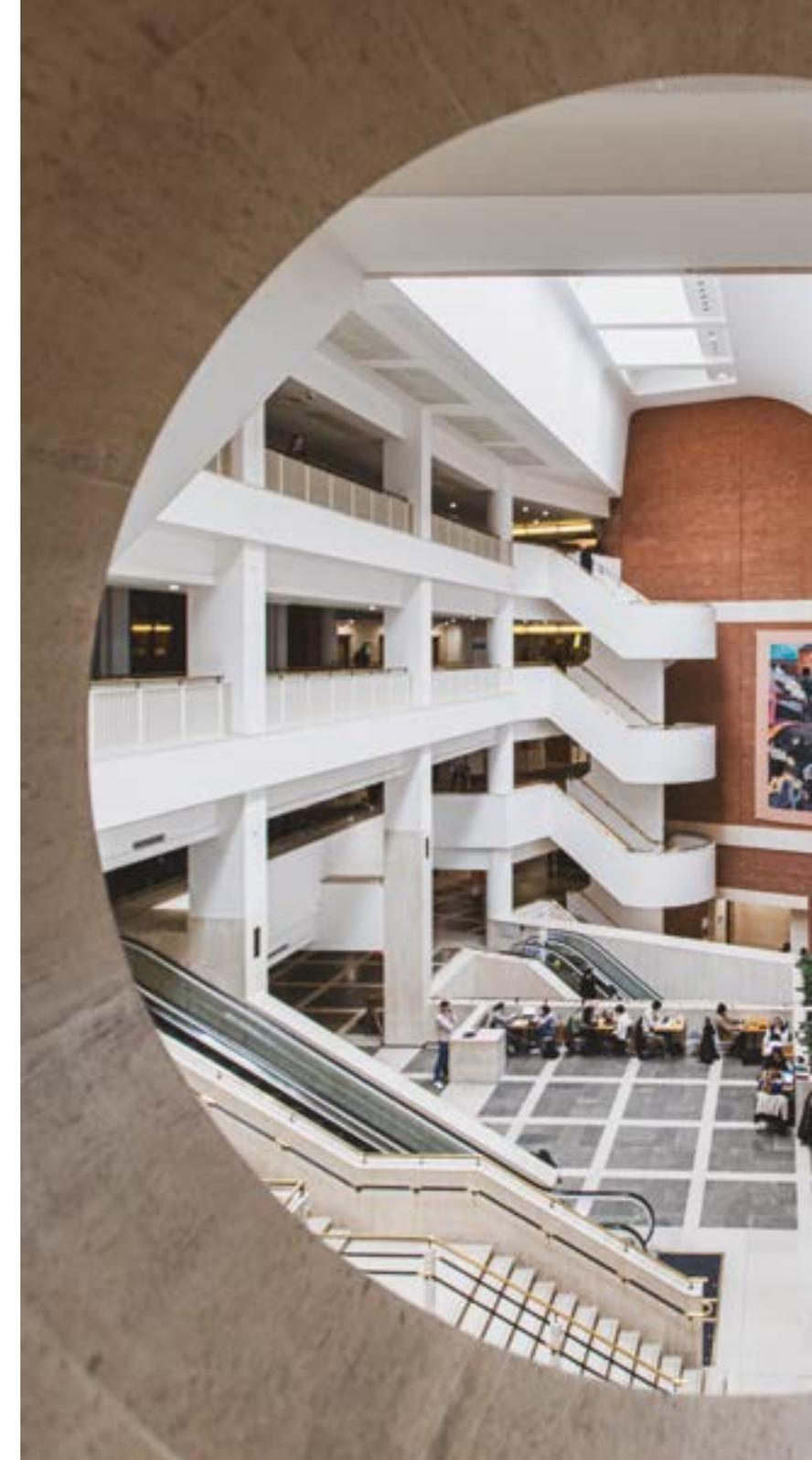
مرحباً

Howzit

Kia ora

Olá

你好





We work with partners around the world to advance knowledge and mutual understanding

The British Library is not just the national library of the UK. We're an international library that's part of a global network of other unique institutions.

Working side by side with these institutions is vital. It means we can learn from each other, promote a shared understanding of world history and culture, and make sure important collections are safe for future generations.

What we learn through our work helps us grow professionally and develop our skills. And by sharing our knowledge with our network of partners, we help creative institutions to innovate and grow, both here in the UK and globally.

It's not just our international team that plays a role in this work. In every corner of the British Library, you'll find teams collaborating with our partners all over the world. Whether it's research collaborations, touring exhibitions or helping libraries whose collections are at risk from war, civil emergency and climate change.

“The collection we hold is a multi-lingual, international history. Almost everyone in the world can find something of their memory, history or identity preserved. Our duty is to make sure that is as accessible as possible.”

Rebecca Lawrence
Chief Executive, British Library

Knowledge Matters

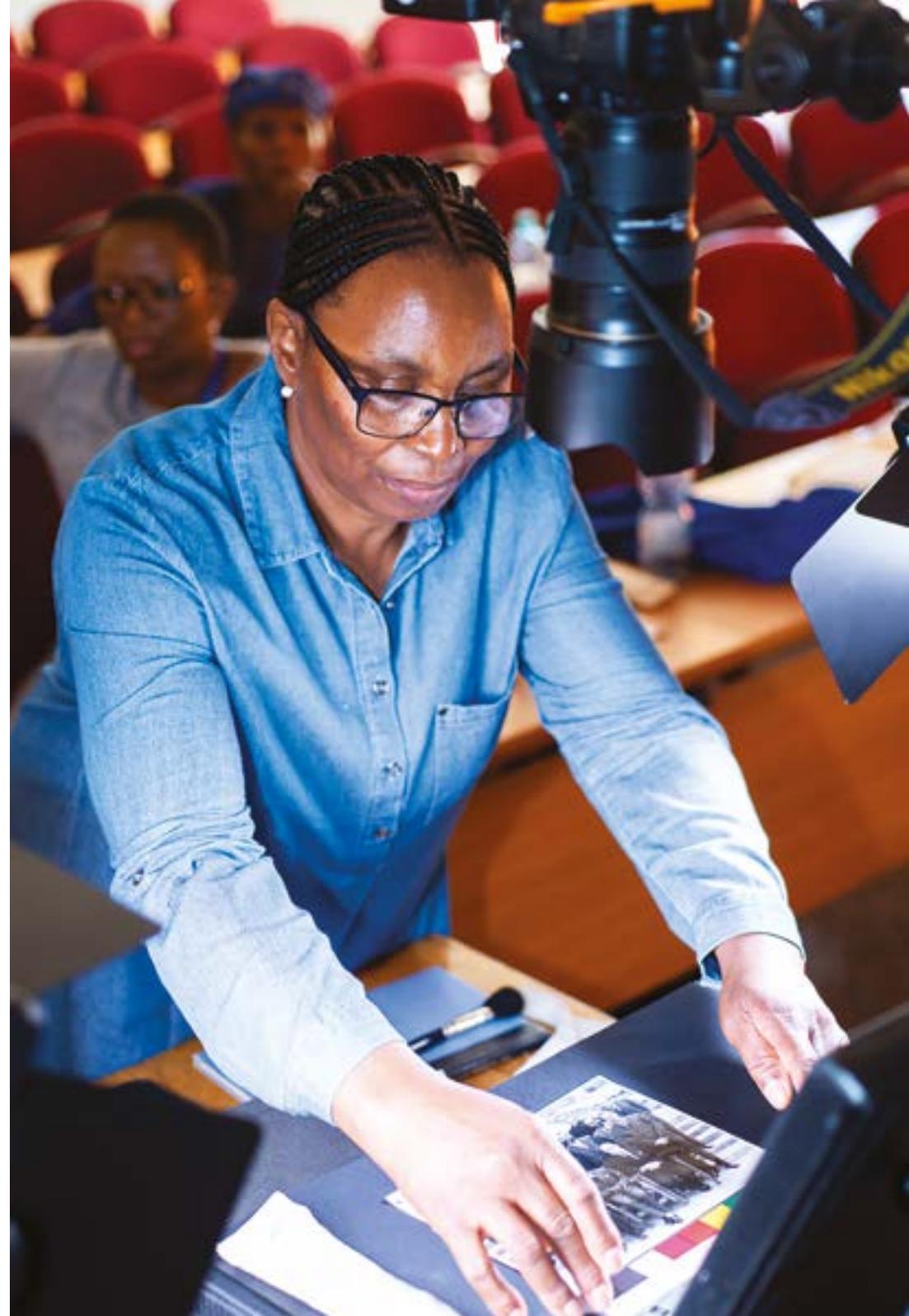
In 2023 we launched our new strategic vision: *Knowledge Matters: the British Library 2023–2030*. It builds on the purposes and values in our previous strategy, *Living Knowledge*, published in 2015, as well as our achievements since then.

Our *Knowledge Matters* priorities that support our international purpose are:

- consolidate and sustain the Library's strong relationships across Europe, South Asia, South East Asia, East Asia and the Middle East
- deepen and diversify our engagement with key partners in Africa, Caribbean and the Americas
- maintain our contribution to professional dialogue, skills exchange and capacity development across the international library sector
- through programmes such as the Endangered Archives Programme, work with institutions worldwide whose collections are at risk from war, climate change or civil emergency.

In this report you'll read about some 2023/24 projects and successes that are helping us meet these priorities and strengthen our connections in the library world.

Right: Setting up a digitisation studio on a budget workshop at National University of Lesotho, our EAP Africa Hub.



Partners around the world

Our many partners around the world are so valuable to the work we do. They open up new opportunities and bring new skills and knowledge to every project. Collaborating with so many different people means we can achieve much more together.

At the British Library we have strong relationships with groups and organisations all over the globe. Our team of more than 1,500 reaches beyond our sites in London and Yorkshire to connect with other major libraries, and international coalitions and organisations tackling preservation challenges that impact us all.

It's relationships like these that help us bring *Knowledge Matters* to life. The priorities for our international partnerships are:

- consolidate and sustain the Library's strong relationships across Europe, South Asia, South East Asia, East Asia and the Middle East
- deepen and diversify our engagement with key partners in Africa, Caribbean and the Americas.

In this section, we've given you a snapshot of some of the teams we've been collaborating with this year – and what we've achieved together.

In 2023/24, we had...

404

international engagements across **70 different countries**

77%

of those were **professional engagements** – like speaking at conferences and hosting international colleagues

23%

were **diplomatic engagements** – like hosting foreign ambassadors and ministers

61%

of the **active users of our website are international users** – the top five being the United States, India, Australia, Canada and Italy.

72%

of our **skills and knowledge exchange programmes** of two or more days were for or in countries in the Global South – great progress for our *Knowledge Matters* priorities.

“The work of the British Library sets it apart as an institution – not just looking into the UK, but looking broadly. It's doing a fantastic job of keeping relationships going with the international community.”

Buhle Mbambo-Thata

University Librarian of the National University of Lesotho, Head of EAP Africa Hub



“The response to the open call for participation was very successful, and the course was attended by more than 150 individuals from different cities in Ibero-America. I take this opportunity to express my recognition to your outstanding team for their commitment and professionalism in preparing and delivering the sessions. I am confident that the content they shared will be of great value to the archival development of our regions.”

Emma de Ramón Acevedo

President of the Latin American Archives Association (ALA)



Laura Carderera (British Library), Magally Alegre (EAP Latin America Hub) and Marco Enríquez (Asociación Latinoamericana de Archivos) take part in webinar on archives at risk in Latin America.

The Hub of the action

The Endangered Archives Programme (EAP) helps protect collections at risk around the world (see page 19 to find out how). The EAP includes five Regional Hubs:

- EAP Asia Hub: School of Cultural Texts and Records at Jadavpur University
- EAP Africa Hub: National University of Lesotho
- EAP Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Hub: American University in Beirut
- EAP Latin America Hub: Instituto Riva-Agüero at the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú
- EAP Caribbean Hub: University of the West Indies Library, Mona

With the support of Arcadia, the EAP Hubs are key to expanding the EAP's reach and building exciting new international collaborations. They help us reach professionals and organisations we've not been in touch with before and, together, create and deliver training about protecting archives under threat in their regions. Here are some of the ways we've been working with these Hubs this year.

Safeguarding documentary heritage in Latin America

This year with the EAP Latin America Hub and the Latin American Archives Association (ALA), we delivered an online course on preventative conservation for documentary heritage for archive and library professionals. It covered the main risks to collections, how to reduce deterioration and stabilise documents, and the basics on conserving documents for digitisation.

ALA's vast network helped us connect with so many libraries, archives and cultural institutions we'd never engaged with before. As well as helping their teams protect significant collections across Latin America, the course gave us a better understanding of what teams in the region need and how our training could help.

In 2024 we had

100%

more grant applications from teams in South America than in our last application window in 2022.

Supporting digitisation in the Caribbean

We were proud to hold our first EAP workshop in Jamaica in 2023, with our Caribbean Hub at the University of the West Indies. *Setting up a digitisation studio on a budget* was for 27 professionals from archives and libraries across the Caribbean, including Belize, Bermuda, Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, Barbados and Saint Lucia. It covered everything from using the right equipment, technical skills like image editing, and what makes a successful digitisation project.

Want to find out more about our EAP Hub training events? Go to eap.bl.uk/regional-hubs

Since 2023, in partnership with our Hubs we have run:

11

face-to-face workshops (48% of the trainees were women) and

29

online training sessions for

2,500

people across

5

continents

90%

of the participants had never engaged with the British Library

Right: Setting up a digitisation studio on a budget workshop at University of the West Indies Library, Mona, our EAP Caribbean Hub.



“The IDP is a brilliant example of how to work in partnership to connect and give access to collections held in institutions across the world, share resources and skills, and advance research and learning, in a spirit of friendship, respect and collaboration.”

Luisa Elena Mengoni,
Head of Asian and African
Collections, British Library



SONG Yanpeng showing the British Library delegation recent publications from the Dunhuang Academy.

Celebrating 30 years of the International Dunhuang Programme

The International Dunhuang Programme (IDP) brings together images and information about items from the Eastern Silk Roads held at the British Library and institutions across the world. IDP partners and collaborating institutions share the vision to preserve the collections, make them widely accessible online and help people understand one of the ancient world's most important trade networks.

The IDP was a pioneering international initiative when it was set up in 1994 and run by the Library and other founding organisations. It has since grown to include 35 institutions across three continents – and we're excited to have celebrated 30 years of the IDP in 2024!

Anniversary celebrations in China

In April 2024 we were thrilled to deepen the programme's achievements. The British Library and the Dunhuang Academy co-organised a conference giving experts from all over the world the chance to discuss everything from collection management to conservation. It was also a great opportunity to share the results of some of the IDP partners' most recent activities, like our recently completed Lotus Sutra Manuscripts Conservation and Digitisation Project funded by Bei Shan Tang Foundation.

For the visit we organised a workshop with our IDP project partners, including Dunhuang Academy, the National Library of China, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Berlin-Brandenburg Institute of Humanities and Ryukoku University, to firm up our vision for the coming years, and plan activities in the field of research, learning and digital infrastructure. During our trip to China we also renewed our Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Dunhuang Academy and the National Library of China, and visited several historical sites – including the Mogao Caves complex and Cave 17, also known as the 'Library Cave', where the documents originate from.

This special visit reinforced our commitment to preserving, documenting and promoting these fascinating documents for a world audience.

A new website for 2024

Since 2022 the IDP team, colleagues across the Library and IDP partners have come together to redevelop the IDP website – a major undertaking. With the support of The Polonsky Foundation, we relaunched it in February 2024, to coincide with the 30th anniversary. We improved the design and functionality, so it's easier for people to search and browse more than 150,000 images, and other diverse learning resources this project is preserving.

Find out more about the IDP at idp.bl.uk/

“QDL has been a priceless instrument for scholars like me, to whom manuscripts from the medieval Muslim world, texts and illustrations alike, constitute the basic ingredient for our research. Making them available in digitized formats has made an otherwise daunting task more fruitful in its results.”

Nawal Nasrallah

Qatar Digital Library user

“My book would not have been possible without the Qatar Digital Library. I am deeply indebted to those who have made so many fascinating sources freely available. The joys of the magnification that lets you pore over the details of maps, photographs and handwritten documents; what a treasure trove!”

Sue-Ann Harding

Qatar Digital Library user

Making Middle Eastern resources more accessible for research

The Qatar Foundation Partnership Programme has continued to make great progress this year. It's our largest partnership with a national library in the Middle East – the Qatar National Library (QNL).

Its goal is to digitise the India Office records, Arabic Scientific Manuscripts and audio recordings we hold, and include them in the Qatar Digital Library (QDL). The QDL is the world's largest digital archive on the Middle East, and 2024 marked its 10th anniversary.

Our India Office records include about 200 years' worth of documents from the East India Company. Letters, reports, photos, maps, audio recordings and eye witness accounts – all in nearly 12km of boxes. These items give insight into culture, news and topical issues across many regions of the Gulf.

We're delighted to be contributing to the QDL, and helping to make it easier for scholars to research the Gulf region from around the world. The newly accessible resources have led to a boom in exciting new studies of Qatar and the Gulf, and are improving understanding of the region and the Arab and Islamic worlds more broadly.

The programme is strengthening our links with institutions in Qatar and other Gulf states. We're growing partnerships that build on our shared history while we adapt and modernise our relationships to reflect the developmental advances of the last 50 years. Working together to explore our shared past is helping us promote tolerance and build trust for the future.

The programme has also had a big impact on our conservation work. Our team has learnt more about Eastern or Islamic manuscripts. This is helping them adapt and enhance our conservation methods so we can protect and preserve even more documents.



Above right: Armenia.
Prepared by Lieutenant
Commander Z. Khanzadian, 1919.
Mss Eur F112/570, f 37

The Qatar Digital Library (QDL) has

2 million

pages, and counting, of valuable resources – all available free online in Arabic and English.
qdl.qa

Connecting people to their heritage

Stacking bookshelves for displaced Ukrainian people

The Ukrainian First Lady, Olena Zelenska, visited us in May 2023 to launch the Ukrainian Bookshelf Project. The project works to get Ukrainian literature into the world's leading libraries. So, wherever Ukrainians live, there's a book to connect them to their home and culture.

In partnership with the Ukrainian Embassy, we added hundreds of donated books to our library, and shared duplicates with the likes of the University Library of Cambridge.

We also supported another of the First Lady's projects this year – Books Without Borders. We distributed 16,000 Ukrainian language children's books to UK public libraries. So displaced young people all over the UK still have access to reading and school books in their own language.



Left: First Lady of Ukraine Olena Zelenska meets displaced Ukrainian children at the British Library of the launch of the Ukrainian Bookshelf project
© Ukrainian Embassy in the UK.



Did you know

We bring the spirit of Jaipur to London every year?

The Jaipur Literature Festival (JLF) is one of the greatest literature festivals in the world. So we're incredibly proud to host JLF London at the British Library every June.

We're always excited to bring the colour, energy and community spirit of JLF to the UK, with inspirational writers, thinkers, poets, singers and storytellers.

Find out more and get tickets for the next JLF London at events.bl.uk

Global impact

More of our projects around the world



North America

This year our Google Books partnership digitised another 30,000 out-of-copyright books. That's nearly 700,000 books digitised and made freely available online since 2012.



Caribbean

We went to the Association of Caribbean University, Research and Institutional Libraries 2023 conference to connect with potential new Caribbean partners.



Latin America

Hannah Lowe and Alia Trabucco Zerán won the Eccles Institute & Hay Writer's Award 2024, which included a £20,000 prize and special access to our Americas collection for their research.



Europe

We loaned two Hebrew manuscripts and one Catalan manuscript to Museo del Prado in Madrid and Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya in Barcelona to star in *The Lost Mirror* exhibition.



Middle East and North Africa

Our curator for Arabic collections started the Collecting Arab Visual Cultures (1960 to Today) project in 2022, funded by the Art Fund. When it ended in 2024, he had added more than 408 items to our collection.



East Asia

Shanghai Museum Box created two immersive experiences using images from our collections. In 2023–24, they toured 12 venues in 10 different cities and had more than 500,000 visitors across China.



South Asia

We were proud that our facsimile of Magna Carta, showcased at the 2023 G20 in Delhi, was chosen as the UK representative cultural item in the G20's Culture Corridor.



Africa

With three of our African partners, we organised a roundtable for 52 delegates on preservation and conservation of documentary heritage in Africa.



Oceania

Our exhibition on Hebrew manuscripts toured to the State Library of Victoria, Australia, reaching more than 111,000 visitors.



Professional leadership and skills exchange

The sheer scale of the British Library means we have always played a significant part in professional leadership and skills development.

Our work with international organisations keeps us at the leading edge of innovation for libraries and archives. Exchanging skills and knowledge with similar institutions to our own also underpins everything we do.

As leaders in our field we share our skills and experience with other professionals as much as we can. Through our initiatives and programmes, and our memberships to international organisations, we do this regularly – and we learn so much from them in return.

In our strategy, *Knowledge Matters*, our priority here is to maintain our contribution to professional dialogue, skills exchange and capacity development across the international library sector. In this section, you can get a glimpse of the work we've done this year to help us do that.

Left: Drusilla Grant (National Library of Jamaica) in the British Library Centre for Conservation.

We give behind-the-scenes access to library leaders

Our International Library Leaders Programme (ILLP) is a week-long professional development course for library and archive professionals. It gives them the chance to see what we do and how we do it, through workshops, talks and tours from our teams. It gives us the chance to play a part in training the library leaders of tomorrow.

The course covers everything from digitisation and conservation to cultural programmes and strategy. It even includes a day in our site in Boston Spa, Yorkshire, where delegates can see our state-of-the-art, sustainable storage.

“Thanks to the organisers for planning a wonderful programme for us. I am returning with many practical ideas and new positive strategies to tackle challenges.”

ILLP 2023 delegate

The ILLP has continued to grow this year and it's now a huge part of the way we offer skills and knowledge exchange. We had 21 leaders on the course from 16 different countries, including Brazil, Papua New Guinea and Pakistan. The delegates' feedback this year has spurred us on to keep making the ILLP as inclusive, useful, comprehensive and inspiring as possible.

Want to see the heart of the action?

If you're interested in ILLP, go to bl.uk/about-us/international/ to find out more.

Right: Participants take part in an ILLP session about community engagement.

Since November 2019 for the ILLP, we've hosted

60

library leaders from

25

different countries – from Brazil and Jamaica to South Africa and Ukraine

68%

of these leaders were women



Growing our knowledge network

We have Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with 13 international organisations. These agreements set out our commitments to collaborate.

In 2023 we were proud to sign and renew MoUs with the National Libraries of South Africa, Indonesia, Jamaica and France. Here are just two examples of how we've already started exchanging skills with our partners, thanks to our new MoUs.



Beverley Lashley (National Librarian, National Library of Jamaica) signs MoU with Marcie Hopkins (Director of International, British Library).

Our Jamaican partner

As part of our MoU with the National Library of Jamaica (NLJ), we hosted Drusilla Grant, their Acting Manager in Preservation and Conservation, for a placement. She spent a week at our Conservation Studio exchanging practical skills and knowledge. The placement included handling, dry cleaning techniques and remedial treatments.

“This workshop was a successful one, in which I learnt many things about the conservation of paper. I was also able to share my knowledge with my trainer, giving her a unique perspective. I gained new knowledge and practical experience, which I now use to execute my daily duties.”

Drusilla Grant

Acting Manager in Preservation and Conservation, National Library of Jamaica

Our French exchange

As part of our MoU with the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF), their strategic leadership team visited for a two-day seminar in October. Our teams exchanged knowledge about library services and strategy, and artificial intelligence. We all came away with new ideas and practises to enhance our work.

“The BnF shares a historic relationship with the British library, which we see as our fraternal yet not identical twin in Europe. Similarities and dissimilarities are at the very heart of our fruitful exchanges. Getting to learn from each other and hearing about each other's strategy is a mutual source of inspiration.”

Gilles Pécout

President of the BnF

We're sharing skills in South Africa

In March 2023 we were delighted to renew our Memorandum of Understanding with the National Library of South Africa (NLSA). It included sharing best practice and exploring opportunities for research placements and training.

This year the NLSA told us their team would really benefit from exchange in conservation and collection care. So we worked with them to deliver our course, giving their team the skills and techniques they need to preserve their collections as effectively as possible. For example, the team told us they were planning to box part of their collection, and improve their pest management system, so they found those sessions very useful.

The partnership has also been invaluable for helping us grow our collection of South African publications. The NLSA also kindly donated 34 classical fiction books in indigenous languages.

“Our collaboration with the British Library has allowed the transfer of knowledge and skills development across Africa. Together we have conducted workshops and training centred on preserving and maintaining the integrity of the valuable heritage collections in the custodianship of our institutions. We are excited about the future of this collaborative relationship”

Jolene Bhadais

Director: Communications,
Marketing and Stakeholder Relations,
National Library South Africa

Right: Collection care workshop at
National Library of South Africa.



“We take part in many working groups and annual conferences. But we also reach out to our peers quite a bit. That’s the great thing – we all feel confident to pick up the phone if we need to. For example, the National Library of Sweden came to me and said we’d love to hear about your international strategy. The National Library of Norway called and asked about our mass digitisation projects. Now we’re speaking at conferences organised by those libraries about our experiences. This network is really alive and it’s so important for us to be part of that.”

Marcie Hopkins

Director of International, British Library

Working better together

We are a member of many international organisations, like the Consortium of European Research Libraries, the Conference of Directors of National Libraries and the Digital Preservation Coalition.

Organisations like these create opportunities for libraries to work together, learn from and support each other to improve the work we do. The British Library can play a leadership role, as well as learning from other experts.

Here are a few more organisations we’re a part of, and some examples of our skills and knowledge sharing this year.



Liz White, Director of Library Partnerships, takes part in an IFLA Public Libraries section meeting.

International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA)

IFLA connects library professionals to share best practice and promote the advancement of relevant scientific and professional knowledge. We’re involved in nine strategic groups, including the Advisory Committee on Cultural Heritage, the Information Literacy Section and the LGBTQ+ Users Special Interest Group.

In August 2023 Cecile Communal, our International Office Manager, presented at the LGBTQ+ Users Special Interest Group and Management and Marketing group. She talked about creating safe working environments for LGBTQ+ library employees and marketing supportive LGBTQ+ services. This was to encourage other libraries to set-up their own staff networks to represent LGBTQ+ staff internally.

The Conference of European National Librarians (CENL)

The CENL celebrates and promotes the importance of national libraries across Europe and brings them together to exchange skills and knowledge. We are heavily involved in the CENL network groups, including Books and Audiences, AI in Libraries, and Equity, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, which was set up after we proposed it in 2023.

This year, the Books and Audiences network group organised a webinar called *Libraries: Unlocking Non-Visitor Potential*. In it, our partnership with UK public libraries the Living Knowledge Network's (LKN) Programmes Lead gave a joint presentation with Leeds Libraries on LKN's collaborative exhibitions model. LKN's case study promoted the benefits of national libraries building partnerships with public libraries through collaborative exhibitions. It was part of a series of presentations that explored the role of exhibitions in attracting new audiences.

You can find out more about LKN at living-knowledge-network.co.uk

Right: CENL AGM meeting at Bibliothèque nationale de France.





Protecting collections at risk

Instability around the world and the rise of civil emergencies and climate change means our work to preserve and digitise important collections at risk has never been more important. Expanding the reach of projects like the Endangered Archives Programme (EAP) is vital to the success of this work.

In *Knowledge Matters*, our fourth priority is to work with institutions worldwide whose collections are at risk from war, climate change or civil emergency.

Our programmes, including EAP, allow us to do just that. They help to support international librarians and archivists to digitise thousands of at-risk materials. This not only makes these unique collections accessible globally for research and enjoyment, but also preserves significant historical and cultural documents that may otherwise be lost.

In this section, you'll see just some of the work we've been involved in this year to preserve and safeguard collections all over the globe.

Leaflet: Workshop on cultural heritage photography and 3D object scanning at Jadavpur University, our EAP South Asia Hub.

"I'm thrilled that this year we've been able to renew the Endangered Archives Programme – centred on libraries and collections in danger – until 2032. We're ready to help librarians, collections and archives around the world that are at risk from things like conflict and climate change. And we couldn't do that without Arcadia and their generous support."

Liz Jolly
Chief Librarian, British Library

The Endangered Archives Programme

The Endangered Archives Programme (EAP) helps to digitise archives in danger of destruction, neglect or physical deterioration. This is to preserve cultural heritage and make it available to as wide an audience as possible.

To achieve this we award grants to applicants so they can digitise their collections. We also run training on conservation and digitisation through our EAP Hubs (see page 4 for more on our Hubs).

Arcadia is a charitable foundation that works to preserve cultural heritage and promote open access to knowledge. Thanks to their generous funding for the EAP we've provided grants to digitise more than

13 million

images and

35,000

soundtracks for over

500

projects, in over

90

countries, in more than

100

languages and scripts.

Reviving neglected palm-leaf manuscripts in Laos

Project EAP 1398 received a two-year EAP grant, which finished in 2023. The project involved digitising and conserving many delicate palm-leaf and some leporello (pleated like an accordion) manuscripts.

These unique and culturally significant manuscripts from royal monasteries near the Buddhist city of Luang Prabang, Laos, were sponsored by royalty and the leading Buddhist monks of Laos. But they were close to perishing because of a lack of resources to preserve them.

Thanks to the EAP grant, local people, who had already been trained in digital preservation in previous EAP projects, have preserved and digitised nearly 4,000 documents. So they're now available for the world – and future generations – to see.



Starting a digitisation project?

Read our practical guide, “Remote Capture: Digitising Documentary Heritage in Challenging Locations”.

Read it for free in English or Arabic at eap.bl.uk/remote-capture

See our experts in action

Watch our conservation training videos and expert lectures on fascinating collections from around the world, with subtitles in six languages.

Go to youtube.com/@endangeredarchivesprogramme/playlists



“We talked about strategic things we should have in place before a flood, a fire and so on. You can’t find that on Google. You need help to do that. I didn’t know, for example, that mould sets in within 24 hours of a flood. If there’s a fire, the fire brigade uses water to put it out. But what the fire doesn’t burn gets flooded. It’s how you respond if you’re not skilled to do that. It was really fantastic to be able to talk about it.”

Buhle Mbambo-Thata
University Librarian of the
National University of Lesotho,
Head of EAP Africa Hub

Facing up to new challenges

Climate change is affecting libraries across the world. In Africa natural disasters, temperature rises, fires and floods pose a growing threat.

In October 2023 we were delighted to partner with the EAP African Hub, the National Library of South Africa (NLSA) and the University of Cape Town Libraries. Together we arranged a roundtable discussion on the preservation and conservation of documentary heritage as a strategic imperative for the African continent.

This was in response to various human and natural threats to African cultural and documentary heritage. For example, the fire and flooding that ravaged the University of Cape Town’s Jagger Library in 2021, and the destruction of the South African National Assembly by arson in 2022.

The discussions raised awareness of the need for libraries to have an emergency response, and to budget for and set up conservation practices with an appropriate conservation strategy. As a result there are now working groups in place to help libraries all over the region protect their collections from and during emergencies.





Protecting collections across Africa

Since setting up the EAP Hub in Africa at the National University of Lesotho in 2023 we've been able to spread the word about EAP across the continent. More and more African institutions are getting involved and finding out how they can safeguard their collections from the many different challenges they're facing.

For example, in 2023 the EAP Hub in Africa held a three-day workshop on setting up a digitisation studio on a limited budget. Professionals from Namibia, Zimbabwe, South Africa and Lesotho took part.

Following the workshop the National University of Lesotho was able to set up a digitisation studio on their campus, which is now used to digitise collections.

Left: Setting up a digitisation studio on a budget workshop at National University of Lesotho, our EAP Africa Hub.

“Having the EAP Hub in Africa has been incredibly beneficial. There is a dire need for knowledge and skills on digitisation, and digital preservation is necessary because of disasters related to floods, fires and pests. The Hub and digitisation training has been a bridge between needs and skills. The most exciting part is that digitisation does not have to break the bank. It can be done with limited resources, making it affordable to most organisations.”

Buhle Mbambo-Thata
University Librarian of the
National University of Lesotho,
Head of EAP Africa Hub

“Our visit to the British Library significantly helped us shape the NDLU project. We are grateful that colleagues in London were open with the challenges and lessons learnt from their own development of digital collections, which gave us new ideas and perspectives to scope our own project. We are also grateful to British Library colleagues for remaining available as we continue to develop our project roadmap, budget and fundraising initiatives.”

Oksana Bruy

President of the Ukrainian Library Association

Supporting the National Digital Library of Ukraine

In October 2023 we hosted four librarians from Ukraine working on the National Digital Library of Ukraine (NDLU) – a project supported by International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) and UNESCO. The aim of the NDLU is to save and preserve the country’s cultural written heritage and make it accessible for the future.

The team spent four days with us, discussing things like digital preservation, technology and copyright. They also visited the digital team at The National Archives. The Ukraine team gave us a great insight into their circumstances too. They gave a

presentation on their progress and priorities for the NDLU, as well as the more general situation for Ukrainian libraries in the current conflict.

As part of their visit we also organised a roundtable with many different organisations like the Arts Council, the British Council and the Ukrainian Embassy. We explored how we could continue to support Ukrainian libraries and writers. Many of our colleagues from the sector offered to support and advise the Ukraine team while they define timelines and budget, and then secure funding to create the NDLU.



Right: National Digital Library of Ukraine delegation visits the British Library with colleagues from the International team.

Taking positive climate action

Libraries around the world are increasingly working to reduce their carbon impact and work with their community to contribute to climate-related education, awareness and practical action. So, in autumn 2023, we hosted three webinars focused on libraries' responses to climate emergency.

Each webinar brought together library leaders from around the globe. We welcomed speakers from Toronto Public Library, National Library of Australia, National Library Board Singapore, the University of Liverpool and Cultural Emergency Response, among others.

The first webinar addressed the role of libraries in building climate action through community engagement. The second explored the work libraries are doing to make their buildings sustainable and carbon neutral. The third webinar focussed on preserving collections in the face of rapidly changing conditions.

In a survey after the second and third webinars,

100%
and nearly

89%
(respectively) said the webinar inspired them to take positive climate action, in or outside work.

The Green Libraries Manifesto

The Green Libraries Manifesto encourages libraries to reduce their carbon footprint and increase awareness of environmental issues by engaging with their local communities.

It's hosted by The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals in partnership with Arts Council England, the British Library, Libraries Connected and Julie's Bicycle.

So far, over 200 libraries have signed up. Of those, 42 are international libraries including National Library of Serbia, National Library of Mexico and National and University Library St Clement of Ohrid (North Macedonia).

Find out more about the manifesto at cilip.org.uk/page/GreenLibrariesManifesto



A message from our Chief Executive

The world continues to be an unstable and unpredictable place. The information landscape is changing quickly, and we're living with the global issues of misinformation and cyber threats. National libraries have a vital role to play here. We need to continue to be a trusted source of information and knowledge for people around the world. That's not something any library can do alone.

It's more important than ever for us to join forces with our international partners and connect with valuable global networks. Together, we can all support and learn from each other, build trust and protect important collections – including digital collections – for everyone.

A good example of the importance of partnerships is the major cyber-attack at the Library in 2023. It went against everything libraries represent – openness, empowerment and access to knowledge. We continue to feel the impact, as do our millions of users worldwide.

Since the attack we've been working even harder to encourage collaboration – including sharing our experience with our peers and partners. This will help us all stay informed about our common threats and best practices in cybersecurity. The experience highlighted the incredible generosity of our international community. We thank them for their support as we navigate this unprecedented challenge.

The international work we do at the British Library is fundamental to growing supportive partnerships like this. This year has been no different – as our report shows – and our success was brought into sharp focus as we celebrated 50 years of the British Library in 2023.

For our 50th anniversary we were able to hear voices from around the planet, reflecting on what the British Library means to them. That was inspiring and motivating for the next chapter of the Library's history – to make sure we build on the international connections we've made in recent years, and that our international purpose remains central to the work we do.



Rebecca Lawrence
Chief Executive, British Library

Our plans for the coming months

Next year we're looking forward to building on partnerships we've grown this year – and making new ones. We want to continue to learn from others, share our expertise and safeguard knowledge and information for generations to come.

Here are a few things already in our international diary to help us do that.

Bringing leaders together on climate action

Our Libraries and positive climate action webinar series will be back in autumn 2025. Find out more and how to join us at bl.uk/about-us/international

Writers Revealed

We're delighted to be partnering with the National Portrait Gallery for the first time, on this touring exhibition of portraits of more than 70 writers. Alongside the portraits will be some of the writers' intimate, handwritten manuscripts, letters and notebooks from our collection.

Writers Revealed opens at the Home of the Arts in Queensland in April 2025.

Fantastic Futures 2025

In December 2025, with AI4LAM, the British Library will be hosting Fantastic Futures 2025. The focus of this international conference will be the challenges and opportunities of artificial intelligence for Libraries, Archives, and Museums. For more information go to ai4lam.org

Working to safeguard our South Asian early print collection

In 2024 we partnered with British Council India for a one-year programme of engagements and research and development, which is continuing into 2025.

The aim is to connect with key institutions and researchers in India who may be interested in partnering with us in the future. We hope this will not only build relationships, but also the foundation for a wider digitisation programme that includes our South Asian Early Print collection.

Congress to Campus 2025

In November 2025 our Eccles Institute will bring this flagship programme back to the UK. Former Members of US Congress will give UK students, researchers and the public an insight into the workings of American politics and government.

Sharing skills with more conservation webinars

We're looking forward to running more in this series of training webinars to our partners around the world over the next year.

Across 2025 we'll be hosting sessions which will introduce attendees to library and archive materials, focusing on their manufacture, characteristics, deterioration, storage and care. Find out more and how to register at eap.bl.uk/regional-hubs.

Huge thanks to...

We'd like to say a big thank you to all the people and organisations we've worked with this year.

You've helped us expand our reach, exchange invaluable knowledge and skills, and support teams all over the world to protect and preserve their precious collections.

“The collaboration between our institutions has allowed us to play a crucial role in advocating for and contributing to the preservation of our cultural heritage. It is remarkable to see the swift and impactful actions taken within such a short timeframe to address the critical issue of preserving cultural heritage, especially the archives that are endangered.”

Elie Kahale

Director of Digital Initiatives and Scholarship, University Libraries, American University of Beirut

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