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The British Library

Annual Report 1995-1996

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Introduction

Throughout 1995/96 the British Library has continued to consolidate its position as a world leader in library services by continuing to make the Library's services and collection more widely known and available. The Library has continued to seek opportunities for closer working relationships with the higher education and commercial sectors and with other libraries. Demand for the Library's services has continued to increase both in terms of document and record supply, and some significant additions to the collection have been made. Towards the end of the year, the Library's excellent record has been overshadowed by a substantial budget cut.

Grant-in-Aid

The Library's budget for 1996/97 and planning figures for 1997/98 - 1998/99 represent a substantial shortfall on the levels of Grant-in-Aid funding that the Library had been seeking; for example the budget for occupying, running and operating the new

St Pancras building was reduced to 65% of the funding level that the Library had been seeking.

In planning for the next four years, the Library has assigned top priority to achieving a successful opening of St Pancras. The Library has also sought to protect future investment in a limited number of critical corporate developments such as a new current awareness and document supply service (DiSCover), in the Corporate Bibliographic Programme, in 'digital library' developments, and growth in storage capacity will continue. However, significant cuts in acquisitions funding approximating some £3 million per annum have been required, and these have been targeted principally at cancelling duplicate overseas journal tiles and reducing expenditure on heritage items. The Library's annual budget for conservation has been reduced by £1 million and cuts have also been made in IT expenditure, research grants, and in service provision from the National Sound Archive and Oriental and India Office Collections. In addition, Government pay policy has capped Grant-in-Aid funded salary expenditure at last year's cash level: a reduction of some 200 posts will be required over the planning period. The majority of these posts will be lost through natural wastage, but a senior management restructuring exercise to be undertaken in parallel will reduce staffing at these levels by 20% and some 20 voluntary redundancies will be required over the next year.

New building at St Pancras

Considerable progress was made towards completion of the new building and the Library now has much greater confidence and certainty about its handover. Handover of the completed building remains, as scheduled, the beginning of 1997. Book moves into the new building are scheduled to commence in November 1996 and the opening of the first reading room to general humanities readers will take place a year later.

Legislation

An internal working party has continued to develop the Library's plans for the legal deposit of non-book materials. In January, a proposal was submitted to the Department of National Heritage seeking new legislation to enforce the comprehensive legal deposit of publications in non-print form which are not covered by the current UK legislation. It is hoped that the proposed legislation may be carried within the lifetime of the current Parliament.

Acquisitions and Exhibitions

The Library bought three important heritage acquisitions - the archive of the 17th century diarist John Evelyn, the Lansdowne Papers and the Clive Papers. The Library also received as a donation from the Delius Trust its collection of autograph scores of the composer, Frederick Delius. The Library purchased the Curzon Papers which had been deposited on indefinite loan between 1962 and 1977, the best known and most heavily-used of the private collections held by the British Library. During the year, the Library was able to continue its policy of maintaining a programme of high-profile exhibitions such as *The Glory of the Temple and the Stage; Henry Purcell, 1659-1695* and *The Earth and the Heavens; the Art of the Mapmaker*.

Automation and data processing

The Library's Information Systems Strategy was published at the end of 1995. The programme of retrospective catalogue conversions continued. Work continued on the Maps Library conversion and the India Office and Library Records European Books catalogue. Feasibility studies were undertaken into the conversion of Manuscripts and Science Reference & Information

Service retrospective catalogues. The conversion of the Newspaper Library printed catalogue was completed. During the year, over one million user transactions were recorded on Portico, the Library's World Wide Web server. Portico includes text, sound and images relating to the Library's treasures and an interactive 'virtual tour' of the new Library building at St Pancras. At the end of the period under review the Library announced the availability of its BLAISE-LINE service on the World Wide Web.

Public Relations

The Library's public relations objective has been to widen the public's perception of the work of the national library. This has been supported by explaining more fully the Library's support for business and industry, the professionalism of its staff and its ability to develop and use new technology.

The British Library's World Wide Web pages on the Internet, Portico, contains information about the Library and images from the collection. Such famous items as Magna Carta and the electronic version of the manuscript of Beowulf are available to internet users anywhere in the world. One of the Library's greatest treasures, the only complete extant copy of the 1526 William Tyndale translation of the New Testament, is to form the centrepiece of a travelling exhibition in the USA beginning this autumn.

International Co-operation

The British Library has continued to forge relations with other National Libraries. Dr Lang and Dr van Drimmelen, the Chief Executive of the Koninklijke Bibliotheek, signed a collaborative agreement formalising and strengthening an already close relationship. Specific goals of the agreement included: widening of access to the two libraries catalogues and collections; shared

responses to the opportunities created by information technology; participation in European and International projects and the development of state of the art networked services. The agreement was the first of its kind between the British Library and one of its European counterparts, but was indicative of the developments made this year to pursue international cooperation, culminating in the Chief Executives participation in the World Library Leaders Summit held in New York in April 1996. The Library continues to participate in a number of EU-funded projects including BIBLINK, KSYSEERROR, UseMARCon, UNIverse, Paragon, and INCIPIT.

The Library also continues to manage the CoBRA - programme. The initial CoBRA contract expired in March 1996 and to date several feasibility studies and research reports have been commissioned and two small-scale projects are under way. Of particular interest to the Library was a wide-ranging study followed up by a workshop on the implications for national libraries of the legal deposit of electronic documents. Other studies included a detailed exposition of models for national bibliographic services. Two projects will deliver prototypes on the application of new character set standards and the linking of national authority files.

The Library and the European Commission have negotiated a new contract for CoBRA which will run for a further two years from May 1996. The new initiative called CoBRA+ will build upon and extend the work of CoBRA beyond bibliographic considerations to explore the issues for national libraries in the legal deposit, access and archiving of electronic publications and digital resources.