



Supporting you in strategic planning

The issue facing academic and research libraries today is what should their role be in the changing academic and technological landscape. Scenario planning is a way of addressing such challenges. It is a way of systematically dealing with uncertainty to inform long-term strategic decisions.

The Academic Libraries of the Future project has developed three scenarios which describe possible futures for teaching and research libraries in the UK. They take the economic, social and other pressures faced by the world today and create futures in which Higher Education (HE) and libraries have evolved in different directions. They describe a world some distance away in the future, beyond 2020. The scenarios will help HE institutions and other organisations look at the challenges faced from a fresh focus and help them formulate strategies to ensure the sector continues to be a leading global force. The scenarios are based on the contributions from a wide range of stakeholders at workshops during 2010 and 2011 – librarians, institutional managers, funders, service providers, publishers and government.

This flyer outlines the scenarios, their use for strategic planning and what are the important steps you should take to put this in place in your institution. The terms 'library' and 'librarian'; are used throughout. This is not intended to imply that libraries or librarians as we know them will continue to exist; rather these are a convenient shorthand for an organisation or individual that carries out all or any aspects of information/knowledge management, curation and preservation and information literacy training. Similarly, 'librarianship' is a convenient shorthand for all aspects of the skill sets required to be a good 'librarian'. There can be no assumption that a library, librarians or librarianship will exist beyond 2020 in the same forms as today.

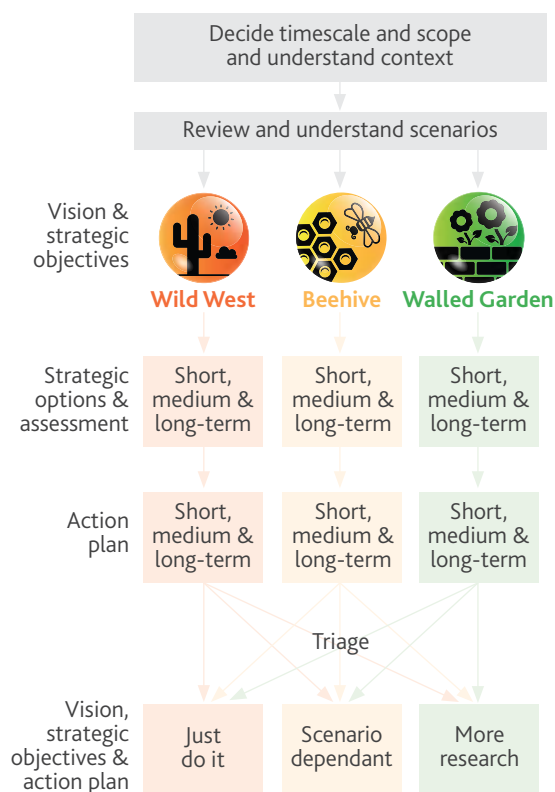
How to use the scenarios

Scenarios create a shared language for understanding the environment in which they are operating, and for discussing future options for academic libraries. They can be used to frame strategic discussions between stakeholders, and can improve decision-making. For example, people find it engaging to be asked: What would our organisation be like under each scenario?

How would we plan for each scenario? Which scenario is better for us? What are the decision points when action has to be taken for each scenario? What are the policies and actions that are indicated under all the scenarios? Workshops or strategy work can be built around the scenarios and these types of questions.

The scenarios can be used in a variety of ways: assessing existing strategies; developing new strategies; highlighting early indicators of change; providing a long-term planning focus; and avoiding complacency. Strategies can be developed which are robust for all scenarios. This is the most demanding use as it requires careful evaluation of the different elements of the strategy against differing assumptions about the future. Alternatively, a single scenario might be chosen that represents a strongly desired future. The scenarios can be used to develop a strategy at the institutional level for a future library or at the sector level to support development of sector-level bodies, say.¹

The 'how to use the scenarios' guide² sets out a detailed approach for library strategy development. It also documents issues and insights for the scenarios and for the sector.



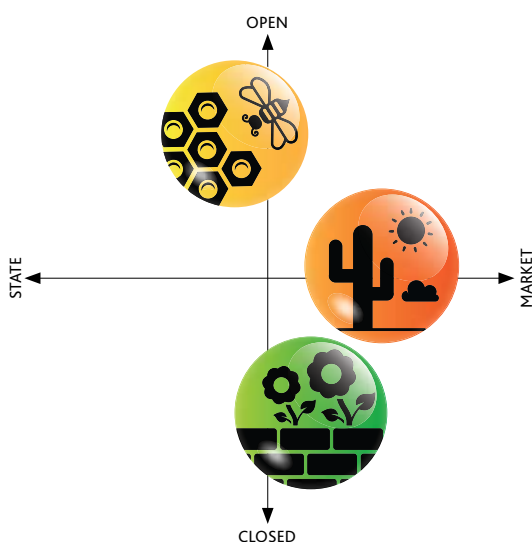


These, together with the institution's overall culture, practice and strategy and the scenarios themselves form the starting point for library strategy development.

Once a strategy has been developed, the institution should establish, continually monitor and review early indicators that suggest which scenario might occur and then adapting the strategy as necessary.

The scenarios

Scenarios are not predictions about the future; rather they describe possible futures. The workshops identified the critical factors that led to the highest impact on, and most uncertainty about, the future. These form the axes for scenarios: whether society and HE have open or closed values and whether HE provision is dominated by the state or by the market. Market here can be that operated either by the state or private sector. Three scenarios were developed that explore these axes.³



Wild West

'Wild West' has a no-holds-barred free-for-all flavour. Specifically, this world is dominated by capitalism and corporate power, including the HE sector. Private providers compete with each other and the state to offer students educational services, including information services and learning material. The power lies in the hands of the consumer ('student' being a rather old-fashioned term) who is able to pick and choose from courses and learning materials to create a personal educational experience.

Beehive

'Beehive' draws obvious parallels with the hierarchical and structured life of the bee colony, where all is ordered to ensure the common good

of the whole community. The Beehive scenario is a world in which society and HE have open values and the state is the primary funder and controller of HE. Its overriding aim is the production of a skilled workforce, and to this end it has created a largely homogenous HE system for the masses while allowing the elite to attend the few traditional institutions. A limited market is used to provide competition within the HE system to drive up quality.

Walled Garden

A 'Walled Garden' is an oasis, shut-off from the outside world. Inhabitants of the garden neither know nor care much about the world beyond the garden's comforting walls. After all, how could the flowers out there possibly be any better than those within the garden? HEIs in this scenario are 'Walled Gardens'. The closed nature of society makes HEIs insular and inward-looking, isolated from other institutions by competing value systems. Provision of information services in this world is as much concerned with protecting their own materials from others as it is in enabling access.

Next steps

To use scenario planning to develop a long-term strategy for your library or for the library sector, you should: read the 'how to use the scenarios' guide² and read the scenarios.³ You can then decide how to apply scenario planning:

- just plan against all three of the scenarios as described above;
- just plan against selected scenarios that you think may represent a potential future world that meets your institution's vision of itself;
- plan against additional or replacement scenarios that you generate to reflect the needs of your organisation.

Further information

Further information on LotF, help on using the scenarios and all papers referenced here can be found at www.futurelibraries.info

There are many available resources to help with understanding and using scenario planning. Useful guidance can be found in books by Gill Ringland,^{4,5} on the JISC InfoNet website⁶ and on the FOR-LEARN website.⁷ However, as ever, practical experience is the key. It is recommended that if you have not used scenarios before that you should either use an experienced facilitator or attend one of the available training courses on scenario planning.

1 The fragmentation of the Walled Garden scenario essentially precludes the concept of a sector.

2 *How to use the scenarios*, CC413D042-1.0, 8 April 2011.

3 *Scenarios for 2050* CC413D040-1.0, 31 March 2011.

4 *Scenario planning*, Gill Ringland, 2nd edition, John Wiley and Sons, 2006.

5 *Scenarios in public policy*, Gill Ringland, John Wiley and Sons, 2002.

6 <http://www.jiscinfonet.ac.uk/tools/scenario-planning> (accessed 14 March 2011).

7 <http://forlearn.jrc.ec.europa.eu> (accessed 14 March 2011).