

## SCONUL Benchmarking Statistics – Case Study

Cost reductions are sadly an unavoidable part of everyday life for many UK universities. For many library services, their budget falls broadly into 3 main areas – staffing, operational and information resources. The dreaded phrase ‘do more with less’ can be applied, within reason, to staffing and operational but is difficult to apply to information resources. Learners and researchers need access to information resources in order to achieve academic success and, traditionally, librarians have worked hard to ensure that collections are aligned with the teaching and research ambitions of the institution. The librarian’s natural instinct is, therefore, to protect the information resources budget wherever possible. So what action can you take when a reduction in the resources budget is unavoidable?

At the end of 2018, university X found itself in this position. Having undergone budget reductions in the previous 5 years, the request to produce a scenario that would make a further 20% reduction was a significant challenge. Up until this point the library had pared back staffing and reduced operational spend to a minimum and whilst the information resources budget had undergone a small reduction (and reductions in real spend caused by inflation), this area of the budget had been relatively protected. Scenarios were presented to senior management with the library’s senior leadership team representative given the task of having to explain the potential impact of these.

The day before the senior leadership team met, the senior manager asked for the most recent SCONUL data and, in particular, the Information Spend per FTE student against the university’s basket of comparators. By coincidence, the SCONUL Strategic Planning Set had just been released and so a quick manipulation of the tables to pull out the comparator data was all that was required for the library staff to be able to brief the senior manager. During the meeting, the senior manager then used this data to show the impact of a high, medium or low reduction and how university X would then compare against the competition. Given that some level of reduction was unavoidable, this resulted in the senior leadership team choosing to take the lower risk option, which, it was felt, could be managed carefully, thereby avoiding a major impact on the student experience. The SCONUL data ensured that the senior leadership team of the university were able to make an informed decision.