

COVID-19 SURVEY REPORT

How Have Academic Libraries Responded to the Covid-19 Crisis?

71% COMPLETION RATE

RUNNING TIME: 16TH OCTOBER - 23RD NOVEMBER 2020

298 RESPONSES FROM LIBRARIES WITHIN EUROPE AND BEYOND



December 2020 | www.libereurope.eu





About LIBER

LIBER (Ligue des Bibliothèques Européennes de Recherche – Association of European Research Libraries) is the main network for research libraries in Europe. Founded in 1971, LIBER has grown steadily to include more than 400 national, university and other libraries from over 40 countries.

Together we work to represent the interests of European research libraries, their universities and their researchers by advocating on issues such as Copyright and Open Access, by collaborating on European-funded projects, and by meeting and learning at events such as our Annual Conference.

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1 Executive Summary - About the Survey

On the 19th of October 2020, LIBER launched a survey across its network. The goal of the survey was twofold. First, to get a better grasp of the state of European research libraries, and second, to understand how we can help our member libraries. Both goals were specific to the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. A little over a month and nearly 300 participants later, LIBER has insightful data to share with you in this report.

Initially, our survey was sent to LIBER members only, but we decided to extend the invitation to all library professionals who wanted to participate. Every voice matters and the more information and diversity of responses we have, the more realistic the results.

We were also hoping to get additional insights into copyright issues faced by libraries, but we see, however, that there is more work to be done on this topic for us to get very specific results. Hence, the topic of copyright will be addressed in separate surveys in the future.

Moreover, our survey was designed to be open-ended and to allow for extensive comments. Except for a short legal question at the start of the survey, no questions were mandatory. There were several multiple-choice questions and many open-ended questions with room for comments.

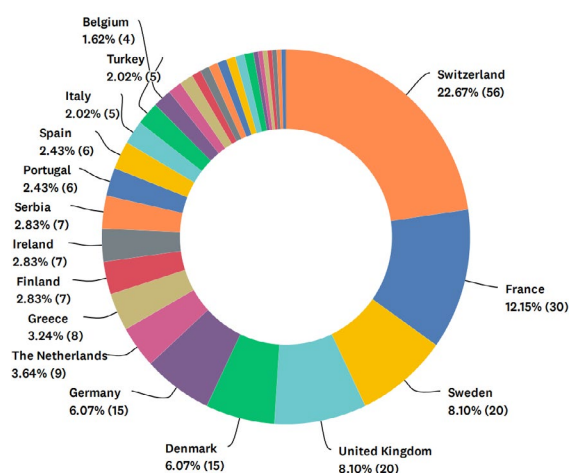
2 Participating Countries

A total of 31 countries participated in the survey, with 2 entries from non-identified countries, although from the comments, these countries are assumed to be Montenegro and Lichtenstein.

Switzerland accounts for 22,67% of the answers (56 responses), followed by France at 12,15% (30), and then both Sweden and the UK at 8,0% (20) each. Denmark and Germany accounted for 6,07% (15) each, followed by the Netherlands with 3,64% (9).

As we have the most results from Switzerland and northern European countries, we believe this affects the overall results and conclusions we can derive. To understand results in a regional context, we created different analysis filters to show results from selected categories in the form of graphs. To do so, we used the LIBER ABC member categories (see Annex), which are originally taken from the European Council's categories. LIBER uses these categories to identify its membership fees for libraries and institutions.

Note that in no way do these categories reflect any opinion regarding any country's status. Note also that overall results included in this report cover all participating countries and institutions.

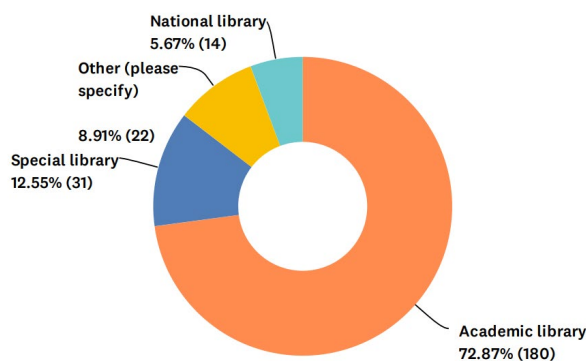


Q.3. In which country is your library located?



3 Types of Institutions

We saw that most institutions 72.87% (180 responses), whose members participated in the survey, are academic libraries. Special libraries come in second at 12.55% (31), other types (municipal, school, public, national and university, hospital, international organisation, state, cantonal, both academic and public, school and public libraries, and library consortium) at 8.91% (22), and national libraries at 5.67% (14) respectively. 51 participants did not indicate their type of institution.



4 Key Findings (all countries included)

We would like to point out that all these answers include the 56 responses from Switzerland specifically and hence may not accurately reflect the overall situation for libraries across Europe and beyond.

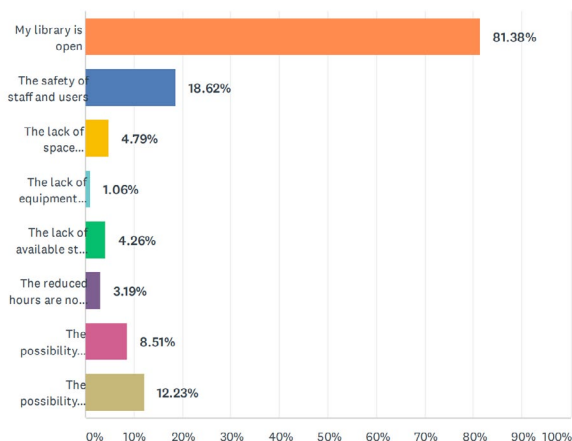
Findings for sections 1 & 2 of the survey

1: Fall 2020, current library situation.

2: Availability of services and materials.

1) Main Concerns with Libraries Reopening (Q.10).

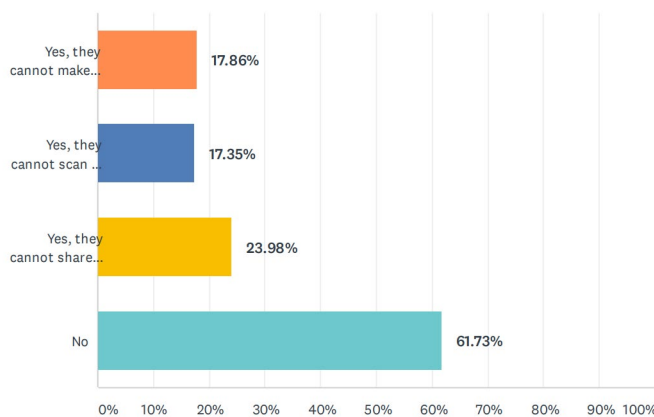
When asked their main concerns with libraries reopening, 153 respondents (81.38%) opted for the option to indicate that their libraries were/are still open. Therefore, the rest of the shown percentages appear low.





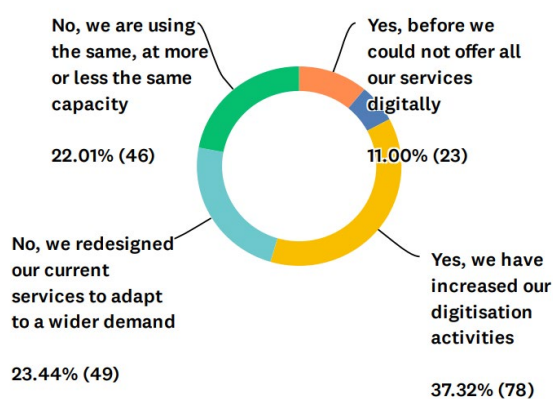
- The safety of their staff and users 18.62% (35).
- The possibility that the physical roles of libraries will be challenged 12.23% (23).
- One participant added that their concern was not physically seeing their patrons as much.

2) Usage of digital materials for remote purposes, because of copyright law infringement (Q.15).



- 61.73% (121) of participants did not have trouble with the usage of digital materials for remote purposes, because of copyright law infringement.
- The rest answered Yes because they cannot share copyright-protected content (23.98%) (47).
- 17.86% (35) answered Yes, they cannot make physical copies of materials.
- 17.35% (34) answered Yes, they cannot scan or copy materials for online teaching.

3) Increase/change of digital services (Q.16).

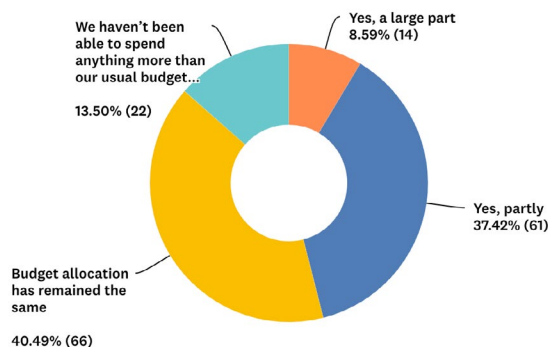


- 37.32% (78) of participants answered that they increased their digital services and applications to cope with Covid-19.
- 23.44% (49) said they redesigned current digital services.
- 22.01% (46) answered that this remained somewhat like before.



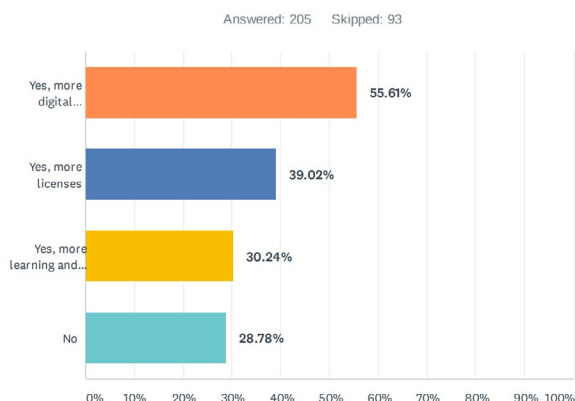
- 11% (23) answered Yes, they increased their digital services because before they could not offer all of them digitally.

4) Redirection of expenses towards digital services (Q.17).



- 41.87% (85) of participants answered that their budget allocation has remained the same.
- 37.93% (77) replied with Yes, partly.
- 7.88% (16) Yes, largely.
- 12.32% (25) answered they were not able to spend more than their usual budget.

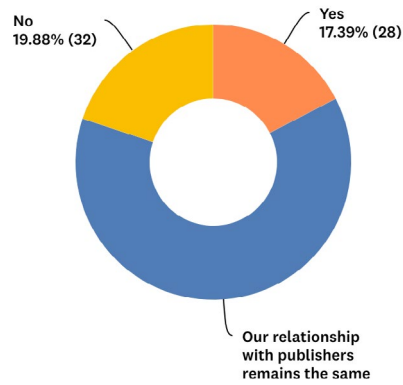
5) Acquisition of more digital materials, licenses, learning & teaching software due to Covid-19 (Q.19).



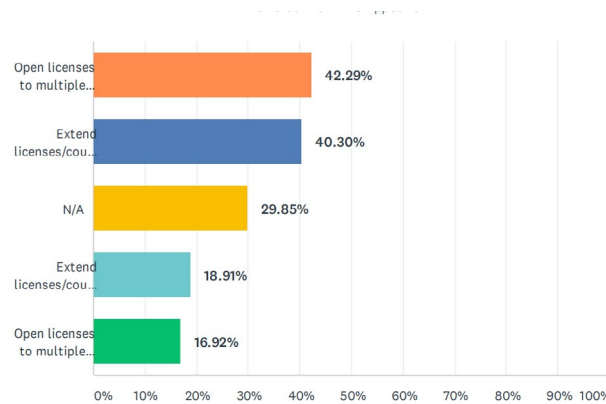
- A little over half of participants, 55.61% (114) said Yes to more digital materials.
- 39.02% said Yes to more licenses (80).
- and 30.24% (62) said Yes to more learning & teaching software.
- 28.78% (59) answered No.

6) Difficulty with publishers regarding licenses and prices (Q.20).

- 59.50% (119) participants said that their relationship remained the same.
- 25% (50) said No.
- 15.5% (31) said Yes.

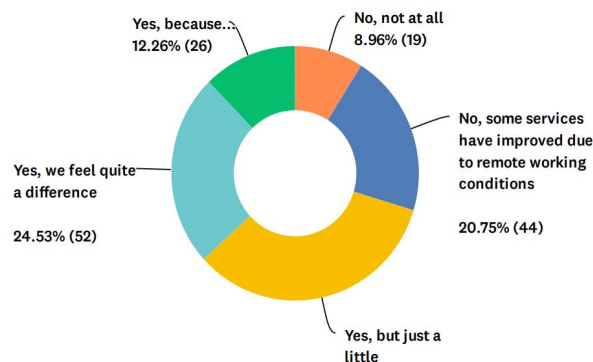


7) Publishers' temporary license extensions (Q.21).



- 42.29% (85) of participants had open licenses to multiple users for free and 16.92% (34) for a reduced fee.
- 40.30% (81) had extended licenses/courses for free and 18.91% (38) for a reduced fee.

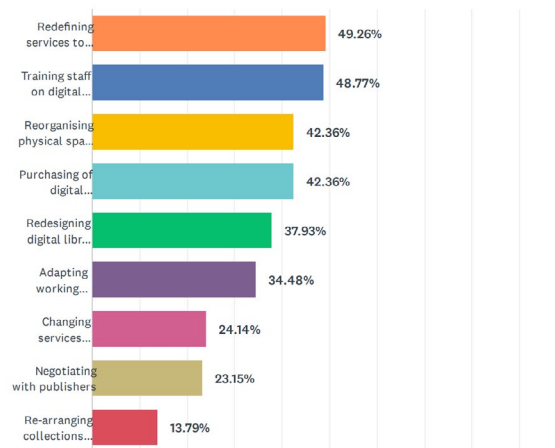
8) Quality of library services (Q.23).



- 33.49% (71) of participants answered that the quality of library services was affected, but only a little.
- 24.53% (52) said Yes and that they feel quite a difference.
- 12.26% (26) also said Yes because of different reasons.

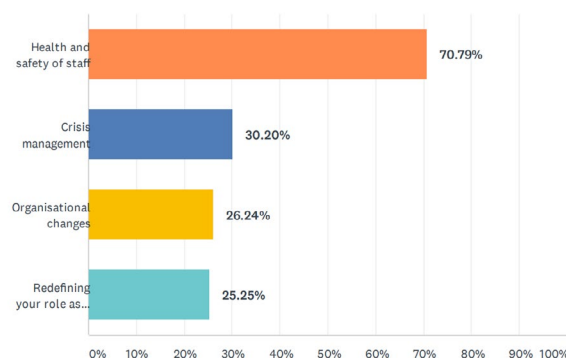


9) Main focuses by end of March 2021 (Q.25).



- Redefining services 49.26% (100) received the highest response.
- Followed by training staff on digital skills at 48.77% (99).
- Reorganising of spaces and purchasing of digital material followed at 42.36% (86) for each, and the redesigning of digital libraries at 37.93% (77).
- Negotiating with publishers got 23.15% (47).

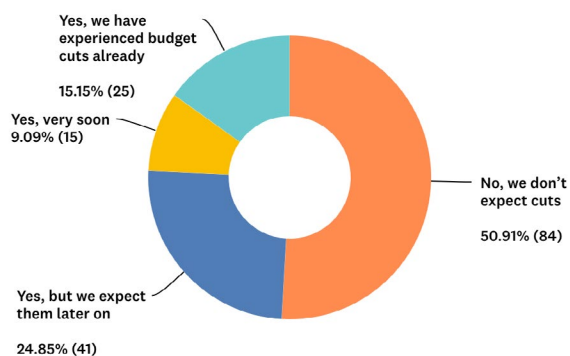
10) Main concerns about the Covid-19 crisis in general (Q.26).



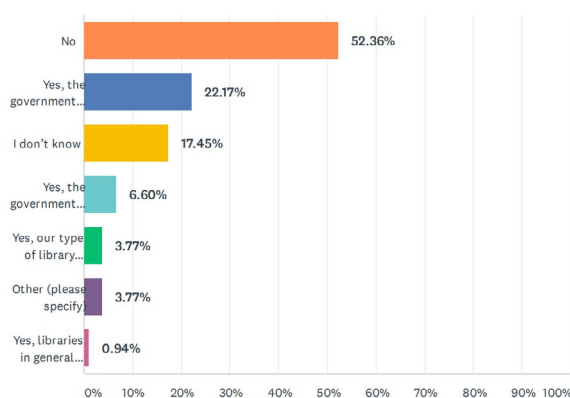
- Health and safety of staff 70.79% (143).
- Crisis management 30.20% (61).
- Organisational changes 26.24% (53).
- Redefining the library's role 25.24% (51).

11) Budget cuts forecast for next academic year (Q.27).

- 52.20% (107) said No cuts were planned.
- 22.44% (46) said Yes, cuts were planned for later on.
- 10.24 (21) said Yes, cuts would happen soon.
- 15.12% (31) said Yes, cuts have already happened.



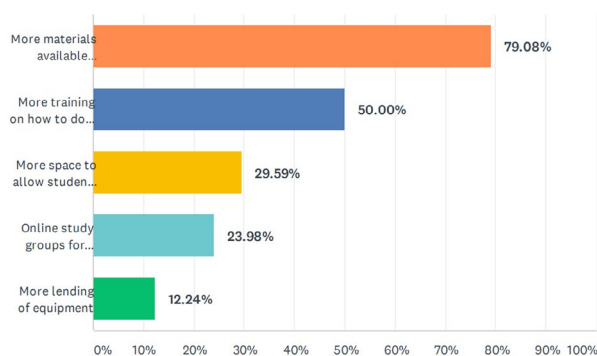
12) Government support (Q.28).



- 52.36% (111) answered that there was no governmental support.
- 22.17% (47) said that their library, or their type of library, 6.60% (14), received health and safety measures.
- 3.77% (8) answered that their library or their type of library 0.94% (2), received extra budget.

Findings for sections 3 - How can LIBER support you?

1) What would benefit most libraries (Q.29).

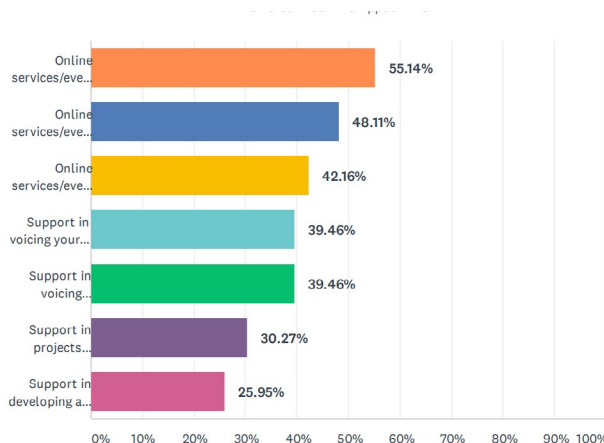




The top 3 answers were:

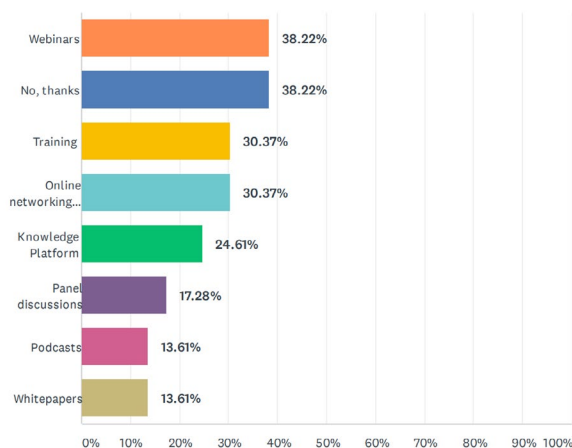
- 79.08% (155) want More materials available digitally.
- 50% (98) want More training on how to do online research.
- 29.59% (58) want More physical space to use materials.

2) What services can LIBER provide? (Q.30).



- Online services and events to support Open Access; help librarians cope with Covid-19; and support in moving towards complete digitisation were the top 3 at 55.14% (102), 48.11% (89) and 42.16% (78) respectively.
- Support in voicing concerns to European Parliament and budgetary issues within the context of Covid-19 at European level received 39.46% (73 responses) each.

3) Support in creating/organising (Q.31).

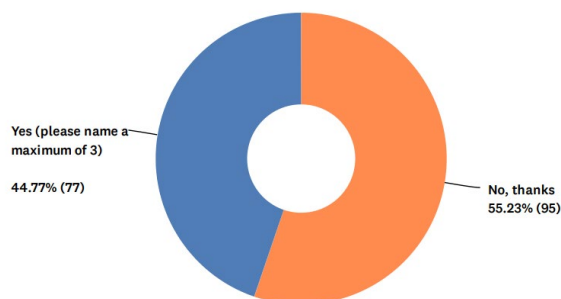


- Webinars received 38.22% (73).
- 38.22% said that they don't need any support here.
- Training and Online Networking received 30.37% (58 responses) each.
- The knowledge platform received 24.61% (47), panel discussions, podcasts, and whitepapers came in last.



4) Support with studies at European level (Q.32).

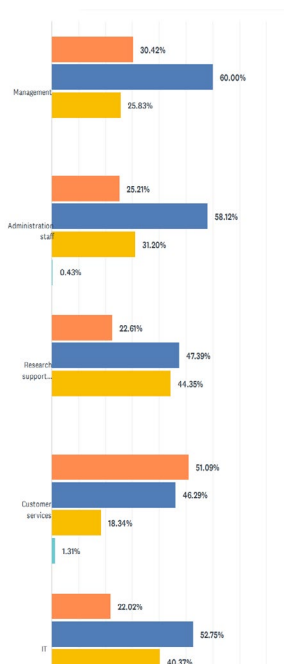
- A surprising majority 55.23% (95) answered No, thanks.
- 44.77% (77) provided varied answers on topics such as Copyright, Covid-19, Open Access, Open Education, and Open Science.



5 Observations next to Key Findings

5) How or from where are staff currently working? (Q.5).

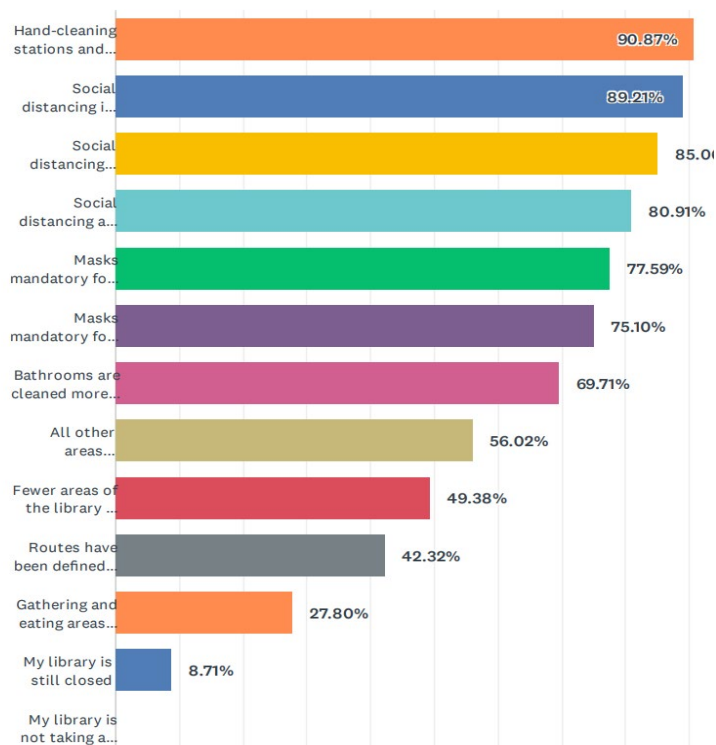
A very low percentage of staff was/is not able to perform their tasks. Management and administrative staff were/are the highest scorers for on-site part-time work. Customer services and digitisation staff, however, indicated that they worked about as much on-site as they did remotely, although customer services ranked the highest as did working on site. Learning and teaching staff, research support and IT (slightly bigger difference) selected that they worked almost as much remotely, as they did part-time on-site.





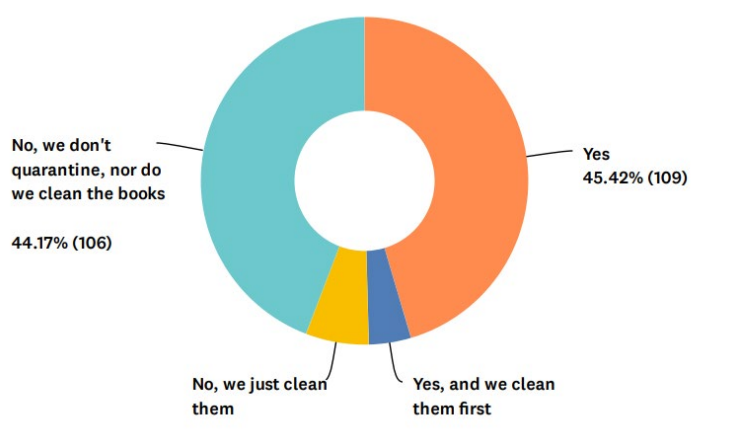
6) Types of Covid-19 measures (Q.6).

Participants could choose several answers. Hand-sanitising stations were the top answer with 91%, closely followed by social distancing measures, the wearing of masks, and the cleaning of bathrooms and communal areas. None of the libraries indicated they are not taking any measures. It is worth noting that some libraries work digitally only, hence measures may not apply.



7) Books quarantine (Q.7).

Participants could choose several answers. Hand-sanitising stations were the top answer with 91%, closely followed by social distancing measures, the wearing of masks, and the cleaning of bathrooms and communal areas. None of the libraries indicated they are not taking any measures. It is worth noting that some libraries work digitally only, hence measures may not apply.



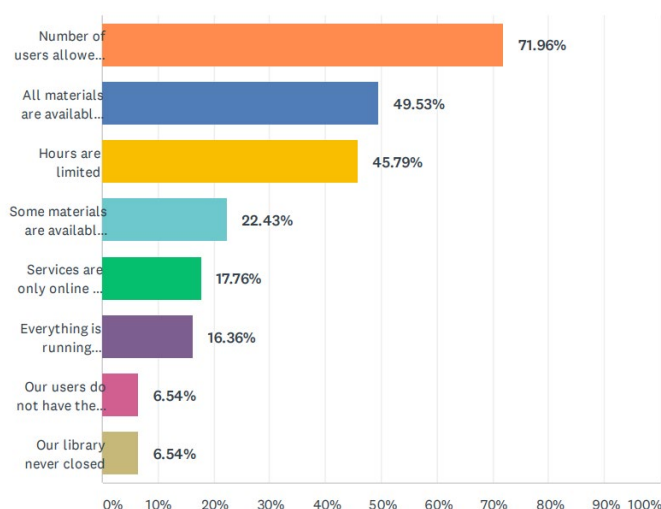


8) Library being open (Q.10).

At the time of the survey (late October - late November), almost all participants indicated that their library was open.

9) Completeness of services (Q.11).

The number one answer was that the number of users inside the premises was/is limited. In the comments, participants expressed that staff members are largely the only ones accessing shelves to obtain material. They then pass this on to users. Opening times have also been reduced. Material is mostly available through reservation only. There is an increased demand for e-books. Online services have increased, as well as online learning, training, and workshops. Services such as collection and scanning have been added as well as free interlibrary loans (ILL).

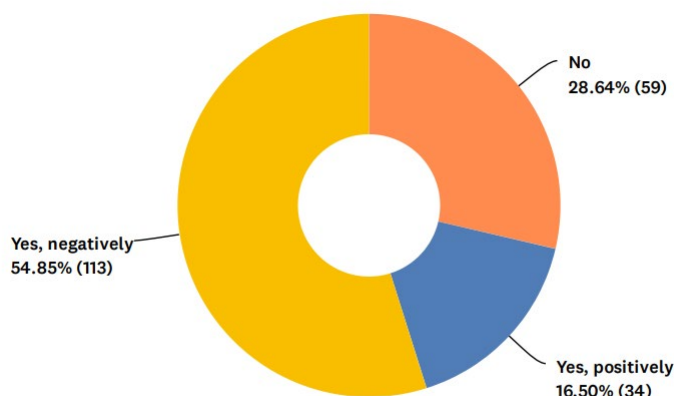


10) Lending of material (Q.12-13-14).

October to end November saw the highest-lending rate so far. The period of March-July however was when the loan period of material was extended the most. Some libraries chose not to extend their loan period because they believe 4 months is sufficient for books. Other participants pointed out that they are not a loaning library. Other participants added that the extensions were due to giving increased access to students for physical textbooks. Quite a few reported their materials are for in-library use and some are online-only. One reported they were striving to buy additional copies of material. While a larger portion of participants answered that there were no significant changes to their Interlibrary loans (ILL) services, others reported differently. Some said that there was an increase in ILL. Some libraries found it more difficult to lend and borrow material, and participants realised that varying conditions affected ILL services differently, and from one library to the other. A few reported that their lending libraries were less strict with due dates and overdue fees, others were following national lending policies.



11) Library projects (Q.22).

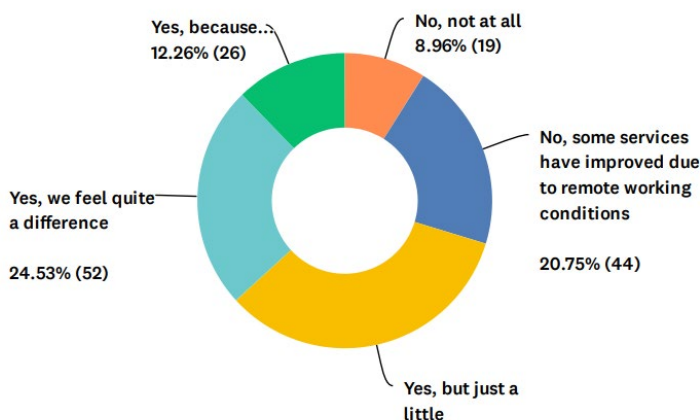


More than half the participants answered that projects were affected negatively. In many of the comments, participants wrote that events such as exhibitions, conferences, lectures, promotions were postponed or even cancelled. Most renovation projects were also cancelled or postponed, although some institutions did take the occasion to renovate and revamp the premises. There was a hiring freeze reported, and a postponement of strategy. Digitisation projects suffered at several libraries.

A small portion was affected positively. There was more activity reported for the development of new online services (such as a chat service), and training, digitisation of material, increase of library material, e-books, improvement of library infrastructure, metadata catalogue, PhD Thesis workflow, inventorisation of autographs etc. One noted that a seminar was converted to a virtual format, which saw a greater reach and more support from other institutions.

34 of the participants reported that their projects were not affected.

12) Services quality level (Q.23).



19 of the respondents reported no difference in their library's service level. The rest answered Yes with varying degrees. Guidance online is not as good as face-to-face and our materials will never all be online, said one participant. The absence of physical presence was a problem in some cases such as in a museum library.



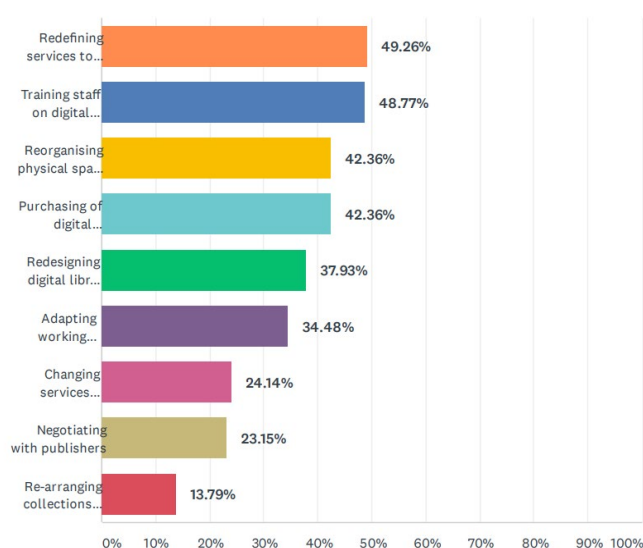
Online trainings are not as efficient said another participant; it is difficult to show the library to students this way, wrote another. Participants miss interaction with students and professors. Although interaction online was OK, it would be better physically. Some reported fewer study spaces. Tied to this, there were less students in the library, and they also have less possibility to obtain help or learning resources. Opening hours are more limited and this also affects students from other libraries, said one participant. Working on Open Science was more challenging because of limited interaction with labs. Onsite services suffered because they would typically include student engagement through hosting events. Delivery services suffered as well due to limited access to packages and rudimentary administrative work. There is also limited library staff on site making responses to enquiries slower and causing a cataloguing backlog. In this case, it is difficult to help with research that requires access to print materials, manuscripts, and archives.

On a more positive note, one comment expressed that engagement had increased because of online possibilities, another reported to offer more digital services. Staff worked very hard to keep up their services. Educational IT skills have improved, reported another participant. The quality of research support and teaching/learning services has either remained the same or improved, said another participant and yet another said they are focussing more on such topics. One noted how the transformation to a digital/online environment can improve services.

13) Focus for March 2021 (Q.25).

Other than the top choices that were previously reported, a few points were also deemed as important: redefining services to help students and researchers more effectively; training staff on digital skills; reorganising physical spaces to accommodate social distancing; and purchasing of digital materials.

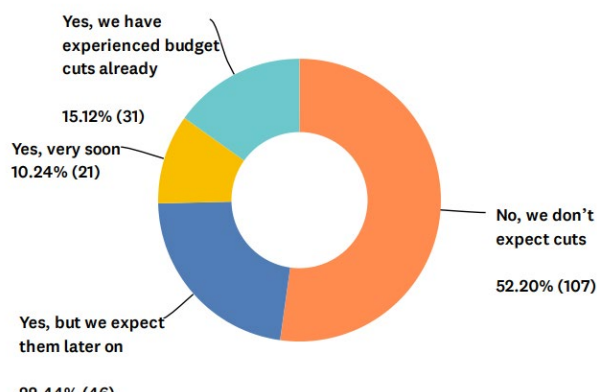
Respondents offered the following additional information: online training for students, redesigning educational activities, as well as online activities, the latter which was mentioned quite a few times. Adapting to new regulations, student training, more online training, increased communication, crisis communication, and HR management were also mentioned in the comments.





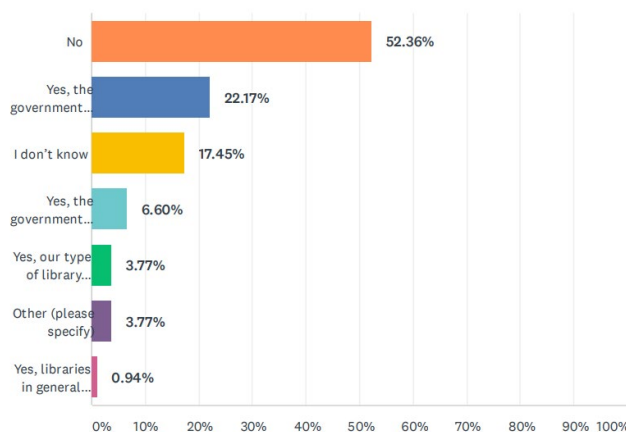
14) Do you foresee budget cuts? (Q.27).

While a little more than half of the total number of participants answered No, we don't foresee budgets cuts, the rest said Yes. 10%, 5% and 15% of the budget were the top three estimations that were shared. The highest was 39% by one participant followed by 30% from another.



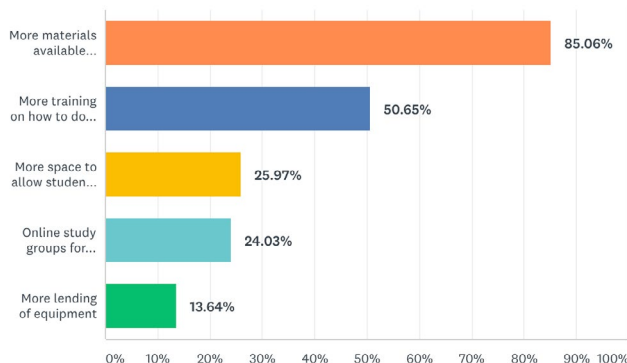
15) Government support (Q.28).

While results have been noted in the key findings from the previous section, two comments stand out. One participant wrote that copyright limitations for sharing ILL material digitally with end-users were temporarily lifted (Germany). Another wrote there was political and financial support to get licenses (from the national copyright organisation) for providing digital library copyright-protected content to users during the pandemic (Latvia).



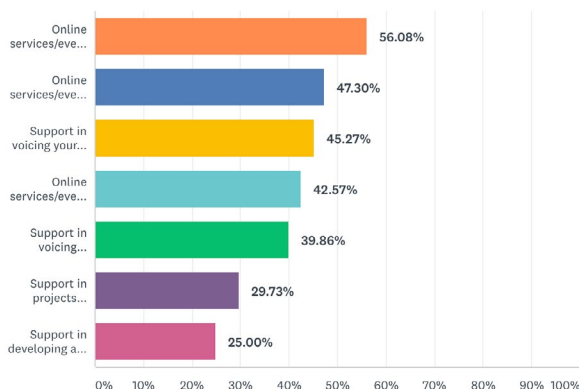
16) What would benefit users most in the current context (Q.29).

More materials available digitally was the top answer. In the comments, copyright concerns were brought up: enabling the library to send/share digital copies of their own collection more easily on e-learning platforms (currently limited due to copyright restrictions) (Germany); easier access to more Open Access materials (unknown country); and changes to copyright legislation to allow more material to be made available to users (UK).



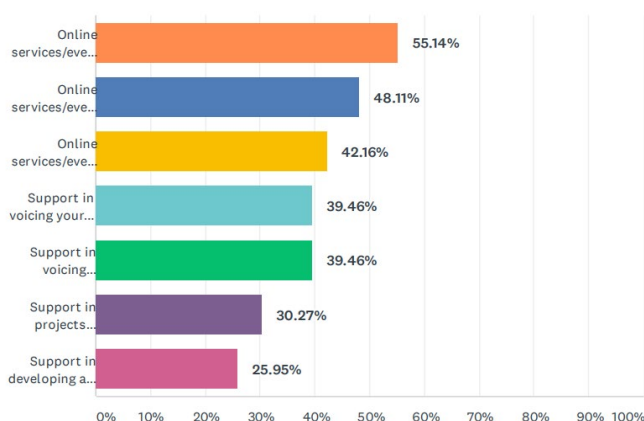
17) Services that LIBER can provide (Q.30).

There is a concern with publishers and the pricing of e-books. One respondent wrote that they would like support in fighting the increase in pricing of e-books and e-textbooks. Another expressed a concern with researchers' and publishers' attitudes toward Open Access. E-lending throughout Europe, support for cooperation between scientific libraries, financial support from the EU for conversion to digital services, support on copyright and Open Education. One party mentioned they would like more lobbying on the costs for digital resources.



18) Support in creating/organising types of activities (Q.31).

Next to the types of activities we offered, participants found it important to outline that they would like support in acquiring better equipment for digitisation, digital services, setting up Open Access material for research, and organising direct dialogue between staff to exchange experiences.

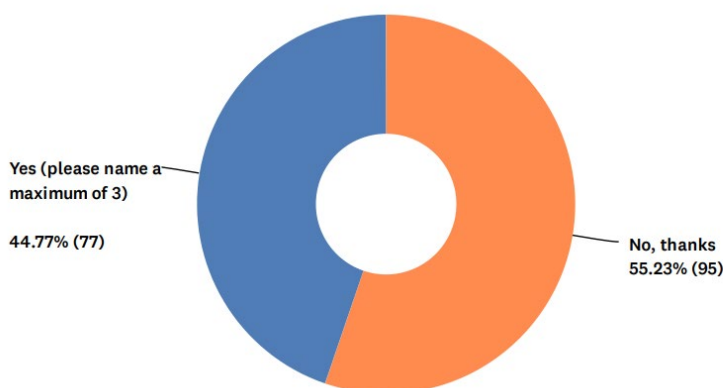




19) Support with studies at European level (Q.32).

This question garnered 77 answers from participants. The topics of increasing or defining digital research services, digitisation, training for digital skills, are very prominent. How to deal with Covid-19 in libraries, physically, on a skills level, on a service level, and redefining the relevance or the new role of libraries and librarians, also topped the list.

The impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in analysing trends and research behaviour was mentioned as a topic to explore for further research. Have research skills improved? Do users have the tools and skills they need? User patterns and changes was another suggestion. Citizen Science Open Access was mentioned in several questions. Is Open Access a trend or a movement?



Publisher models for learning and teaching materials (specifically e-textbooks), copyright issues, open educational resources, evolution of training practices, and online services, all resurfaced in the comments. Participants want to know the impact of Covid-19 on Open Science, library tools, and society itself. The implementation of crisis management also came up.

Comments also mention the need to prepare for a second wave, changing strategies, the impact on the position of the library in a new role, in a digital world, instead of physical books and study spots. How will the library world be after Covid-19?

20) What did we miss in the survey? (Q.33).

This quote below demonstrates the reality of the situation for libraries and reiterates the need to further investigate certain issues at regional or state levels:

“The national library association very quickly issued guidelines for library services under Covid-19 measures and updated them in line with changing regulations. I think that it would be difficult for LIBER to act as quickly in this situation and therefore frankly doubt that this is the right level to address some concrete issues.”



6. Quotes from Participants

“Libraries involve human contact, physical spaces, direct communication.”

“In some areas, some developments have been positive as more are engaged with digital [services].”

“However, we have also seen how the transformation to do this digitally/online can improve our services.”

“Some of our H2020 projects were extended due to the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown (e.g., OpenAIRE Advance). Our face-to face education had to be postponed in some cases.”

“Positively only some of them, mostly fundamental research (codicology, musicology, Slavonci studies); applied research the same or a bit negatively.”

“Positive: Started long planned: crowdsourcing projects, digitization of library infrastructure & services (e.g. webinars). Negative: Cataloguing and digitization of historical collection was on hold for some months.”

“We think you covered it all. Thank you for support and for thinking about the future of libraries in these difficult times. Some concerns remain, naturally, however we hope to prevail. With your help...”



7. Key Outcomes

- There is an extreme diversity in answers. A few questions had overwhelming and definite preferences. This indicates that each country and type of institution has its own special situation and while conclusions to capture an overall sentiment are possible, it is necessary to further pursue and examine cases more closely, for example per country, per type of institution, size, etc.
- Health and safety of staff is a top concern regarding working within the physical realm of libraries. This includes both physical and mental health. There still are Covid-19 transmission risks in various scenarios, such as shared study spaces, library materials, shared use of equipment, etc., wrote one participant, and also risks regarding the use of paper and plastic, added another.
- Library spaces need to be redesigned to accommodate the new normal of social distancing, the physical use of materials on site, reading zones, events, and other physical activities.
- Dialogue is especially important now. The emotional toll that the pandemic has had on the research library ecosystem is challenging. Everyone's situation is different. One effective way to gain greater insight is by encouraging dialogue with online sessions. People need contact, the possibility to exchange ideas, and a way forward with the concretisation of these ideas. This is especially so, as there needs to be a lot of reorganisation done on many levels, and the future of libraries may need to be redefined. People will need to find their place in a new infrastructure, to reinforce their relevance. The unknown brings a lot of uncertainty and what lies ahead will require a high level of adaptation.

The quote below captures the afore-mentioned existential sentiment, in response to what kind of services LIBER can offer in support of research libraries (Q.30).

“Discussions on the hybrid and blended forms of future education as well as libraries. Space and Place are still very important as part of libraries, as well as the competencies of library staff. It's the combination of digital and physical libraries that are the future.”

Translated from French is a comment about further examining the topic at European level. (Q.32)

“What will be the new procedures for the physical reopening of libraries and welcoming users on site? Do we become a closed community, or do we open doors to external users? What societal responsibilities do universities face toward populations who are now experiencing difficulties in the context of the pandemic?”



As such, it is necessary for communication to be addressed on many levels in order to offer the possibility for people to exchange ideas and concerns. Another participant wrote, what are the lessons learned from this pandemic (so far) and what is the future role of libraries? The feeling of belonging and the sense of purpose are basic needs of our community, as they are for everyone. These are topics that need to be addressed, by way of leading, and as importantly by way of facilitating collaboration

- There is a definite focus towards increased online training. Creating and maintaining engagement in the form of more online training and events. Contact with library users is greatly missed by many participants. Not only emotionally but practically as well, as users need better digital tools and services, and because staff members want to have the capacity to help users.
- Reorganisation of libraries, physical spaces, digital infrastructure take a prominent place in the minds of participants. How can we organise and improve user access to material and archives, or support users with their research in lockdown situations? asked one participant.
- Respondents wish to know/see how their peers are coping. What are other libraries doing to deal with this situation? What measures have been put in place? This was also what participants pointed out, when asked what topics they wished LIBER could further explore.
- Digitisation is on everyone's minds and agendas. There is a digital divide now, and we need to be careful not to alienate those who are behind in digitalisation, said one participant. Some libraries have fully digitised, and some have always been digital, but many are still in the process, and at different stages or phases of transformation. What is certain, is that libraries need support in a transition to full or almost-full digitisation. This comes in many shapes and forms, such as financial support, online services/activities, tools and training.
- Open is the way forward. There is a lot of talk about Open Access, Open Science and Open Education in several responses. More research is needed to understand the Open status; more services are needed, especially in financially challenging times; more webinars and training; and more activities in general are also required. Easier access to Open Access material in general was also a comment.
- As participants pointed out on several occasions, action needs to be taken regarding licensing and copyright legislation. One other participant specified publisher models. This brings us to the topic of copyright infringement issues, licenses, licensing models and their limits, and the pricing of e-books. Although the majority of participants (nearly 60%) reported that their relationship with publishers remains the same, we don't have further insight in what this exactly means. 47 participants selected Negotiating with publishers as one of their focus points up until March 2021 (Q.25). Seeing that many concerns on the topic were put forward, we can conclude that this needs to be further examined.



8. Closing Remarks

“The collaborative creation of a common research methods curriculum with online training [possibilities].”

The above comment (Q.32, What other concerns do you have?) indicates the need for creation through collaboration. Indeed, working together is essential in the success of future projects, and we need to work hard to make collaboration efficient, pleasant, and meaningful in the (post) Covid world.

9. Annex

CATEGORIES

1. All countries
2. Category A (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom)
3. Category B (Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia)
4. Category C (Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Georgia, North Macedonia, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Turkey)