Birkbeck Library Annual Review 2020–2021
Opening during the pandemic

We continued to offer a full range of services throughout the year, having quickly adjusted its operations after the first national lockdown in March 2020.

The Library building reopened in September 2020, remaining open until the beginning of January when it closed again due to the third lockdown. It then reopened again at the end of March and hours were gradually extended until they were back to their pre-pandemic levels in time for the start of the 2021–2022 academic year.

To ensure social distancing, the capacity of the Library was reduced by two thirds and a booking system introduced.

Over 14,000 individual visits were made during 2020–2021.
Ebooks and digitised readings

To support the move to online teaching, we provided access to an additional 200,000 ebooks through our Library catalogue. We also scanned and created links to over 2,000 new book chapters and journal articles for Moodle and supplied over 1,000 interlibrary loans.
Online support
Support for library users quickly moved online in March 2020. Our live chat service ran from 10am to 10pm, 7 days a week, and we answered 5,313 chat enquiries in 2020–2021. Our Subject Librarian team and Library Disability and Dyslexia Service delivered hundreds of one-to-one support sessions through Microsoft Teams.

Click-and-post
From summer 2020, we began offering a click-and-post service. It is still in operation and provides print books for students and staff who are unable to make it to Malet Street. So far, we have sent out over 3,000 parcels to users.
BiROn
Content from ORBIT (our old thesis repository) was added to our main institutional repository, BiROn, with 527 PhD theses uploaded in 2020–2021. The repository now contains over 25,000 items, of which 41% have full-text files attached, with 34% completely open access. BiROn has registered 3.3 million downloads since its inception in late 2007. We have begun outputting publications metadata to staff profiles and the information is refreshed daily.

Data management
Our Research Data Support Manager helped Birkbeck researchers with 28 Data Management Plans in 2020–2021. An additional 20 data collections were deposited in BiRD, our data repository – the highest annual number so far.
Archives and special collections
We continued to receive enquiries from researchers about our archive collections. We have seen an increase in enquiries to the Birkbeck archive as we approach our 200th anniversary in 2023. Several books have been published that have used material from the Bohm archive, including the one pictured. Our image collections have been added to JSTOR as part of their growing Open Community Collections.
Customer Service Excellence
Our team has always prided itself on its customer service and during 2020–2021 we collected evidence for Customer Services Excellence accreditation. Our application, which included nearly 300 examples of good practice, was submitted in May and followed by a formal assessment day in September when an assessor met different groups of stakeholders (including students, academic staff and professional colleagues). We are delighted to say that we met the standard and achieved a Compliance Plus rating for several parts of our application.

Automatic renewals
In August 2020, we introduced a system of automatic renewals. Borrowed books are automatically renewed unless they are requested by another user. All past fines were waived to mark the start of the new service.
Feedback
We received much positive feedback about our services last year as well as comments and suggestions about how we can improve them.

New silent study area
As part of the Professional Services Workplace Project, a new and improved 130-seat silent study area will open on Level 2 of the Library early next year.

Student-Library Partnership
We kept the Student-Library Partnership going throughout the year, holding well-attended online meetings. The purpose of the Partnership is to develop and improve our services through dialogue with Birkbeck students.

“You’ve all done such an amazing job of keeping things going for us so we can study during the lockdowns and other restrictions.”

“A brilliant online and postal service!”

“It was the first occasion I’d come to the library in a very long time, and your staff made my experience wonderful. They were so helpful and professional. I am really grateful.”
Statistics at a glance

Live chat enquiries: 5,153

Individual visits to the Library: 14,005

Print book loans: 18,171

Interlibrary loan requests fulfilled: 1,046

Click-and-post requests fulfilled: 2,900

Disability and Dyslexia Service one-to-one appointments with students: 94

Subject Librarian one-to-one appointments with students: 146
Our Service Standards: how did we do?

**Achieved**

- We will have trained library staff available to provide help and support whenever we are open.
- We will respond to all enquiries within a day.
- We will respond to complaints and comments within 2 working days.
- 99% of interlibrary loan requests will be submitted to the British Library within 2 working days.
- 90% of all returned material will be reshelved within 48 hours.
- 90% of students will be able to arrange an appointment with their Subject Librarian within 1 week.

**Not achieved/not applicable**

- We aim for the Library to be open 100% of our advertised opening hours.
- Our Library Catalogue and electronic resources will be available 24/7 for 100% of the time.
- New books will be available to library users within 7 days of arrival.

The pandemic meant that the Library had to close for two periods and our opening hours were initially limited. Our electronic resources were available for over 99% of the time. Unfortunately, we do sometimes experience unannounced downtime when platforms or individual titles fail at the provider’s end – something that is out of our control. The Library Catalogue was available 99.9% of the time with just two very brief outages. For most of the year, we only purchased ebooks to support Birkbeck’s shift to online learning. Print books took a little longer to be processed as many staff worked from home.
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