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University of Leeds Libraries Forward Plan 2025 Final Report

Executive Summary

The University of Leeds Libraries Forward Plan 2025 has delivered substantial progress across five strategic themes: Digital Futures, Open Higher Education, Sustainable Environments, Enriched Experiences and Cultural Shift.

Collectively, this work has strengthened the Libraries' role as a strategic partner in education, research, digital transformation, cultural engagement and organisational development, while improving services, spaces and access for students, researchers, staff and wider communities.

Digital Futures

The Libraries have enhanced their digital offer:

- led institutional digital transformation projects
- widened access to services and collections through digital methods
- embedded digital and academic literacies are across the curriculum, supported by the Makerspace
- created AI guidance and training
- improved booking and access systems
- created more responsive discovery services.

Phase one of the Digital Library Infrastructure Project (DLIP) has progressed the development of research systems and repositories. This included migrating more than 340,000 high-resolution digitised images (9.8 TB), making them available for teaching and research as never before.

Open Higher Education

The Libraries have advanced:

- rights retention
- open research guidance
- responsible metrics
- research data governance
- open publishing.

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Academic literacies and academic integrity are more embedded in student learning.

The University of Leeds Open Books platform refreshed Open Educational Resources policy and support, and continued development of White Rose University Press, provide a stronger institutional foundation for open scholarship.

Sustainable Environments

The Libraries' first Sustainability Blueprint has embedded environmental improvement across services and spaces.

The quality, inclusivity and usability of the estate has been improved through:

- major £3.3 million refurbishment of the Health Sciences Library
- upgrades to more than 1,000 study spaces
- expanded wellbeing and accessible provision
- live occupancy data
- extended opening hours.

Enriched Experiences

Collections and services are more visible and responsive to users' needs through:

- user research
- improved metadata
- multilingual discovery
- strategic digitisation.

The Libraries have made a significant contribution to the University's civic and cultural ambitions, welcoming more diverse audiences and improving the accessibility and inclusivity of the facilities.

Engagement with cultural collections has broadened through:

- developing effective partnerships
- innovative exhibitions
- object-based teaching
- student internships
- programmes such as Welcoming Migrants.

Cultural Shift

Cross-Library activities have developed a more inclusive, collaborative and ambitious approach among library staff. Specific areas of progress include

- user experience and innovation
- engagement, collaboration and community
- equity, diversity and inclusion
- leadership and the working environment.

Digital Futures

O1 – Adopt a digital literacies framework and embed it through Academic Literacies strategy and Curriculum Redefined.

Digital literacies have been systematically embedded within teaching sessions across all faculties by the Learning Development Team. The Jisc Digital Capabilities Framework has been implemented for both students and staff, with oversight provided by the Digital Capabilities Working Group, coordinated by the Libraries.

The Makerspace opened in October 2023 in the Edward Boyle Library. Collaborating with HELIX delivered a comprehensive suite of services to students, offering workshops, training sessions, self-directed activities, inductions, instructional resources, equipment loans and a monthly repair café.

The Libraries play an integral role in advancing the University's adoption of artificial intelligence, providing guidance to students and offering AI training through our Digital Literacy Advisors. Library staff are involved in the University's AI Stakeholder and Experts Group, and within the service an AI and Automation Task and Finish Group has been established to coordinate activity and training, and principles for AI adoption and use, in the Libraries.

O2 – Improve outdated processes and systems to improve user experience and create efficiencies.

Digitisation workflows, from ordering to delivery, have improved following rapid improvement exercises training.

It is now easier for users to manage their bookings for staff and researcher events, individual student support, workshops and room bookings, with a new bookings system.

A mobile app improved access to the libraries, enabling users to scan their library card barcodes for entry and exit. This, alongside updated scanners, has reduced queues for entry and provided users with real-time occupancy information in the Laidlaw and Edward Boyle Libraries.

User feedback now leads to improved services and content discovery as continuous improvement processes were adopted for the library catalogue, Library Search and reading list systems.

A benchmarking exercise was completed to review the process for managing read-and-publish deals, and minor amendments were made.

The ongoing EDCIS (Ensuring Data Compliance Insights and Sharing) Project will enable streamlined deposit of research data. Requirements gathering and procurement have been completed in this forward plan, with implementation continuing as part of Forward Plan 2028.

O3 – Develop a digital ecosystem that supports a high-quality experience for connected customers.

An enhanced Library profile on the SharePoint intranet has increased visibility and improved information sharing across the institution. Sub-sites support Symplectic, Research Visibility, EDCIS, and DLIP projects, facilitating researcher collaboration and stakeholder communication.

LibGuides are being piloted with a planned 2027 launch to improve student access to library resources alongside the institutional website. Delays in the institutional web project have postponed migrating the library website to the new Design System.

O4 – Support the establishment of a Digital Creativity and Cultures Hub (DCCH).

The Digital Creativity and Cultures Hub (DCCH) was established within the Brotherton Library, in collaboration with the Leeds Arts and Humanities Research Institute. The DCCH has played a pivotal role in broadening the Libraries' engagement within the research community at Leeds. This initiative demonstrates the Libraries' capacity to actively participate in research partnerships and facilitate academic discourse. The DCCH also provides support for projects using library collections and regularly hosts workshops, training sessions, research support activities, teaching programmes and events.

The DCCH coordinates student internships that bring together STEM and SHAPE[1] students for collaborative projects, co-supervised with library subject matter experts. The team is also an integral partner supporting user engagement workstreams associated with the Digital Library Infrastructure Project.

O5 – Transform our digital infrastructure and digitisation capability.

The Digital Library Infrastructure Project (DLIP) is one of the University's Digital Transformation Projects, building a new technical infrastructure for the cultural collections of the institution through the adoption of open standards.

Phase one is now complete and has included the migration of over 9.8 TB to a new open-source infrastructure. 340,000 digitised images are now openly available via IIIF (International Image Interoperability Framework) for teaching, research and public engagement. DLIP has enabled high-resolution unique content to be used in teaching, research and public engagement.

The launch of IIIF at the University was celebrated at the International IIIF Conference, held at Cloth Hall Court with over 200 attendees from around the world. Two AI Flash

[1] STEM: Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics; SHAPE: Social sciences, Humanities and Arts for People and the Economy

Fellows were co-supervised by the Libraries and DCCH to help explore the use of AI with open cultural collections in IIIF.

The White Rose Libraries, as part of the Repositories Renewal Project, examined the repository landscape, shared requirements and technical landscape in detail. White Rose Libraries concluded that EPrints is the strongest option for the current shared repositories. The focus has been on increasing community engagement, developing EPrints incrementally and increasing the resilience of the underpinning infrastructure.

Symplectic, the University Current Research and Information System (CRIS) has been expanded to support the REF, research equipment and professional activities.

O6 – Transform institutional records management and digital preservation approach.

Through the Digital Library Infrastructure Project (DLIP) a foundational infrastructure for digital preservation has been built to ingest born-digital and digitised content. Content is stored in the Oxford Common File Layout standard to ensure long-term access.

Institutional records management is outside the Library's remit.

Open Higher Education

O7 – Further position libraries as a leader in open research.

The Libraries directly advanced the Open Research strategic objective within the University's Research Culture Strategy. The Knowledge Equity Network was launched in 2022, which is now sited in the Libraries. The updated Leeds Research Outputs Policy drafted by the Libraries in 2023 has cemented institutional support for rights retention, a key plank of open research.

New online resources developed by the Research Services Team are providing support for the adoption of open research practices across all disciplines. This includes the development of the Open Research Hub with ODPL. Dedicated support for the Directors of Research and Innovation is provided across Schools in their new Open Research Champion roles, including 15 discipline-specific advocacy sessions. Support for open publishing and open infrastructures has been improved, including the adoption of read and publish deals, and the creation of an Open Access Support fund.

O8 – Actively support diversification and decolonisation of collections.

A coordinated approach to improving descriptions of the collections and content with inclusive language is helping to develop consistent and sustainable practices across the Libraries. The content policy has been rewritten to emphasise the principles of openness and inclusivity.

A toolkit for tutors has been developed to support the diversification of content on reading lists. Student internships that support inclusive practices have been established in Cultural Collections, and there is an annual allocation of £15,000 to support acquisitions that diversify the University's Art Collection.

O9 – Establish academic literacies development as an essential element of student learning.

Significant progress has been made embedding academic literacies across the institution. Academic and digital literacies are now fully integrated as core elements of Curriculum Redefined. In collaboration with Careers, Sustainability and Enterprise Services, the Learning Development team launched Surfacing Skills, a university-wide initiative to integrate skills into the curriculum. All new programmes and modules must now define skills-based learning outcomes within the approval process. The team has delivered staff training, hosted three conferences on embedding skills, and produced resources that can be integrated into teaching.

A 2025 learning design sandpit, which demonstrated how the Libraries place students at the heart of its academic literacies offer, led to a student-facing reflective skills portfolio due to be piloted in autumn 2026. Cocurricular provision has been refreshed through a new suite of student-centred active workshops.

The Writing Space initiative now provides a dedicated community space offering peer-supported academic writing, while the new Skills Space in the Laidlaw has become a popular hub enabling new initiatives such as dissertation drop-ins and events.

O10 – Establish a positive approach towards academic integrity.

The Learning Development Team has been instrumental in establishing a positive approach to academic integrity at Leeds. The team worked with students and academic staff to co-produce a new university definition of academic integrity, emphasising the behaviours, values and skills that support good academic practices.

In response to student feedback about the content and timing of academic integrity training, the team led in redeveloping the Academic Integrity Tutorial and test, creating a new three-level resource supporting taught students to understand the role academic integrity plays at every stage of their learning. The library website, workshops and learning resources were updated to align with the new definition.

Tutorials and other resources were created to support academic staff to embed academic integrity into their teaching activities and personal tutoring conversations. In collaboration with the Digital Education Service, a new student-facing resource was developed to explain how Turnitin is used as part of the assessment process.

O11 – Support a positive research culture through responsible metrics and institutional systems/practices.

The Research Services team developed training resources around responsible metrics to support the Responsible Research Metrics Group. The team now provide faculties with reports on their research metrics each year, ahead of the annual Integrated Planning Exercise.

The Libraries purchased, and support the use of, Dimensions, the world's largest collection of linked research data. This supports work on research metrics across the University and the work of the UK Reproducibility Network.

The Libraries play a key role in maintaining and developing the University's research information management systems, and support user engagement with the systems, working with Research and Innovation Service (RIS) and IT Services. This includes creating a strong governance structure for the system through a Symplectic Operations and Symplectic Management Group. Key areas of focus include supporting the move of Symplectic to vendor hosting and implementing the impact and assessment modules (led by RIS).

Research Services delivered improvements to the metadata in the University's data repositories and developed guidance around acceptance of datasets. The Data Access and Retention Group (DARG) was established as a formal subgroup of the Information Governance Oversight Group. DARG serves as the official mechanism for reviewing, approving or rejecting access requests to controlled-level data within the University's Research Data Repository, and assesses more complex data deposit requests. A business case has been developed by the team for a new data repository, which is now being procured.

Working with the Graduate Board's Progression and Examinations Group, the Research Services team has also developed guidance on the submission of multipart theses into university repositories.

O12 – Establish libraries as the institutional lead for open educational resources (OERs) and position White Rose University Press (WRUP) as a globally recognised high-quality press.

Significant progress has been made in providing support for the creation, discovery and adoption of Open Educational Resources (OERs). This work includes developing guidance on how to produce OERs and contributing to the White Rose Libraries Open Education Toolkit.

The University of Leeds Open Books platform was launched. Training and support have enabled University of Leeds authors to produce six books with 28 in production. The discoverability of open content is promoted through the Library Search interface and the

Libraries have partnered with the AI platform Sylla to enhance the discoverability of OERs.

The Libraries established the University Open Education Group which has updated the University's Open Educational Resources Policy and now acts as the advisory board for University of Leeds Open Books.

The appointment of a White Rose University Press (WRUP) Advocacy and Publishing Assistant has led to a clear communications plan for WRUP, including publicity roadshows, book launches and the reintroduction of the WRUP Early Career Publishing Prize at Leeds.

Sustainable Environments

O13 – Measure and improve our environmental impact and promote sustainability in our services.

Working with the Sustainability Service, the Libraries completed their first Blueprint, meeting a range of ambitions linked to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. These included auditing the environmental impact of library buildings, improving sustainability around single-use plastics, and introducing a living wall into the newly refurbished Health Sciences Library.

O14 – Develop an incremental plan to refurbish Health Sciences and Brotherton Libraries.

Major refurbishment work took place in the Health Sciences Library, implementing a £3.3 million upgrade of the group study area, creating a state-of-the-art open, light, welcoming area focused on collaborative activity and wellbeing.

Ambitious plans were developed for improvements to the Brotherton Library, with feasibility studies in 2025 leading to RIBA stage 1 designs for a major refurbishment of the lower levels – though these ultimately proved too complex to be cost-effective. Nevertheless, smaller-scale works took place, upgrading the West Building link corridor, improving accessibility and refurbishing the postgraduate researcher study rooms on Main 1. Further feasibility work has been initiated looking at the reception desk and foyer area.

O15 – Improve the aesthetics, quality, and overall provision of our spaces.

Study spaces were substantially upgraded and enhanced. As well as major capital investment in the Health Sciences Library, a wide range of interventions and improvements took place across the estate, including:

- replacement, refurbishment and reupholstering of over 1,000 study spaces in Laidlaw and Edward Boyle
- introduction of more biophilic elements at Health Sciences
- refurbishment of PGR spaces in Brotherton
- development of wellbeing spaces across library sites
- creation of a new high-profile Skills Space on the ground floor of the Laidlaw.

Experiments with low-sensory spaces, the creation of new faith spaces, and dedicated accessible pods to provide discrete accessible spaces in otherwise challenging buildings, have improved overall provision of inclusive spaces.

O16 – Embrace the smart campus programme and improve our data analysis capability.

Wherever possible, the Libraries have improved infrastructure to gather more meaningful data about how users interact with spaces and services. This has included occupancy tracking at Laidlaw and Edward Boyle Libraries, automated people counters at Health Sciences Library, and closer integration with the Space Finder app – providing live data that guides students to areas of low occupancy. A significant data integration pilot was undertaken, aimed at pulling together disparate library data sources into a single dashboard – an important early experiment to build on.

O17 – Provide leadership for improving education spaces across the institution.

The Libraries were a key contributor to the University's Educational Spaces programme and collaborated with the Facilities Directorate to deliver innovative new spaces. These include the Health Sciences Library group study area and a new Library Makerspace in the Edward Boyle Library – a popular location for entrepreneurial and creative experimentation.

In partnership with IT Services, the Space Finder app was developed and launched to help students navigate the estate. The Libraries were a key pilot site for bring-your-own-device docking stations and screens, helping to establish the viability of a wider campus rollout.

O18 – Embrace digital in our approach to encourage interdisciplinary experimentation.

The Libraries have been at the forefront of interdisciplinary digital activity, producing cutting-edge research into AI in Libraries, as well as developing innovative cultural technologies such as the public art audio trail and the Gair Wood soundscape. The Libraries have developed practical tools to support digital copyright, licensing and rights management.

Enriched Experiences

O19 – Develop a storage plan to manage the physical growth in our Special Collections and to improve storage facilities for modern collections.

Print collections are proactively managed to maximise use of space while ensuring collections are preserved for the global research community. There has been significant work on retention statements in cataloguing systems to support the development of a national distributed print collection (UK Print Book Collection). A major investigative project explored options for long-term storage solutions for both main collections and cultural collections, feeding into Campus Reimagined.

O20 – Develop an institutional cultural programme that positions the University as a major cultural hub. Contribute to Leeds 2023 through innovative programming.

The Libraries have supported the University's cultural programme through a fruitful partnership with the Cultural Institute. A thematic collaboration with the Henry Moore Foundation was delivered with a research season focused on Herbert Read in 2023, while opportunities for audience development were trialled and delivered through collaboration with the Marks and Spencer Archive.

Public engagement through exhibitions, fellowships, workshops and teaching has seen considerable success over the last five years. Collections shared have included the Honresfield Library Brontë acquisitions and materials relating to the Women's Aid Federation of England, Max Farrar and Maurice de Sausmarez.

A crucial success has been the development, resourcing and embedding of collections-based engagement with migrant communities through the Welcoming Migrants programme. This was launched in 2021 and played a key role in the award of the University of Sanctuary status in July 2025.

O21 – Better understand and meet the information needs of our users.

Active engagement with tutors, employing user experience research techniques, has helped to improve provision of reading lists. A range of usage data, including exit surveys, ARA user surveys and benchmarking, have identified areas for service improvement.

Faculty Engagement Committee (FEC) reports were reviewed, and the mode of reporting has been rationalised to more effectively communicate activities to stakeholders. The appointment of Collection Liaison Advisors has resulted in a better understanding of faculty requirements of the information resources budget.

New tools and technologies have been trialled to improve the discoverability and use of resources, including using automation and AI to streamline work on bibliographic records. The use of Wikidata and BIBFRAME has been expanded to ensure linked data can be accessed easily. Teams have developed their expertise alongside partnerships with external pioneers, ensuring the Libraries remain at the forefront of this shift.

New ‘featured collections’ in Primo have increased visibility of diverse materials, with a focus on promotion during ‘awareness months’ and in support of wider University projects. Enhanced subject headings for sociology collections have improved discoverability using the Homosaurus international linked data vocabulary of LGBTQ+ terms. The discoverability of Chinese collections has improved significantly (more than 6,000 Chinese texts have been made discoverable for the first time) and users can now search for Arabic, Thai, Japanese, Ukrainian and Korean materials in their original language.

Mass digitisation approaches were explored and the focus has shifted to strategic digitisation, embedded into the Libraries’ workflows. Libraries-wide content policies have been redrafted to ensure collections reflect the information needs of users.

O22 – Create engagement programmes that inspire curiosity, creativity and knowledge sharing for diverse audiences locally and from around the globe.

Vibrant student engagement activities and internship opportunities within Cultural Collections & Galleries have developed educational engagement and widening participation.

In 2023, a LITE Research Experience Placement internship focused on the Peepal Tree Press archive, leading to a co-curated exhibition of student work planned for 2026.

The creation of a Digital Media student intern role has offered peer engagement opportunities, while promotional events, such as ‘Museums and Mocktails’ have significantly increased awareness of the Libraries’ offer.

The Welcoming Migrants programme has supported engagement with audiences who have diverse experiences beyond the University. Volunteer opportunities have been enhanced but further work is required during the next phase to formalise and embed these changes.

Teaching with cultural collections has expanded significantly, with 20 sessions of the undergraduate core module ‘Exploring History’ and 12 sessions of the core ‘Introduction to Classical Archaeology’ run as part of the expanded offer for the academic year 2025/26.

O23 – Develop an alumni offer for the libraries and attract philanthropic funding opportunities.

Developing a comprehensive alumni offer has been challenging, with a shift towards exploring options to include alumni access within publisher licence agreements. Barriers to access for alumni and members of the public have been lowered through the successful introduction of free library access for asylum seekers and refugees in 2024 and the review of membership charges in 2025, which resulted in significantly lower fees.

An ongoing partnership with the University’s Advancement team has ensured collections are embedded into the philanthropic offer. A significant Libraries-supported research project secured National Lottery Heritage Funding and several smaller projects gained philanthropic funding. The Libraries continue to play a key role in the University’s fundraising activities, such as hosting the Brotherton Circle summer event in 2025.

O24 – Extend access to our buildings to support the needs of diverse audiences.

Introducing a 24-hour physical library offer in January 2023 provided more consistent access to study spaces. This was augmented with extended hours across all campus libraries at weekends and through vacation periods, and an increase in opening hours for the Brotherton Research Centre to four days a week. The Brotherton Research Centre and Galleries front of house offer has been aligned and streamlined, providing a more seamless user experience.

Different voices were invited to contribute to our storytelling about communities. The ‘Contested Bodies’ exhibition in 2023 told stories of the LGBTQ+ community, refugee communities spoke through Mo Barangi’s exhibition and the 2025 ‘In Touch, With Nature’ was curated in partnership with local migrant communities.

The Stanley & Audrey Burton Gallery and Treasures of the Brotherton Gallery now have well-equipped ACCESSories Hubs, providing visitors with tools to make their experience more comfortable, particularly for neurodivergent visitors.

Provision of accessible study spaces has increased, with a new accessible pod in the Brotherton Library, upgraded equipment across all dedicated accessible rooms, and improved access routes to the new Health Sciences Group Study Area.

Ebook supplier accessibility features have been collated on a single library web page to support access for all users. The Awareness Weeks and Months Working Group was established and delivered activities and content curation for Africa Week, Black History Month and Disability History Month.

Cultural Shift

Cultural Shift work has brought colleagues together from across the Libraries to explore new ideas, strengthen connections and foster a more collaborative, inclusive and innovative working environment.

Through four cross-service groups, colleagues have developed practical initiatives around user-centred improvement, connection and collaboration, equity and inclusion, staff development and the working environment. This work has created new resources, development opportunities and routes for staff and students to contribute ideas, while helping to establish a more open, inclusive and improvement-focused culture across the service.

The programme has also strengthened the role of staff voice in organisational development. Cultural Shift groups have used employee engagement evidence, focus groups, staff workshops, pulse surveys and direct feedback to identify barriers and shape future priorities. The groups have increasingly worked alongside operational teams and projects so that cultural considerations are reflected in areas such as induction, staff development, service improvement, communication and engagement.

User Experience and Innovation

The User Experience and Innovation group strengthened the Libraries' capability to understand and respond to user needs. Staff completed UX research and design training, supported by manager and train-the-trainer programmes, helping to build confidence and expertise across the service. The group also progressed the development of a UX and Innovation Hub to bring together resources, guidance, tools and opportunities that support user-centred practice across the Libraries.

The Give it a Go Fund was established to support staff-led improvement ideas and has become an established route for testing and implementing user-focused innovations. Together, these activities have helped embed a more user-centred approach to service development, increased staff confidence in applying UX methods and created stronger foundations for continuous improvement.

Engagement, Collaboration and Community

The Engagement, Collaboration and Community group created new opportunities for colleagues and students to connect, collaborate and influence change. Key achievements included:

- delivery of the Library Staff Conference
- launch of the inaugural Student Library Innovation Competition
- development of cross-library ‘team showcase’ activities
- early development of Library-wide buddying and work-shadowing schemes.

The group also supported employee engagement activity through pulse surveys, staff consultation and analysis of engagement insights, alongside activity encouraging colleagues to recognise and celebrate the contributions of others. Collectively, this work has strengthened connections between teams, improved visibility of expertise across the Libraries, and created new opportunities for staff and students to contribute ideas and shape services.

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

The Equity, Diversity and Inclusion group developed practical resources and approaches to help embed inclusion across Library services. This included the creation of an EDI values framework, online guidance and resources, contributions to employee support materials and work to improve inclusive recruitment practices.

The group also promoted EDI learning and awareness across the service and provided a forum for identifying and addressing barriers to inclusion. As a result, greater emphasis has been placed on accessibility, representation and inclusive practice, helping to build stronger foundations for a more equitable and supportive working environment.

Working Environment and Staff Development

The Working Environment and Staff Development group focused on creating an environment where colleagues feel supported to learn, develop and contribute. The group developed resources to support staff wellbeing, championed conversations around psychological safety and learning from failure, and influenced wider initiatives including the Staff Training and Development Hub.

The group also developed a series of executive leadership videos to increase the visibility and accessibility of senior leaders, encourage connection with colleagues, and build greater awareness of the work and contribution of teams across the Libraries.

Through workshops, events and practical resources, the group helped promote a culture of learning, openness and continuous improvement. This work has increased the visibility of development opportunities, encouraged greater sharing of experiences and expertise, and reinforced the Libraries' commitment to supporting staff at all stages of their careers.