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Libraries 'becoming invisible' to junior scholars

Many early career researchers have 'not gone to the library for years', according to report

December 8, 2016



By [Holly Else \(/content/holly-else\)](#)

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Source: Rex

File under irrelevant? Libraries 'appear to have little to offer to the newer researchers. There have to be worries for their future'

A report detailing the rise of the Google search among young academics has prompted debate about the future of libraries.

The research, funded by the Publishing Research Consortium, looks at the attitudes to publishing of early career academics and suggests that libraries have "little to offer" the next generation of academics.

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But the Society of College, National and University Libraries (Sconul) said that no matter how junior scholars discover materials, the resources were “almost certainly” made available by the university library.

The findings are based on interviews with 116 junior academics from seven countries, including the UK, the US, Spain and China, working across science and social science. It is the first report to come out of a planned three-year qualitative study that will analyse how junior academics approach scholarly communication and the extent to which they are adopting social media, online communities and open science.

The report says that it finds “bad news for libraries” because they “seem to have lost all their visibility. Lots of early career researchers have not gone to the library for years,” it adds.

“Their discovery systems have been bypassed by Google to a large extent, and to make matters worse their institutional repositories are not popular either. Libraries appear to have little to offer to the big new wave of researchers, so down the line there have to be worries for their long term future as resources for postdocs,” says the report (<http://publishingresearchconsortium.com/index.php/136-prc-projects/research-reports/early-career-researchers-year-one/174-early-career-researchers-the-harbingers-of-change-year-one-2016>), *Early Career Researchers: The Harbingers of Change?*

The document adds that early career researchers consider libraries to be “places for undergraduates to sit and work”, which they say makes them “very expensive assets”.

But Ann Rossiter, executive director of Sconul, said that researchers did not need to come into a library building to use their services.

“When UK researchers access journals or other materials, whether via Google or via library catalogue, they are almost certainly accessing material that is made available to them, paid for and licensed by the university library,” she said.

She added: “Libraries work hard to make getting access to that content as easy as possible. So we’re happy for early career researchers to find it via Google or via the library’s own discovery systems, or to access it remotely, or come into the library in person.”

Ms Rossiter said that in the UK, the library had a broad role “including support for open access publishing, research data management and research skills, all of which we know are highly valued by early career researchers”.

Martin Reid, deputy director and head of academic services of the library at the London School of Economics (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/london-school-of-economics-and-political-science>), said that the report “to some extent” chimes with his team’s experiences of working with early career researchers.

“They are independent and self-motivated, creating their own support networks,” he said. “But they can also be isolated and incredibly grateful for targeted, meaningful support, which is why, along with other research libraries, we dedicate significant amounts of our time to making contact with them and helping them.”

He added that in general he and his team recognised that the library’s role was changing for all researchers. “Research libraries are responding by moving into new areas in the scholarly communication chain,” he said.

He said that they are using the trust that they have built up with researchers to show how they can help with “things they find annoying”, such as data management, open access compliance, intellectual property rights, archiving and impact metrics.

“The traditional view of the library may be becoming less visible, as the report suggests, but we are happy to try to replace it with one that actually brings us closer to the researcher. This may take time, but it is where our future lies,” he added.

The report also finds that early career researchers have concerns about article publication charges, the fees that are often charged by open access journals to publish research papers, which were seen as too high by those interviewed. Junior scholars in Spain also raised concerns that they make the playing field uneven between researchers who have the funds to pay them and those who do not.

Publishing in open access journals was not seen as a priority for early career researchers despite mandates in the UK and the US that give researchers an incentive to do so.

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