CAPITAL PROVISION FOR UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES IN THE UNITED KINGDOM — Comments on the Atkinson Report

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A topic which has dominated discussion in academic library circles in the United Kingdom in the latter part of 1976 has been the content of a University Grants Commission sponsored report "Capital Provision for University Libraries," known as the Atkinson Report after the chairman of the working party, Professor Richard Atkinson.

The Report is also of more than passing interest to Australian University Libraries because it seems to call into question some of the principles on which such libraries are based. The Report has already been the subject of discussion by the Committee of Australian University Librarians and the Universities Commission had 'noted' the Atkinson Report. Mr. Harrison Bryan has published his comments for the benefit of academic librarians.[1]

The primary task of the U.G.C. Working Party was to establish new norms on which the U.G.C. could determine the needs of universities in the U.K. for library space provisions. Having myself been involved in a research project in a British university library which was concerned with stock control and space provision, before I came to Australia, I think that there may well be a need to take an objective look at what the new norms are and the effect they would have on Australian University libraries, in the perhaps unlikely event of the Universities Commission adopting them without modification to take into account Australian conditions.

Book Storage

The old norm allowed for the accommodation of present holdings together with anticipated accessions for about 10 years ahead. This has been replaced by the concept of the so called self-renewing library in which space for new accessions would be created by moving out obsolete or unconsulted material to other stores. A concession is made to allow for some growth on the basis of the increase in the amount of material being published world-wide and an acknowledgement that some material will be needed for permanent retention.

This outcome could not be regarded as being entirely unexpected in view of the guidelines given to the Working Party which include: "to make recommendations on the amount of book storage required by a given library in its main buildings to meet essential requirements, on the assumption that suitable arrangements can be made for discarding material at a rate equivalent to the rate of accessions." Data were collected from U.K. Libraries on the amount of occupied shelving, in metres per full-time equivalent student. These range from 6.59 to 2.26 m/F.T.E. student. The average is 3.70m/F.T.E. The conclusion reached by the Atkinson working party is that **3.8 metres of shelving per F.T.E. student should be adequate for normal working purposes.** This when translated into space requirements leads to a figure of **0.68 square metres per full-time equivalent student.**

Provision for Future Growth

Based on data collected about world publishing, the Committee reaches the conclusion that "the total output of published literature relevant to academic libraries is now roughly constant." Also, library accessions of British Universities for the years 1966 to 1976 are shown to have been approximately constant at an average of 5.73 vols. per F.T.E. student per year. This information, taking account of withdrawals and on various other assumptions is translated (unfortunately without any explanation as to how) into a statement that "an addition to the norm of 0.2 sq.m. per F.T.E. student applied for forecast numbers 10 years ahead should be sufficient to provide for possible net growth in accessions per student during this period."

Reader Places

The existing U.G.C. norm for reader places provides for one reader place for every 5 arts students and one for every 7 science students. Surveys on use of library seating only indicated the range of variation, although in general the load of each science student is substantially less than that of each arts student. However, because of the approximate balance between arts and science students over the country as a whole, the Committee "decided that a broader norm of one place for every 6 students without distinction between arts and science would be more appropriate."

This more or less comes back to the original norm except that it must give some advantage to Universities such as the ex Colleges of Advanced Technology which still have a strong science bias. This change seems to have been merely a simplification measure rather than one strongly supported by evidence.

Space allowed per reader place is 2.39 sq. m. (actually 2.4 is used) to give **seating space per full time equivalent student of 0.40 sq. metres.**

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Administration

Space for administration has previously been set at 18% of the total area needed for reader places and book storage. It is recognised that operation of the 'self-renewing' library involved an additional administrative load because of the continuous work on selection of books for relegation. The 18% figure is therefore raised to 20%.

The New Norm

	M²
Seating/F.T.E. student	0.40
Book storage/F.T.E. student	0.68
	1.08
Administration (20%)	0.22
	1.30

To which can be added provision for net growth in accessions of 0.2 sq.m. per F.T.E. student.

As an example, a University of 10,000 F.T.E. students which is planning to have the same student intake in 10 years time would have a total space for library provision of 1.5 sq.m/student or 15,000 sq.m. overall.

Of this, 4,000 sq.m. would provide for 1667 reader places
2,200 sq.m. would provide for administration
6,800 sq.m. would provide for present book storage needs
2,000 sq.m. would provide for growth in book storage needs over 10 years

15,000 sq. m.

6,800 sq.m. for book storage gives 38,000 metres of shelving which at 85% capacity (effectively full) and an average size of 30 mm per volume gives a maximum allowed for present bookstock of 1,076,700 volumes. Assuming the library has reached that size, the growth allowed over the next 10 years will be 11,174 metres of shelving (0.2 sq.m. F.T.E. student) or 316,700 volumes.

This allows for an excess of intake over withdrawals of 31,670 volumes a year.

Total intake is expected to run at 5.75 volumes F.T.E. student or 57,500 vols./year so that withdrawals would have to run to approximately 26,000 vols./year, or 45% of intake. This is a long way from the position of discarding at a rate equivalent to the rate of accessions.

Reserve Storage

The recommended procedure for housing material withdrawn from the main collection is to have a local storage facility and once that is full to dispose of the excess to the British Library Lending Division.

Local Store

The local store proposed is to be of a size "large enough to serve as pools for material that in five years would be either returned to the main stock or be sent to the B.L.L.D. Subject to consideration of any special circumstances the appropriate capacity for a reserve store should be the equivalent of about 5 years accessions at current rates." To continue our example of the 10,000 student university, the local store would have a capacity of 287,500 volumes.

Special Collections

The Committee recommends that the U.G.C. allow up to 100% of the space needed for special collections, subject to the consideration of each case on its merits, in addition to the space allocated by application of the norms. No guidelines are given on cases which are meritorious and this whole area seems a bit vague. One firm recommendation which is apparently causing alarm amongst some librarians is that "the U.G.C. should be consulted when a university proposed to accept a collection of more than 5000 items, so that longer term financial consequences can be fully considered and the U.G.C. can comment on the implications for capital and recurrent grant."

Summary of the U.K. Situation

'Optimum size' has been a topic often discussed in the literature on academic libraries whilst in practice 'the bigger the better' has always been the policy. It was inevitable that at some stage a halt would have to be called and in the absence of any concerted initiative from librarians it had to be economic circumstances which called forth a revision of priorities. The new norms provide a basis for deciding which libraries have the best cases for capital expenditure on buildings.

In the course of the next ten years, five sixths of U.K. libraries would have been demanding new buildings or extensions. With the introduction of the new norms, one fifth will still have cases for extra space, several more will have cases for a local store. As Table 1 shows, many of the libraries of the smaller universities of the U.K. will find that their sails are being substantially trimmed.

Some of the new (1960's) universities in the U.K. now have close to 3,000 students and are approaching a bookstock of 300,000 volumes. Their growth rate will be cut to under 10,000 volumes per year unless they increase student numbers. Many long established universities still only take about 5,000 students and have library stock in excess of ½ million volumes. They will face an immediate necessity to cut book stock by relegation and will then have to live within a growth rate of 16,000 vols./year. In terms of library adequacy there would seem to be a tendency to push the 'ideal' size of a university up from the U.K. norm of 5,000 students to nearer to Australian norm of 10,000 to 15,000 students.

I would question the desirability of that for U.K. conditions and so I would like to have seen some

Table 1

Size and Growth Norms applied to Universities with various F.T.E. Student Populations

University student population F.T.E.	3,000	5,000	10,000	15,000
Max. area of main library M^2	4,500	7,500	15,000	22,500
Reader places	500	833	1,667	2,500
Present book storage (vols.)	323,000	540,000	1,076,000	1,600,000
Growth/year (vols.) thereafter	9,500	16,000	32,000	48,000
Local storage capacity (vols.)	86,000	145,000	290,000	435,000

weighting in favour of allowing the smaller universities to build bookstocks larger than their student numbers would indicate. This could have been achieved by having the 'provision for future growth' on a sliding scale of say,

3,000 students 0.3 sq.m./F.T.E.
5,000 students 0.25 sq.m./F.T.E.
10,000 students 0.2 sq.m./F.T.E.

That point aside I consider the norms reasonable and the suggestion for the slowing down of ever increasing size in University Libraries to be sensible as well as an economic necessity.

Application of the Norms to Australian University Libraries

It is unlikely that the U.K. norms would be adopted by the Universities Commission without modification but it is interesting to calculate the effects of the norms on Australian university libraries to see whether the Committee of Australian University Librarians needs to prepare itself to enter into battle.

The calculations in Table 2 are based on figures published in the A.A.R.L. Supplement "Library Statistics 1975" included in the September 1976 issue of Australian Academic and Research Libraries. To arrive at an approximation of full-time equivalent students, two part-time students are counted as being equal to one full-time student.

Book Storage

In comparing 1975 bookstock (volumes) with the maximum capacity in volumes allowed under the U.G.C. norms, it is apparent that most university libraries in Australia fall well within the allowance and would expect virtually unrestricted growth for a number of years. Most of the newer universities have had student numbers rapidly outstrip library growth. The libraries which would, failing a rapid rise in student numbers, be forced to look next to a

Table 2

Comparison of Australian University Libraries' size with U.G.C. norms

University (a)	F.T.E. student population 1975 (1) (b)	Vols. in Library 1975	Vols. allowed by U.G.C. norm = (1) × 107.67 to nearest '000	Seats available 1975	Seats allowed by U.G.C. norm = (1) ÷ 6	Vols. added 1975	Growth allowed by U.G.C. norm in vols./year (c) (1) × 3.167
A.N.U.	4,822	815,173	519,000	1,952	804	64,975	15,271
Sydney	16,568	2,062,725	1,784,000	4,514	2,761	142,834	52,471
N.S.W.	15,088	769,498	1,625,000	2,448	2,514	45,066	47,784
New England	5,109	373,719	550,000	393	852	23,504	16,180
Macquarie	6,638	451,601	715,000	1,750	1,106	47,405	21,022
Newcastle	3,497	303,099	377,000	916	583	22,824	11,075
Wollongong	1,613	99,415	174,000	280	269	8,889	5,108
Melbourne	13,297	814,353	1,432,000	3,814	2,216	47,958	42,111
Monash	12,702	771,707	1,368,000	3,888	2,117	54,667	40,227
La Trobe	6,482	265,443	698,000	1,690	1,080	38,111	20,528
Queensland	13,484	933,973	1,452,000	2,982	2,247	66,724	42,703
James Cook	1,549	99,271	167,000	321	258	16,009	4,905
Adelaide	7,913	828,279	852,000	2,523	1,319	49,585	25,060
Flinders	3,008	337,616	324,000	1,239	501	32,860	9,526
Tasmania	2,843	325,819	306,000	1,012	474	21,980	9,004
Western Australia	8,131	602,498	875,000	2,748	1,355	53,499	25,751

(a) Griffith, Murdoch, Deakin not included.
(b) Calculated as 1 full-time student = 2 part-time students.
(c) Growth allowed will be higher for those universities with increased student intake in the next 10 years.

local storage facility rather than a new library building are Flinders University, 337,616 vols. (324,000 allowed) and University of Tasmania 325,819 vols. (306,000 allowed) which both suffer the penalty of low student numbers mentioned earlier; University of Adelaide which with 828,279 volumes in 1975 will by now have exceeded its allowance of 852,000 volumes; The Australian National University with 815,173 volumes (519,000 allowed), which may perhaps be viewed as a special case being a 'prestige' university; Sydney University with 2,062,725 volumes as against the allowed 1,784,000.

Seating

It is clear from the figures that the U.G.C. norm of one seat for every six F.T.E. students cannot be applied in Australia. Only the University of New England has less than one to six and their figures 393 seats to 5,109 students (1 to 13) need to be viewed with their large enrolment of external students in mind.

It appears, therefore, that Australian university libraries should look to a seating 'norm' of at least one seat to every four students. Perhaps someone else would like to explain why the Australian student needs more seating space in his university library than his British counterpart, because no really obvious reasons spring to my mind.

Growth

Growth figures are very difficult to interpret without local knowledge of a particular university library. During 1975 many libraries will have grown rather faster than recurrent funds would have suggested, because of non-recurrent capital grants. Also, the growth allowance in the U.G.C. norm should be based on the projected figure for F.T.E. students 10 years ahead. It does, however, seem probable that libraries once having reached capacity, would be required to remove volumes to secondary storage at a rate of about 40% of current intake.

Conclusion

In general, there doesn't seem to be a case for an alarmist reaction to the Atkinson Report amongst Australian Universities, because the report most certainly does not advocate the no growth 'self-renewing' library so freely described by the press.

It is perhaps also something of a note of good-faith to find that the U.G.C., out of the tiny sum of £4 million, allocated to new university buildings in the U.K. for 1977, has allocated £2.2 million to a major new library project at Loughborough University.