

# Softlink Information Centres Annual Library Survey 2020

## #gotknowledge2020

Findings from Softlink Information Centres' 2020 Annual Library Survey.



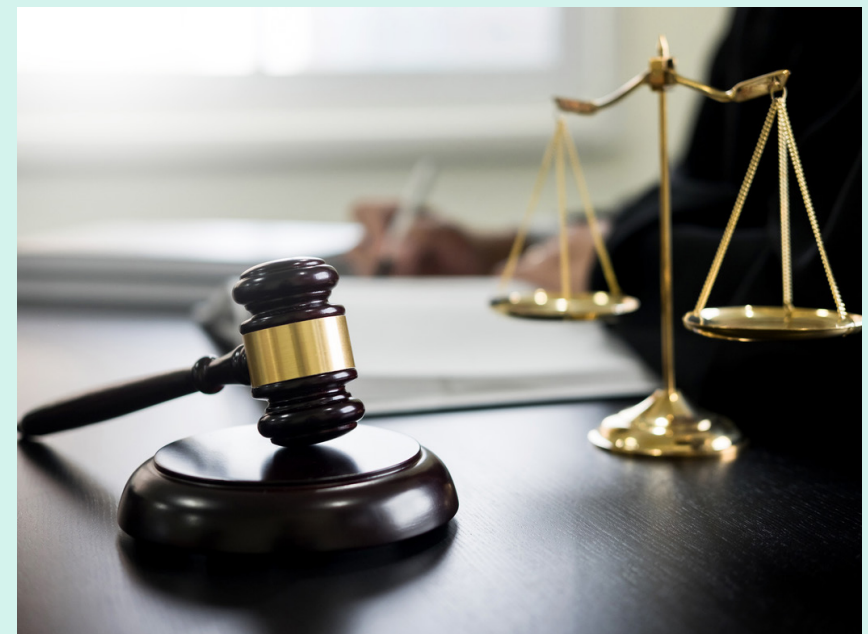
# Table of Contents

Table of Figures	03
Introduction	04
About the Survey	04
Purpose & Scope	05
Summary	06
Resources, Budgets & Staffing	07
Resources	07
Budgets	08
Staffing	09
Services Offered	10
Access and Use of Services	11
Reference and Research Query Management	12-13
Sector Snapshots	14
Academic and Further Education (Tertiary & Vocational) Sector	14

Theological Sector	15
Legal Sector	16
Corporate Sector	17
Special Sector	18
Government Sector	19
Not-For-Profit & NGO Sectors	20
Membership Based & Organizations Based Sectors	21
Health & Sciences Sector	22
Public Sector	23
Trends & Future Themes	24-25
Conclusions	26
Appendix 1	27
Appendix 2	28

## Table of Figures

Figure 1	Responses by sector	06
Figure 2	Responses by country	06
Figure 3	Types of resources managed across all sectors	07
Figure 4	Budget changes across all sectors	08
Figure 5	Number of staff across all sectors	09
Figure 6	Types of services offered across all sectors	10
Figure 7	Number of research or reference queries managed across all sectors	12
Figure 8	Breakdown of method of research or reference query management by volume	13





## Introduction

The Softlink Information Centers (SoftlinkIC) #gotknowledge2020 survey was launched in early April and closed on 15 July 2020. The survey was conducted on behalf of our knowledge and information centers and library sectors. Our survey was designed to investigate and analyze work patterns, identify staffing, resource and budget trends, the services currently delivered and collect opinions on future trends.



## About the Survey

This survey was an opportunity for SoftlinkIC to understand more deeply the changes, impacts and trends in the knowledge sector. We sought to identify important statistical information, such as staffing and budgets, library practices, services, resourcing and trends around the world. Our survey included open questions providing respondents with an opportunity to share ideas, future trends and provide insight into the day-to-day running of their knowledge center or library.

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Quotes come from the survey questions – “What services would you ideally love to improve or implement for your users?”, “What trends do see emerging in the knowledge industry?” and “Any further comments?”. These have been anonymized.



## Purpose & Scope

Softlink specializes in knowledge, content and library management systems and request management systems for legal, special, education, public, government and corporate information centers and libraries. We also provide digital asset management, equipment tracking and lending systems.

We have always sought to gain further insight into the information and knowledge sector. We know this sector thrives by managing changes and challenges, it's always kept an eye on emerging trends and embraced new opportunities to deliver innovative knowledge services. We believe the best way to gain even deeper understanding of our sector is to ask those at the coalface.

Information gleaned from a variety of sources, including this survey, means our industry leading solutions can integrate with the latest digital technologies (including mobile, tablet and e-reader technology), providing a centralized performance platform to manage, discover and deliver your physical and digital assets.

At Softlink, we understand your needs can be as unique as your organization, so our solutions are developed and supported by teams of experienced librarians, information and resource managers and expert knowledge management development professionals. Continuing with our survey annually will build a useful reference point for understanding changes, impacts, and trends over time to our knowledge center and library workers, and the broader sector.







## Summary

The Softlink Information Centers #gotknowledge2020 survey was designed to analyze and understand our customers and the sectors we serve. The survey opened in early April 2020 and closed 15 July 2020.

To begin with, a general overview of the respondents shows this survey was completed by information service professionals from the knowledge center and library sectors from a broad range of industries. Representation of survey responses by sector are shown graphically here in Figure 1. Survey responses were collected from across 16 countries. In summary, 48% of responses came from either Australia or New Zealand with a further 37% from either the United States of America or the United Kingdom.

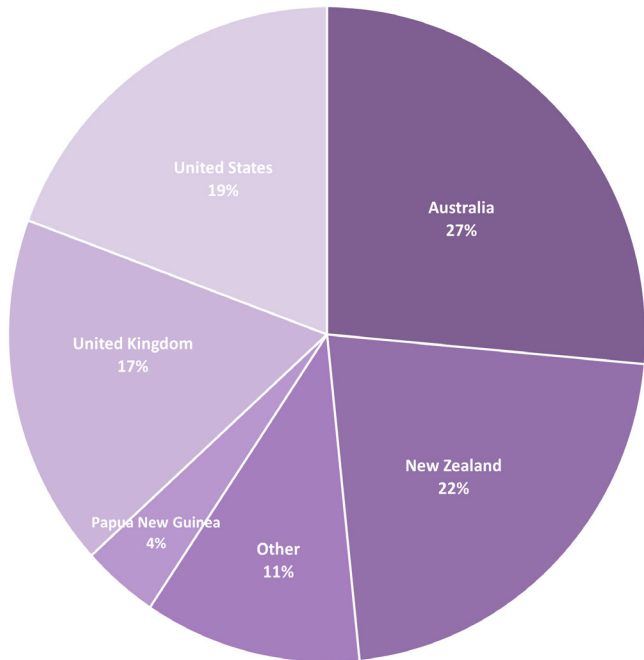


Figure 2 - Responses by country.

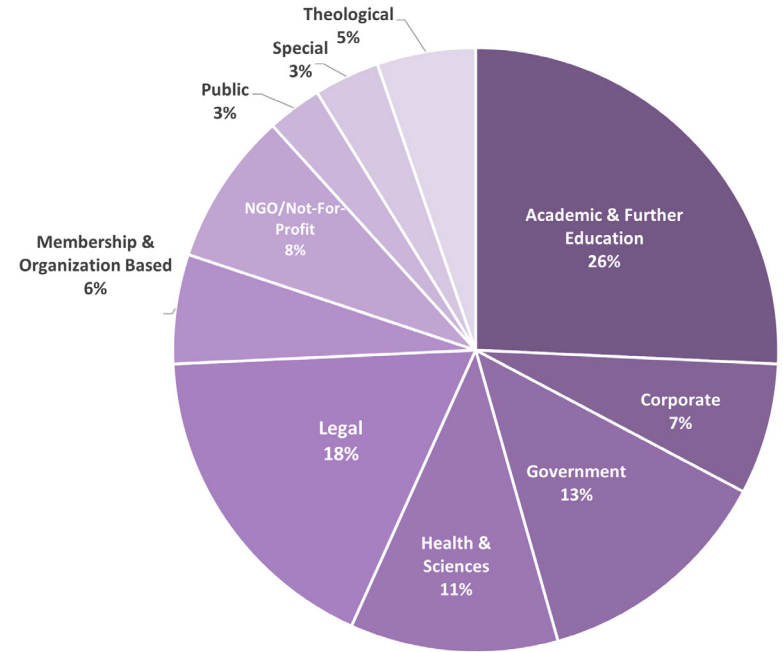


Figure 1 - Responses by sector.

A further 15% of responses were also submitted from PNG, Fiji, the Philippines, India, Ireland, Nigeria, Spain, Singapore, Germany, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada and Jordan. These are also represented graphically in the following graph (Figure 2).

This report will provide further statistical information gathered from key areas of the survey. A deeper analysis of specific sector-based trends is also provided in this report and will follow this general summary.



## Resources, Budgets & Staffing

In our survey, respondents were asked to provide details about the nature, shape and scope of the resources they manage. Respondents were also asked to quantify the number of staff in their knowledge center or library (based on a full time equivalent [FTE]) and changes (if any) which have occurred to both staffing and budgets.



## Resources

Understandably, with such broad representation from library and knowledge center sectors, the types of resources managed were quite varied. Traditional resources (physical books and journals) still make up 96% and 81% respectively, of the collections managed by those responding to our survey. Management of electronic resources (e-books and e-journals) also make up 64% and 65% of the collections managed. Other resources managed included documents, maps, judgements and legal cases, online videos, archival material and images.

Interestingly, 20% of total responses to our survey indicated they manage physical assets for their organization, although this varied by sector. The types of assets managed primarily consist of PCs and laptops (38%), meeting rooms or furniture (34%) or AV equipment (23%). When asked about the adequacy of resourcing to their library or knowledge center, our survey responses showed an even response (52% responding “Yes” and 48% “No”).

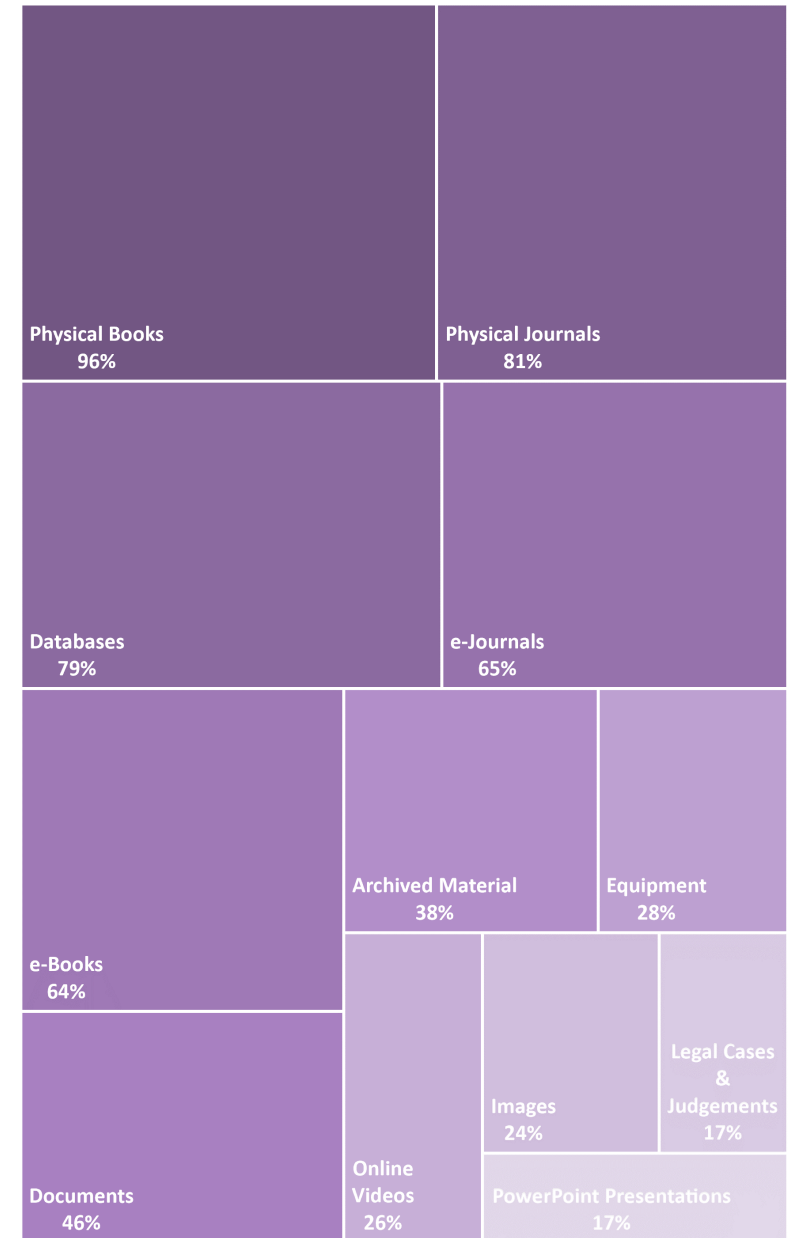


Figure 3- Types of resources managed across all sectors.



## Budgets

Further responses were sought regarding ongoing funding arrangements for knowledge centers or libraries. From our total responses, 68% of survey respondents reported managing a budget.

When asked to reflect on the allocation of funding and budgets over the last 5 years, 27% of survey respondents reported no change to their budgets and 23% were unsure if there were any changes to their budget.

A total of 28% of survey respondents reported an increase to the budgets of their library or knowledge center, with 14% reporting an increase of greater than 10%. Further, 22% of survey respondents reported a decrease to the budgets of their library or knowledge center, with 12% reporting a decrease of greater than 10%.

A breakdown of changes to budgets by sector is included as Appendix 1 of this report.

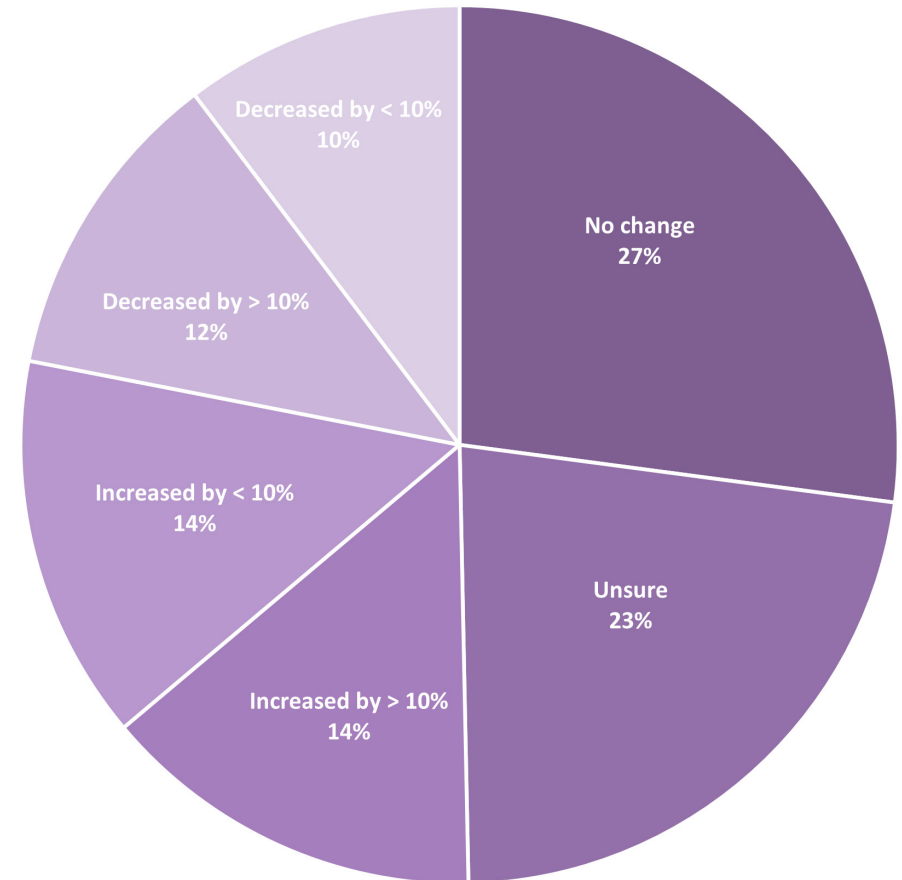


Figure 4 - Budget Changes across all sectors





## Staffing

The results from our survey which focused on staffing yielded some interesting results. Over half (62%) of libraries or knowledge centers are staffed by up to 3 full time equivalents (FTE). Further 86% have up to 10 FTE. Only 5% of those surveyed have more than 40 FTE working in their knowledge center or library.

Interestingly, two respondents reported their organization running an unmanned library or knowledge center. Further, 12 respondents reported less than 1 FTE working in the library or knowledge center.

Across all sectors and all responses provided a knowledge center or library will have an average of 6.17 FTE workers. Of those surveyed, 39% reported a decrease in staffing levels over recent years. A further 34% reported staffing levels in their library or knowledge center have remained the same and an increase in staffing levels was reported by 26% of respondents.

A breakdown of staffing changes by sector is included as Appendix 2 of this report.

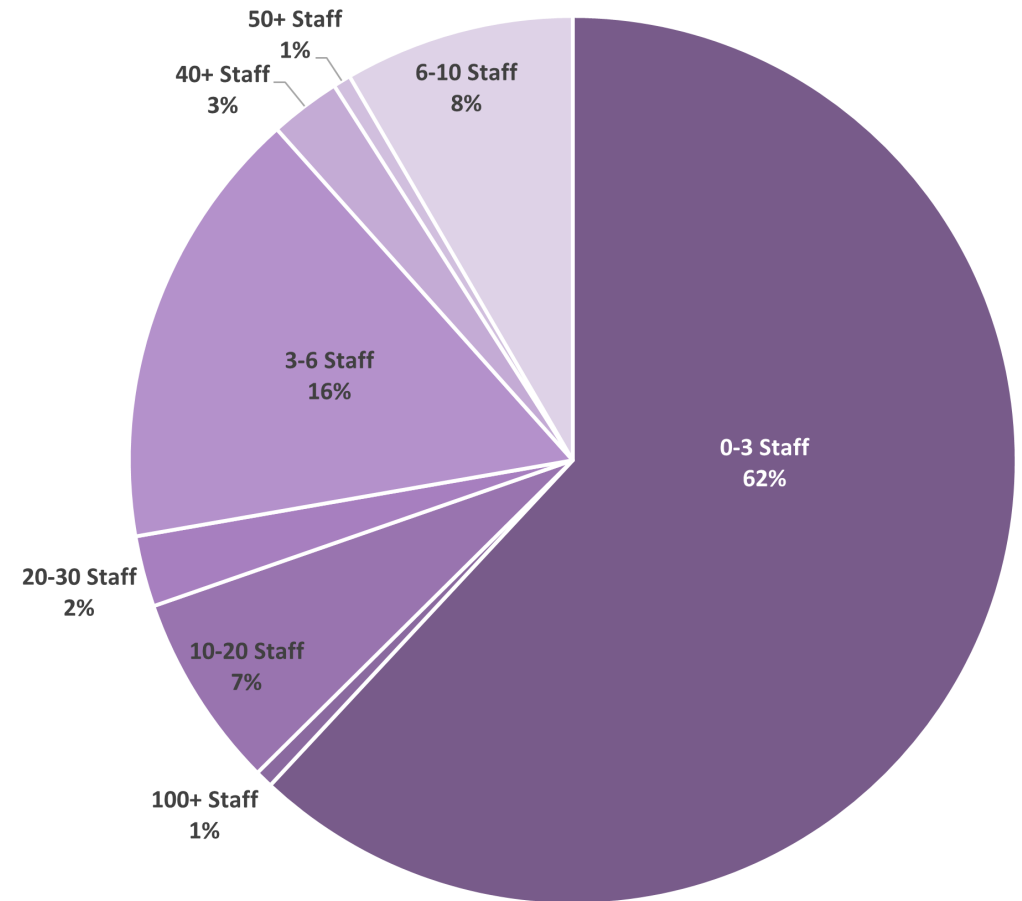


Figure 5 - Number of staff across all sectors.



## Services Offered

This section of the report covers a summary of the survey results which reflect what services are provided in the knowledge center or libraries of our survey respondents. In this section we'll also analyze what awareness raising, marketing or knowledge sharing activities are carried out to market knowledge centers or libraries across all sectors surveyed.

A summary of the top services provided across all sectors is listed in the figure opposite. Interestingly, analytical reporting or statistical information and business intelligence analysis and reporting were provided by 41% and 22% of our survey respondents respectively. Other services provided included publishing, photocopying or print services, management of image resources and reader advisory services.

Sharing knowledge or raising awareness about your library or information centers was primarily undertaken during training sessions for new users (79%). The library home page or organization's intranet was also used 79% of the time. Other methods for raising awareness or sharing knowledge included hosting meetings or functions (34%), and newsletters (33%). Interestingly, only 10% of survey respondents indicated using social media, email or EDMs to share knowledge and raise awareness of their knowledge center or library.

**79%**  
Training Sessions

**79%**  
Intranet

**34%**  
Meetings or Functions

**33%**  
Newsletters

**10%**  
Social Media

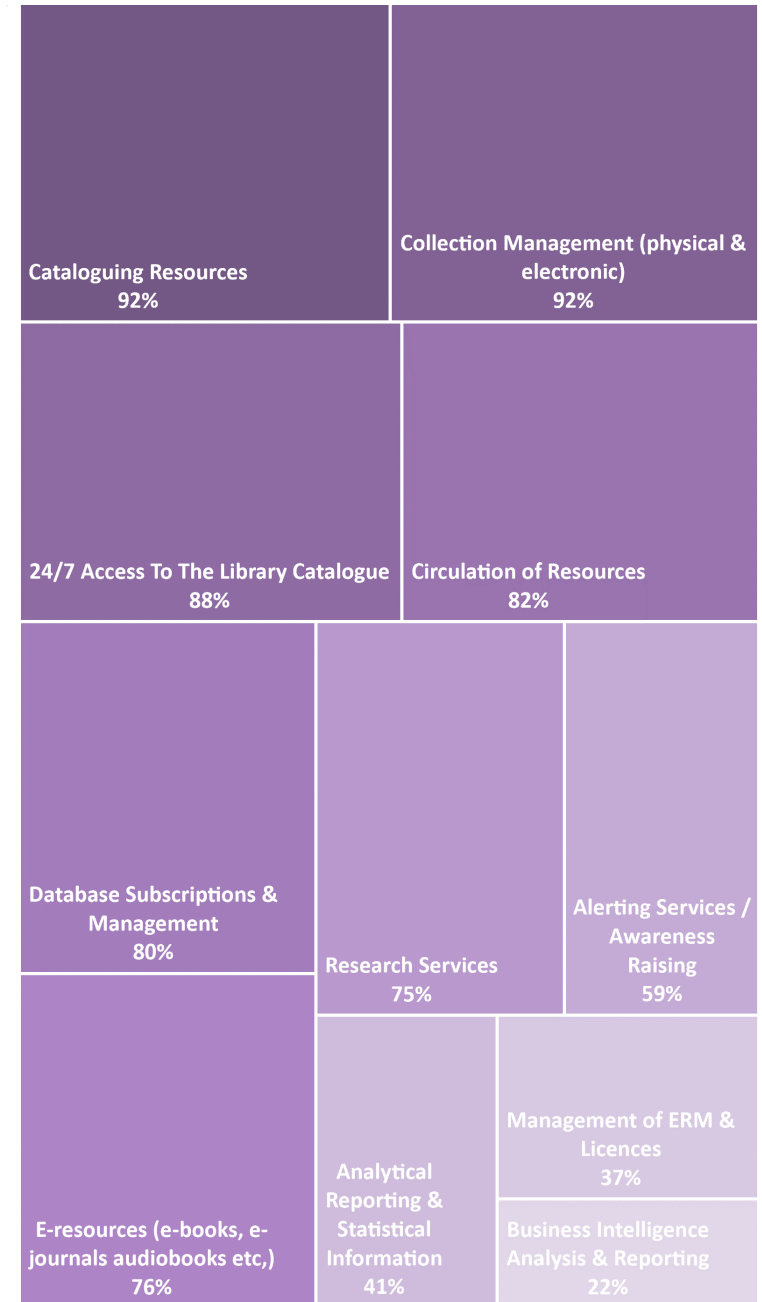


Figure 6 - Types of services offered across all sectors.



## Access and Use of Services

### What you said about service improvements you'd like to make ...

*"Providing remote learning service; new e-learning tools including videos; virtual training; being able to remote onto their desktop and assist with training, access queries and troubleshooting."*

Information Management  
Administrator, New Zealand.

In our survey we asked our information and knowledge professionals to respond on how users interact with the knowledge center or library. We also asked about how your borrowers or users access the catalogue and if these same borrowers or users accessed services from the knowledge center or library outside business hours

To get a feel for the number of borrowers or users in the organizations of our survey respondents we asked; 'What percentage of your organization uses your services?'. The responses indicate 72% of those surveyed working in a knowledge center or library reported their services were used by 20 % - 80 % of their organization. The top 5 types of interaction with knowledge center or libraries by users across all sectors was:

**94%**

Email

**93%**

Walk-In

**83%**

Phone

**78%**

Online  
Catalogue

**66%**

Library  
Webpage

Users of library and information center services accessed the OPAC primarily via their own PC (94%) or mobile device (52%). In-library access of the OPAC still accounted for 48% of users according to survey respondents. Further, an overwhelming number (82%) of survey respondents stated their users accessed their services (OPAC, digital resources etc.) outside regular business hours.



## Reference and Research Query Management

We were interested to know how knowledge and information service professionals managed reference and research queries. We asked our survey respondents to share the number of research or reference queries handled per week and to provide details about how these are managed.

In our results, 94% of survey respondents indicated their library or knowledge center handled reference or research queries. Almost half of those handling reference or research queries (48%) handled less than 10 per week. A further breakdown of the number of requests managed per week is provided in the figure opposite, this is the total across all survey respondents.

When broken down by sector, 83% of survey respondents working in a knowledge center or library in the legal sector indicated handling more than 10 reference or research queries each week, with 14% indicating they handled over 100.

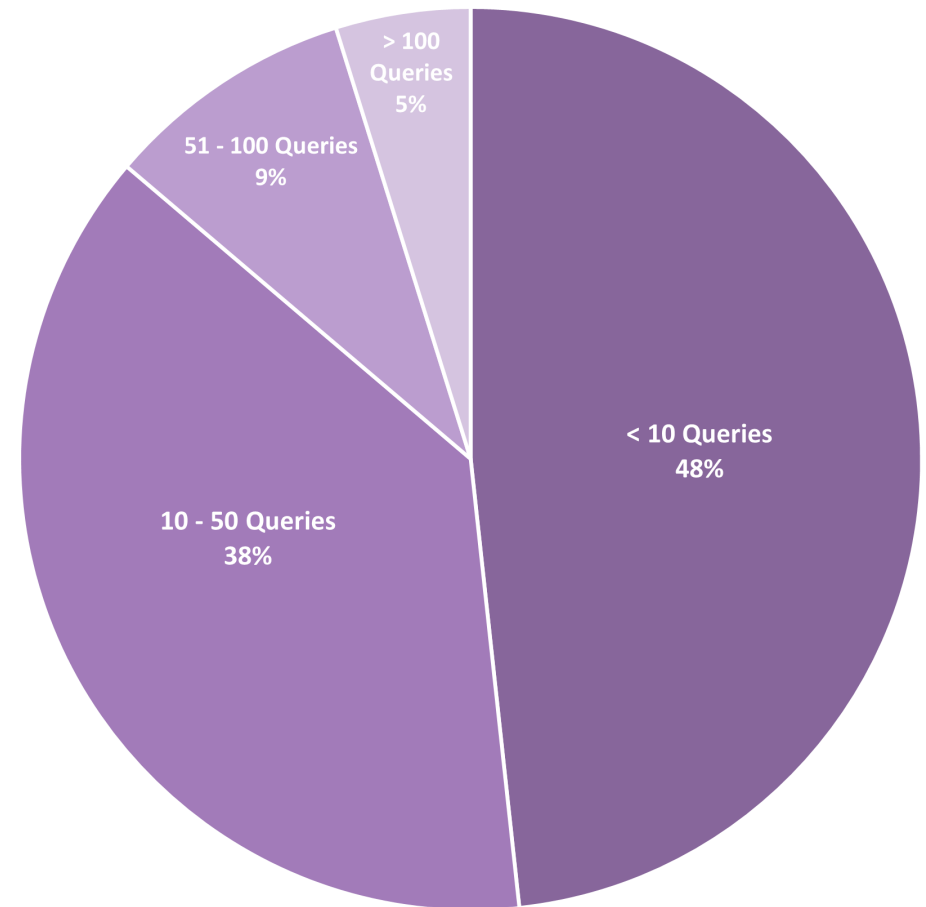


Figure 7 - Number of research or reference queries managed across all sectors.

Management of research or reference queries, across all sectors, is primarily conducted via email (79%), an internal system (32%) or a formal request management system (25%). Other methods include face-to-face (7%), a survey tool or web form (6%), chat (3%), walk in (1%) or phone calls (2%). The graph below combines survey responses across all sectors to show the number of queries received along with a breakdown of how they are managed. Interestingly, the reliance on email as a reference and research query management tool diminishes as the number of queries grow.

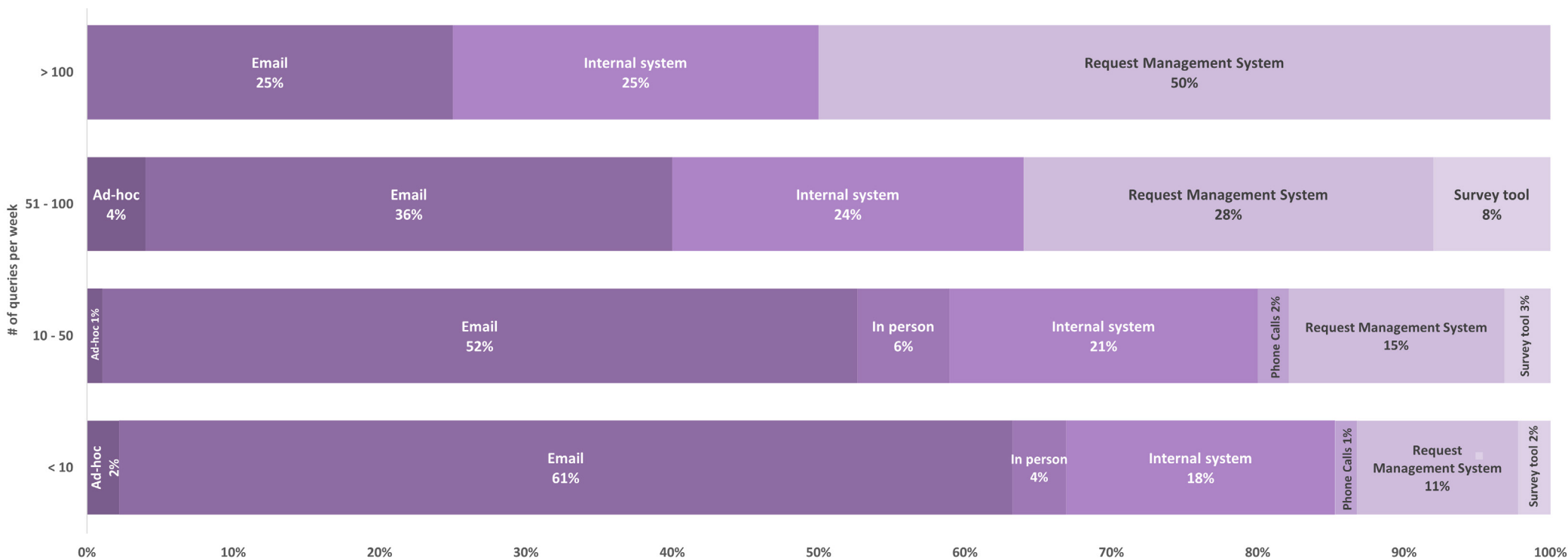


Figure 8 - Types of services offered across all sectors.



## Sector Snapshots

The following section of the survey report will provide a deeper analysis of specific sector-based trends.

### ACADEMIC AND FURTHER EDUCATION (TERTIARY & VOCATIONAL) SECTOR

- **90%** use library outside of business hours
- **7** staff (avg. # FTE)
- **62%** dissatisfied with resourcing



In this sector there's an average of 7 staff (based on FTE) and 59% of respondents indicated staffing levels have decreased in this sector over the last few years. This aligns with 61% of responses indicating either no change (33%) or a decrease (28%) in budgets over the last 5 years. Over half (62%) of respondents were dissatisfied with the resourcing of their library or knowledge center. Almost all (90%) responses indicated the services of the library or information center are used outside standard business hours. The primary interaction method for this sector's

knowledge centers or libraries included walk in (97%), email (95%), OPAC (85%) and via the library homepage (85%).

Services available from libraries or knowledge centers in this sector are marketed via training sessions or updates (95%) and the library homepage or intranet (87%) according to survey responses.

In this sector, 56% of survey respondents reported handling less than 10 reference or research queries per week, most queries are handled by email (54%).

Knowledge and information professionals in this sector would like to improve access to and choice of their electronic resources, provide more self-service functions to borrowers and generally improve knowledge of the services provided. Opinions about the future trends of the industry include a growth in open or alternative sources for publications, an increase in availability of electronic resources of all types and a greater demand for mobile or remote access of resources.







## Theological Sector

In this sector of the industry, 44% of survey responses indicated their staffing levels have decreased in recent years and 33% of respondents indicated there has been no change to the budget of their knowledge center or library over the last 5 years.

89% of survey respondents reported users or borrowers accessing the services of the knowledge center or library outside business hours. Raising awareness of the services available through the knowledge center or libraries in this sector is primarily through training sessions for new users (89%) or via the library homepage or intranet (67%). Borrowers will likely make contact via email, the OPAC or phone 89% of the time according to the respondents.

Professionals working in this sector reported they'd like greater funding for access to e-resources and database subscriptions. Future trends identified include a greater reliance on online driven (and based) services, changes to interactive technologies to deliver resources, a growth in use of AI (for OPACs, e-books and other online resources) and further discussion around open-access rights (surrounding issues with accessing journals and other periodicals).

### THEOLOGICAL SECTOR

- **44%** experience staff decrease
- **2** staff (avg. # FTE)
- **89%** host training sessions for increased use
- Access via walk-in, OPAC, phone





## Legal Sector

This sector has an average of 4.6 (based on FTE) staff working in information centers or libraries. When asked about staffing and budgets, 66% of survey respondents indicated staffing levels in their library or knowledge center had either increased or stayed the same and 52% of survey respondents reported a budget increase, with 34% of those reporting an increase of more than 10% to their budgets.

Interaction with the library or knowledge center was primarily by email (97%), phone (90%) and walk in (86%). Outside business hours, 83% of users access library or information center services.

Raising awareness of the library or knowledge center in this sector by survey respondents is carried out via training sessions or updates (90%) and the library homepage or an intranet (76%).

In this sector, 83% of survey respondents indicated handling more than 10 reference or research queries each week, with 14% indicating they handled over 100! These queries are primarily managed by email (72%) with use of a request management system by 38%.

Generally, respondents indicated a desire to streamline and improve services such as self-service, check in of new resources, delivery of e-resources and the quality of search results.

Professionals in this sector identified future trends including a focus on AI and the growth of online resources and digital collections. They also predicted a move away from a reliance on print-based resources, an increase in remote or outsourced staff coverage and further integration with other existing organizational software or applications.

### LEGAL SECTOR

- **92%** of interaction via email
- **14%** handle over 100 research queries per week
- **52%** report budget increase





## Corporate Sector

Survey respondents from this sector would like to improve accessibility and availability of digital resources when compared to the cost per item of physical resources. They would also like to have better integration of services offered by knowledge center or library (self-service, digital resources, OPAC search).

Some of the emerging trends from survey data for this sector include a greater growth in on-demand use of services, remote access to services and resources, changes in the type and variety of tasks or requests made by borrowers, a growth in cloud-based file sharing services and storage, and further growth in use and adoption of AI.

Currently this sector is staffed by an average of 3 (based on FTE) knowledge and information service professionals. Staffing trends indicate 58% of those who responded to the survey believe their staffing levels have stayed the same over the last few years. Further, 42% responded to indicate their budgets have increased by less than 10% over the last 5 years.


83% of survey respondents indicated their users access the services of the knowledge center or library outside business hours. However, during business

hours, overwhelmingly email is the preferred method for users to interact with their knowledge center or library. The promotion and marketing of the services provided by libraries or knowledge centers in this sector are via training sessions or updates (92%) or the library homepage or intranet (75%) according to survey responses.

In this sector, less than 50 research or reference queries are handled each week by 92% of survey respondents. These queries are handled primarily by email (75%) or via an internal system (50%) according to survey respondents.

**CORPORATE SECTOR**

- **3 staff** (avg. # FTE)
- **42%** report budget increase of less than 10%
- Access via email, walk-in, phone






## Special Sector

Knowledge and information professionals report a staffing decrease in this sector according to 67% of respondents, 33% of respondents indicated, budgets too had also decreased by more than 10%.

When asked about use, all respondents believed their knowledge center or library was used outside business hours by their users or borrowers. All respondents indicated interaction with this sector's knowledge center or library via walk-in or the OPAC. The awareness raising of services available in the library or knowledge center of this sector is always done via the library homepage or intranet according to those who responded to the survey.

In the future professionals in this sector would like to see an introduction of a greater variety of items for loan (such as board games), an improvement to availability of online resources and the creation of in-house e-resources which can be accessed off site via mobile devices. Future trends identified by survey respondents include an increase in digital content which is available on-demand by users or borrowers and less need for physical spaces.

### SPECIAL SECTOR

- **62%** decrease in staffing
- **100%** promoting using library homepage
- Access via walk-in Requests & OPAC.







## Government Sector

Knowledge and information service professionals in this sector would like to provide a better integration of their services (self-service, digital resources, OPAC search) and increase funding for awareness raising within their organization or department to grow borrower knowledge, awareness and use of the library or knowledge center.

Future trends imagined by professionals in this sector include a growth in use of digital resources, remote access, an increase in partnerships with other government, partner agencies or authorities and improvements in searching across collections via metadata with increased connections to other repositories or collections to encourage 'intelligent searching'.

With an average of 6 staff (based on FTE) working in this sector, over the last few years, staffing levels (44%) and budgets (39%) have stayed the same according to the survey responses.

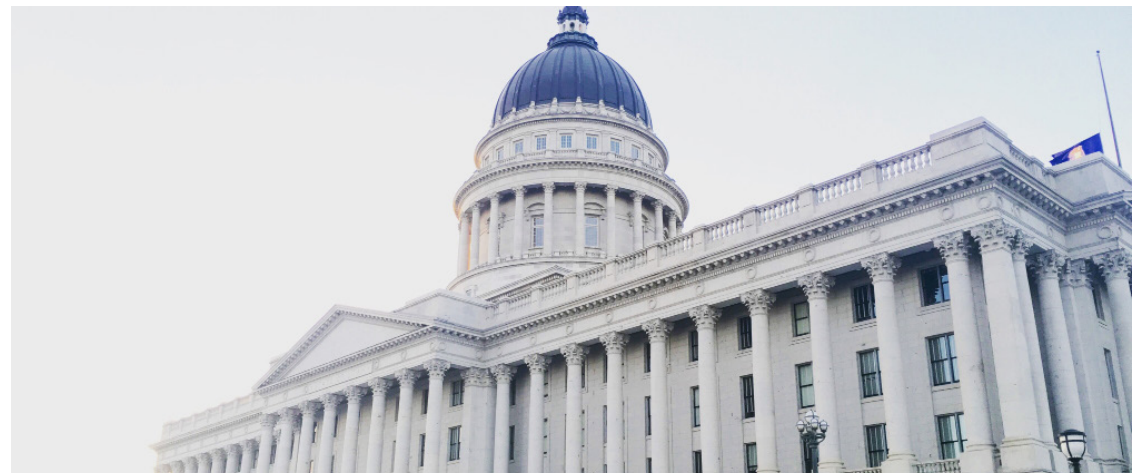
Survey respondents indicated interaction with the library or knowledge center is primarily via walk-in (94%) with email (83%) and the OPAC (72%) the next most popular. 89% of the marketing for services

provided by libraries or knowledge centers in this sector are via library homepage or intranet and training sessions or updates accounting for 72% according to survey responses.

In this sector, 75% of respondents reported a low volume (less than 10) of requests for reference or research queries were managed each week and 83% of these queries were managed by email.

### GOVERNMENT SECTORS

- Interaction via walk-in and email
- Marketing via library page **89%** of the time
- **56%** dissatisfied with resourcing





## Not-For-Profit & NGO Sectors

Professionals from this sector report stable staffing levels with 50% indicating their staffing levels have remained the same over the last few years. 33% of respondents indicate there's been no change to their budgets.

Awareness raising of the services available through the knowledge center or libraries in this sector is primarily through a library homepage or intranet (75%) or via training sessions or updates (58%). Borrowers or users interact with the knowledge center or library primarily via walk-in (92%) and contact via email, the OPAC or phone 67% of the time according to the respondents.

This sector would like to develop a 'professional' output for search results or bibliographies (1-page summary, formatted professionally), provide improvements and increase in access to digital libraries and databases. In the future, it's the opinion of professionals from this sector that there will be a supplementation of the catalogue via AI and further automation for administrative tasks like record management with more descriptive fields.

### NOT-FOR-PROFIT & NGO SECTORS

- Interaction via walk-in - **92%** of the time
- **3 staff** (avg. # FTE)
- **58%** believe adequately resourced







## Membership & Organizations Based Sectors

This sector averages 2 staff (based on FTE) in their knowledge center or library according to the responses provided. Half of all respondents indicated they're responsible for managing physical assets in this sector.

Interaction with knowledge centers or libraries in this sector is overwhelmingly via walk-ins (70%), followed by OPAC, phone and email (each at 60%). When marketing their services knowledge and information service professionals do this primarily via the library homepage or an intranet (80%). 70% of responses indicated the resources and services of their knowledge center or library is used outside business hours.

When asked about staffing and budgets, 50% of survey respondents believe their staffing levels have remained the same over the last few years. 40% of respondents were unsure if they've had changes to their budgets over the last 5 years.

In the future this sector would like to see improvements to access of full text collections, greater variety in e-book offerings and off-site resources. Thoughts on the future of knowledge centers or libraries include managing the challenges around production, security and verification of digital resources (they're easier and cheaper to acquire, but not always reliable).

### MEMBERSHIP & ORGANIZATIONS BASED SECTORS

- **2 staff** (avg. # FTE)
- Budget stayed the same for **50%**
- **50%** manage physical assets through library or knowledge center





## Health & Sciences Sector

The library and knowledge centers of this sector are staffed by an average of 3.4 staff (based on FTE) according to those surveyed. When asked about staffing levels and budgets, a decrease (staffing by 44% and budgets by 28%) was reported in the library or knowledge centers surveyed in this sector. This may correlate to 56% of those surveyed being dissatisfied with the resourcing of their library or knowledge center.

Services provided by libraries or knowledge centers in this sector are marketed via training sessions or updates (78%) and the library homepage or an intranet (67%) according to survey responses. Users interact with the library or knowledge center via email (94%), via the OPAC (78%) or phone calls (72%). Further, 89% of survey respondents reported use of the services of the library or information sector outside business hours.

Improvements professionals from this sector would like to make include, improvements in alerting services (new loan requests, incoming information

requests), easier access to OPAC from remote or off-site locations via single sign on and an increase in funding for awareness raising within organization to grow borrower knowledge, awareness and use of library or knowledge center.

Future trends identified by professionals from this sector include a greater growth in on-demand, remote access to services and resources, a further growth in cloud-based file sharing services and storage, and further growth in use and adoption of AI.

### HEALTH AND SCIENCES SECTOR

- **3 staff** (avg. # FTE)
- **89%** use library or info center outside business hours
- Email + OPAC to interact





## Public Library Sector

Staffing levels have decreased in this sector according to 60% of responses to our survey. Changes to budgets for this sector's library or information center were even, with a mix of responses supplied (increase, decrease, no change or unsure of changes to budgets). All survey respondents indicated users access the services of the library or knowledge center outside business hours.

However, only 25% felt that 50-80% of the users used the services of the library or knowledge center. A variety of methods were used to interact with this sector's knowledge center or library, overwhelmingly walk-in, phone, email or a live chat /online solution were used nearly all the time. Marketing of these knowledge center or libraries was conducted via the library page of intranet but all survey respondents and via training sessions or updates by 60% or respondents.

In this sector, 60% of respondents managed between 10 – 50 research or reference queries per week. These queries were managed either by email or an internal system 80% of the time.

Information and knowledge services professionals

from this sector would like to see access improvements for people who aren't easily connected to the internet, improvements to alert systems for reservations and deeper history for reservations (requested, collected, cancelled etc.). Future trends identified include a growth in self-service for borrowers, greater use of mobile services and changes to off-site and remote services via e-resources.

### PUBLIC LIBRARY SECTOR

- **60%** say staffing decreased
- Use walk-in, phone, email and live chat to interact
- **100%** report use of services outside business hours





## Trends & Future Themes

In our 2020 survey we were interested to hear about future trends and which services could be improved or implemented in knowledge centers or libraries of the survey respondents. These comments were optional to submit with the survey responses. In summary the services which survey respondents would like to improve, or implement are:

- **Self-service capabilities** for users via a mobile application or dedicated terminal in the library or information center.
- Improvements to the **OPAC experience** such as a virtual bookshelf, discovery tools, links to electronic resources and bibliographic capabilities from catalogue results.
- Greater ability to **provide research, analytical reporting or statistical information** services to their users.
- Greater access to **online services** (databases, e-books and e-journals or federated searches).
- **Streamlined access** to library or knowledge center services via single sign-on functionality.
- Improvements to virtual, remote or **off-site options** for access to the knowledge center or library services or resources.

### What you said about trends and future themes ...

*“Especially now, improving ways to serve those working remotely. Not something I would have said before February (2020).”*

Manager, Library & Research Services,  
United States of America.

*“Publishers still really need to look at how they licence digital items ... You can buy one hardcopy book and legally share it. This is not possible with digital access ... We are left needing to balance accessibility with cost ...”*

*It will be interesting to see where this takes us.”*

Information Services Manager, United Kingdom.

Additionally, in the survey opinions were sought on the emerging trends in the knowledge and information services industry. One of the emerging trends consistently mentioned is the development of artificial intelligence (AI). Our recent survey sought to gain a better understanding of the use of AI to support knowledge centers or libraries. Interestingly, only 3% of those surveyed are using AI to support their library or knowledge center. However, of those who are, its use is geared towards deep learning of metadata (29%), image recognition (29%) and reading documents (43%).

Following is a summary of those opinions:

- Users imagine greater use of AI in supplementing the catalogue.
- The value of libraries further cemented by growing their offering of in-house, remote access and online services.
- Increase in self-service or user-controlled access to catalogue and resources.
- Growth in electronic resources and materials in all formats and digitization of records.
- Greater use of mobile technology to provide remote and off-site access to the catalogue and resources.
- Increase in the seamless sharing of meta-data, better use of intelligent linking and semantic web services.

### **What you said about the future of our libraries and knowledge centres ...**

*“I do see AI supplementing cataloguing. I am also interested to see what developments will come to improve the automatic description and filing of business records (e.g. emails) in records management systems.”*

*Information Services Officer, Australia.*

*“(In the future, I see a trend for) AI and machine learning, more self-help systems.”*

*Information Resources Manager,  
United Kingdom.*





## Conclusions

### What you said about trends in resource management ...

*“Hard copies are becoming a thing of the past with e-resources emerging as the new focus over the traditional library environment.*

*As such, the idea of opening up the library to support other academic needs should be emphasized.”*

Acting Librarian, Papua New Guinea.

Our inaugural survey was an opportunity for Softlink IC to understand more deeply changes, impacts and trends in the knowledge sector. Through the compilation and analysis of the survey responses we sought to gather and report on important statistical information, such as staffing and budgets, as well as library practices, services, resourcing and trends around the world. The survey included open questions where respondents had the opportunity to share ideas, future trends and provide insight into the day-to-day running of their knowledge center or library.

The future of AI in knowledge centers and libraries continues to be raised as an emerging future trend. As Griffey (2019) said “... the opportunities associated with new machine learning systems to reform large portions of library activities will be rich and varied. While it will be some time before AI will conduct full conversations or reference interviews with students and patrons, the use of AI as an increasingly powerful lever inside other systems will progress quickly over the next three to five years.”

**We look forward to next year’s survey and would like to share a special thank you to everyone who participated in and shared the inaugural SoftlinkIC #gotknowledge2020 survey.**

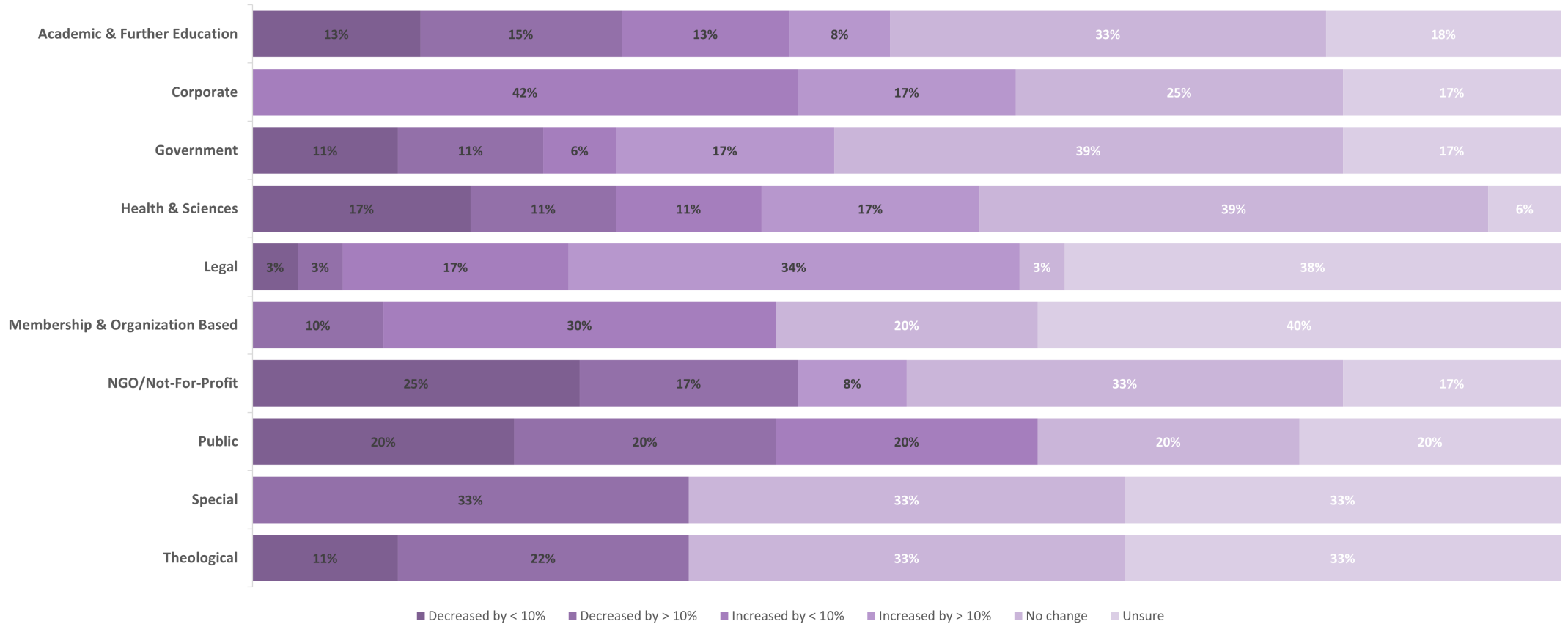
Griffey, J 2019, ‘AI and Machine Learning: The challenges of artificial intelligence in libraries’, American Libraries, vol. 50, no. 3/4, p. 47, viewed 23 September 2020.





# Appendix 1

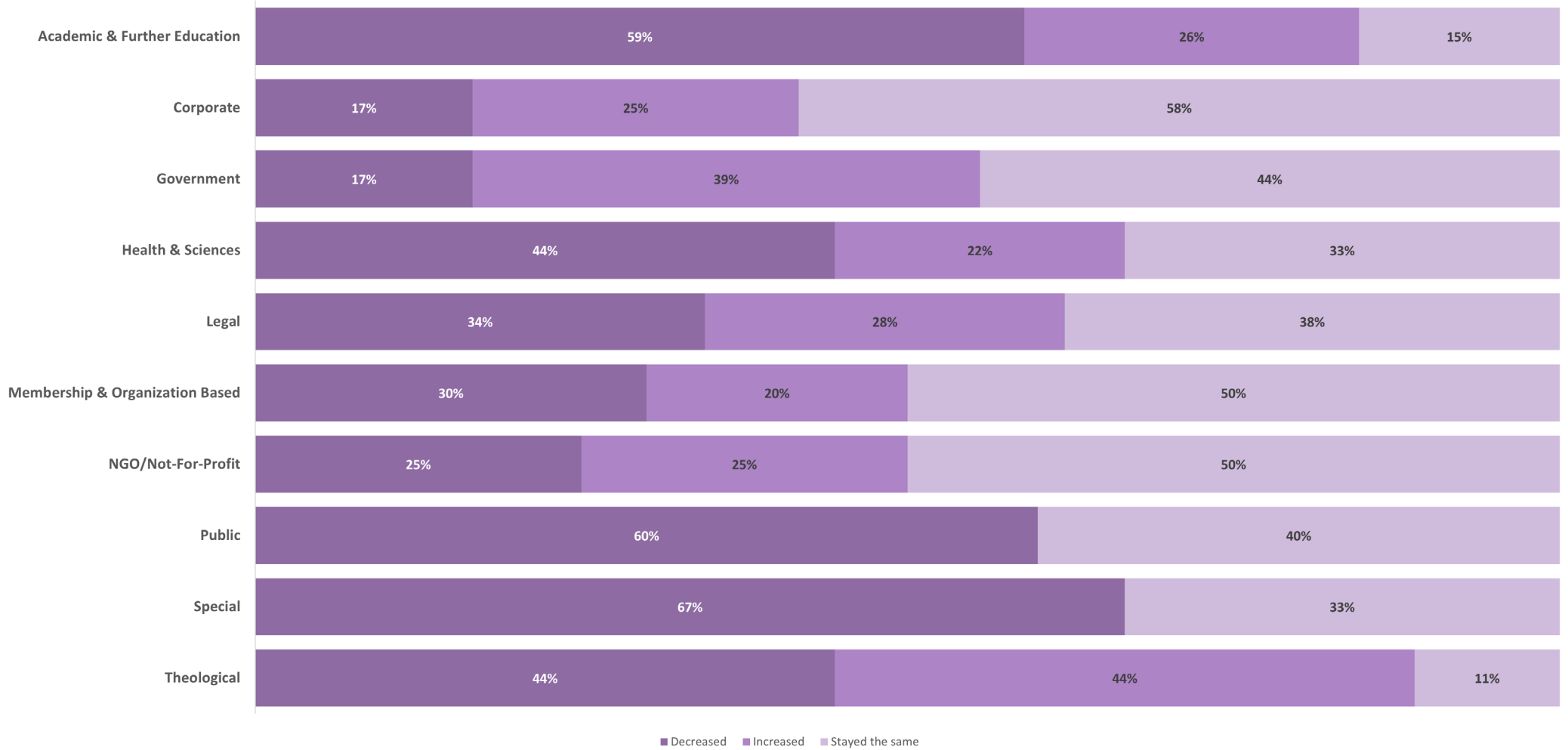
## Appendix 1 - Change to budget by sector





# Appendix 2

Appendix 2 - Change to staffing by sector





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