

# Librarian of the *Future*

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# Foreword

Librarians play a critical role in research and learning. Their work helps researchers, institutions and the wider knowledge ecosystem access, manage and make effective use of information, yet much of this contribution happens out of sight.

For decades, librarians have applied technical, leadership and interpersonal skills to propel collaborative projects and deliver on institutional goals, all while leading digital transformation, safeguarding information security and upholding research integrity. However, their own voices rarely set the agenda.

This report seeks to bring their voices to the center of the conversation. In today's rapidly evolving research landscape, we wanted to understand the challenges librarians are facing, the perception of their impact, the skills they have today and their expectations of the future. Alongside our other reports — like Researcher of the Future — this helps provide a more complete view of what's happening today and where research might be headed.

Our role has been to listen and to carry those voices to the people who most need to hear them. For Elsevier, librarians are fundamentally important members of the community we serve, and we recognize the importance of working with and supporting them to enable us to advance together. We are proud to have partnered with librarians for many years, and we continue to provide platforms for them to share their voices.

The insights of librarians around the world are valuable not just to other librarians, but to institutional leaders, researchers and others across the broader landscape. Understanding the challenges and opportunities librarians have can help shape a future in which librarians are equipped, supported and recognized enough to take advantage of the opportunities ahead, for the benefit of global research.

I extend our gratitude to the librarians who shared their views and experiences through the survey, and to the researchers and academic leaders who took part in interviews to offer a perspective on the librarian's role. We want to keep the conversation going: I welcome you to share your feedback or input on this research, and your ideas for the future.



**Judy Verses**

President, Academic and Government Markets

# Executive summary



Today's academic librarian plays a central role in a dynamic, interdisciplinary, technology-enabled research ecosystem. As this ecosystem undergoes profound transformation, it is reshaping how research is planned, managed, conducted, shared and measured, as well as how education is designed, delivered and experienced. Librarians are well-placed to act as strategic partners in helping institutions navigate this transition and emerge in a strong position.

For librarians to fully embrace their evolving roles, and for their institutions to benefit from their expertise, we need to understand today's librarian, what is driving change and the future direction of the profession. This report focuses specifically on the research dimensions of their role.

- Through a global survey, librarians shared their views on evolving skills, AI adoption and the strategic role they have in the research ecosystem.
- Through in-depth interviews, key stakeholders reflected on the changing research environment, their needs and the role of the librarian.

**The headline:** librarians are ready to be strategic partners in the research ecosystem, leading on AI, research integrity and collaboration. Institutions and the wider research community can help by making that expertise more visible and by working with librarians on shared challenges.

### Librarian of the Future

**Survey:** Online survey

**Date:** May-June 2026

**Respondents:** 1,100 academic librarians from 88 countries

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**Interviews:** Semi-structured qualitative interviews

**Date:** June-August 2026

**Respondents:** 10 researchers and 9 academic leaders from 12 countries

*Responses are weighted geographically to improve representativeness.*

**Chapter 1:**

## Today's librarian — dedicated, skilled, ready to drive change

Today's global research ecosystem is undergoing rapid change as it responds to a range of new and emerging challenges, from AI to research integrity issues. Librarians are both shaping and being shaped by these changes. Librarians have the skills and expertise to be strategic partners in meeting them, and there is a clear opportunity to make that contribution more visible.

- The top three skills librarians consider very or extremely important today:
  - ethical judgement and professionalism (88%)
  - adaptability or resilience (88%)
  - written communication (86%)
- Researchers already turn to the library: 83% of librarians say researchers seek support when they need help, and there is room to build visibility, with 62% agreeing that the library's positive impact is widely recognized.
- Just 11% of librarians globally feel fully able to demonstrate their impact on research so better tools and support for telling the library's story are a clear opportunity

**Chapter 2:**

## Drivers of change in the research ecosystem

The needs of key stakeholders, shifts in research, funding, technology, the political landscape and more can help predict what will be needed for librarians to succeed in the future.

- 83% of librarians cite AI among the biggest drivers of change in the research ecosystem.
- Librarians identify drivers of change, including open access mandates (47%), funding pressures (46%) and research integrity (43%).
- Academic leaders, faculty and researchers mention AI, research integrity, collaboration, funding and administration, and career sustainability and well-being shifting their needs.

**Chapter 3:**

## Tomorrow's librarian — digital, collaborative, in demand

Librarians envision their future role as more collaborative, requiring a broader set of skills, and increasingly enabled by technology. This is a unique moment for librarians to become even more deeply embedded in the research ecosystem, demonstrate and drive impact for their institutions, and strengthen their position as strategic partners for research success.

- 76% of librarians expect collaboration between the library and other departments to increase in the next five years, a chance to deepen the library's role as a strategic partner.
- Librarians expect an increase in researcher demand for support for:
  - open access (88%)
  - research data management (86%)
  - research integrity (85%)
- Adaptability or resilience (92%) and ethical judgment and professionalism (92%) are the top skills for the future.
- Strategic influencer skills are where librarians see the greatest room to grow as partners. 83% of librarians expect negotiation and influencing to be important in five years' time, but only 56% rate themselves proficient today, a 27 percentage point (pp) gap. For navigating complex decisions, the figures are 83% and 60%, a 23pp gap.

**Chapter 4:**

## Imagining the librarian of the future

**Technology takes a new role**

The librarian of the future will have an increased focus on digital technologies and will play a vital role in protecting research integrity.

- Top skills: driving change; planning and implementation; ethical judgment; communication skills.
- What they need to succeed:
  - support in developing skills in driving change.
  - provision of suitable AI tools.
  - institutional support for AI use.

**Collaboration becomes even more vital**

Positioned at the center of a vast web of researchers, administrators, suppliers and external stakeholders, librarians will continue to rely on their skills to build partnerships that benefit the institution.

- Top skills: cross-functional collaboration; leadership; communication; managing stakeholders and building relationships.
- What they need to succeed:
  - support in developing leadership and stakeholder management skills.
  - opportunities to tell the library's story.
  - alignment with institutional strategy and goals to strengthen visibility.

**Embedding further into the research ecosystem**

Librarians will continue to be a foundational part of the research infrastructure, with the library giving researchers access to the tools and metrics they need to succeed and tell their research story.

- Top skills: analytical skills; adaptability and innovation; negotiation and planning.
- What they need to succeed:
  - support in developing negotiation skills.
  - improved institutional awareness of the librarian's role in research.
  - structural facilitation of engagement with researchers.

**Chapter 5:**

## Implications and recommendations

Five implications emerge from the survey and interviews:

1. Strategic skills are a growing opportunity for librarians.
2. Ethics of the profession become a greater focus.
3. Regional differences require localized changes.
4. Persistent visibility issues continue.
5. Expertise continues to grow.

These implications lead to opportunities for institutions, librarians and others in the research ecosystem:

- Building on librarians' strategic skills is a clear opportunity.
- Changes in the research ecosystem are opportunities to evolve the library's role.
  - The library's role in AI governance, literacy and tool procurement underscore their relevance.
  - Researcher challenges can serve as opportunities for awareness of library expertise.
  - Expanding unique and growing services illustrates the library's contribution to research excellence.
- Supporting ethical and responsible research upholds ongoing library efforts. Because research integrity is a shared responsibility, partnering with researchers, academic leaders, publishers and others in the research ecosystem can strengthen these efforts.





# Introduction

Librarians have successfully guided their patrons and institutions through milestone changes, from the slow beginnings of digitalization in the 1980s, to the rise of the internet in the 1990s. Today, AI presents another pivotal moment to help navigate change. Technological advancements like these have transformed how the library looks and continues to shift the librarian's role within the broader research ecosystem.

Research relies on the institution's core structures and people — including the library and librarians — to maintain stability, competitiveness and excellence in this fast-changing context. Indeed, librarians bring a wealth of knowledge and skills to research, and thanks to their central position among communities, they foster new collaborations and strengthen research projects.[1]

Today, the research ecosystem is undergoing a period of profound transformation, changing the way research is planned, managed, conducted, shared and measured. Institutions are under pressure to do more with less, many reporting dwindling student numbers and tightening budgets.[2] Institutions face the added challenge of staying in step with technological developments that are evolving at dizzying speeds.

Librarians play a pivotal role in helping institutions embrace this transformation and realize the opportunities it creates. This global change is also having an impact on the librarian role, causing a shift in the needs of library users and collaborators, the challenges librarians face, and the skills they will need in the future. For librarians to fully embrace their evolving roles, and for their institutions to benefit from their expertise, we need to understand today's librarian, what is driving change and where the role is headed.

> *"In my 35 years of librarianship, we've always been changing. Others may see librarians and libraries as static, but [...] we are surrounded by change and if we're not a part of the change, adapting, communication and training for the changes, we will not be a part of the movement or conversation on our campuses."*
>
> **Library Director, USA**

> *"Many researchers still adhere to traditional library concepts, but I believe modern libraries have deeply engaged in research data management and digital research support, actively improving research visibility, efficiency, and impact."*
>
> **Librarian, China**

# About the research

This report is based on the results of two pieces of research: a survey of academic librarians and a series of qualitative interviews with researchers and academic leaders.

The survey, conducted in May–June 2026, maps the evolving role of academic libraries and librarians in a rapidly changing landscape. While focusing on research support and research outcomes, it also reflects the broader responsibilities of academic librarians, with the aim of better understanding the current view and state of preparedness for the future among the global librarian community. With responses from 1,100 academic librarians from 88 countries in five global regions, the survey reveals challenges, trends and expectations that clarify what librarians need in order to thrive in the future.

The interviews were designed to explore the same issues from the perspectives of librarians' primary stakeholders within the institution: researchers and academic leaders. These stakeholders help shape offered services, inform available resources and advocate for the library. They also provide insights into other areas of the research ecosystem.

We conducted 19 interviews (10 researchers, 9 academic leaders) to understand their pain points, priorities and their perspectives on the library. Their responses help us understand the gap that exists between librarians' roles and the way they are perceived, and they add detail to what's driving change in the research ecosystem more broadly.

### Discover related reports

- Attitudes toward AI: Through the librarian's lens — a librarian-focused report exploring usage and perceptions of AI.
- Researcher of the Future — a Confidence in Research report — researchers' views of research and innovation environment today and what is needed to strengthen it for the future.
- Confidence in Research: Researchers in the Spotlight — a global initiative to assess the pandemic's impact on confidence in research and identify actions to better support researchers.
- Research Futures 2.0 — a report that examines the challenges and opportunities of a post-COVID world.

> *"[Stakeholders] are our raison d'etre."*
>
> **Library Director, Norway**



Chapter 1:

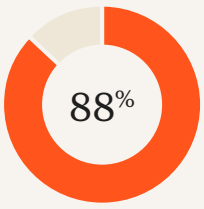
# Today's librarian — dedicated, skilled, ready to drive change



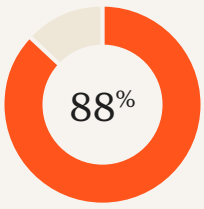


Today’s global research ecosystem is undergoing rapid change as it responds to a range of new and emerging challenges, from AI to research integrity. Librarians are an integral part of this transformation, both being affected by and helping to shape these changes. They have a wide range of soft skills and expertise that help them succeed in their roles. Yet the profession has not historically been widely recognized for its strategic impact, and despite its importance to research at this pivotal moment, librarians often feel critically undervalued.

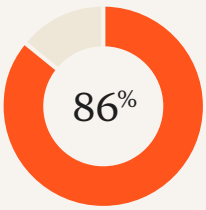
**The top three skills librarians consider very or extremely important in their roles today:**




Ethical judgement and professionalism




Adaptability or resilience




Written communication



Globally, two-thirds **(67%)** of librarians use AI tools daily **(32%)** or weekly **(35%)**; only **6%** never use them.



Only **11%** of librarians globally feel fully able to demonstrate their impact.



The top three limiters to demonstrating impact are a lack of metrics **(18%)**, lack of visibility **(17%)** and limited engagement with researchers **(16%)**.

# Today's dedicated librarian: supporting research from within

Librarians occupy a unique position: they are at the heart of a web of communities, supporting and collaborating with their peers across the institution and beyond, including on research.[3]

*"In my opinion, the library plays a key role in connecting local research with international academic networks."*

**Librarian, Mexico**

*"Fast-moving changes with multi-generational staff, students and faculty will make those things important to keep moving things forward. Changes can be positive and rewarding but if not everyone has the skills then everyone needs a chance to grow and be up to speed. If we are not communicating changes and giving people the tools they need, then how will they know?"*

**Library Support Staff, USA**

## How librarians say they support the research lifecycle

Librarians' written survey responses reveal a range of activities contributing to research. While not exhaustive, this list provides insight into how librarians' daily work helps drive their institutions' research output.

**Finding and incorporating evidence:**

- Literature search support/strategies
- Evaluation strategies/query support
- Systematic reviews
- Refining search strategies
- Training courses on library resources

**Publishing support:**

- Publication strategy
- Copyright guidance
- Funder compliance
- Research grant writing support
- Citation support
- Open access support

**Research infrastructure and visibility:**

- Metadata and repository support
- Targeted data analysis, such as bibliometrics
- Institutional repository maintenance
- Research visibility tasks, such as maintaining author profiles

**Management of research resources:**

- Negotiating subscriptions/access
- Ensuring seamless access to resources
- Cataloging/classification for research discovery
- Digital preservation
- Interlibrary loan (ILL)/inter-institutional resource sharing maintenance

# Today's skilled librarian: applying a broad skillset

Librarians supporting research in this way require a wide range of skills. According to a recent report using data from Skilltype, librarians have 30 skills across three main domains: information management skills, personal and community development, and interpersonal and leadership skills.[4]

That broad range is confirmed in this study, which focuses on a narrower set of skills, particularly soft skills rather than technical ones. The results reveal that librarians are clear about the importance of their skill set: from ethical judgement to negotiation, most consider their skills very or extremely important to the work they do today. Even the lowest-rated skills were considered important by over two-thirds of respondents.

The range of agreement across 15 skills surveyed is just 19 percentage points (pp), with very little regional variation, highlighting a global consensus on the skills that matter most for librarians today.

Librarians' focus does seem to make a difference: those at research-intensive universities consistently rate the importance of all skills higher than those at teaching-focused institutions.

### The 15 skills surveyed

**Communication and influence:**

- Negotiation and influencing
- Presentation and public speaking
- Storytelling and advocacy for the value of the library
- Written communication

**Collaboration and leadership:**

- Cross-functional collaboration
- Ethical judgement and professionalism
- Leadership
- Managing stakeholders and building relationships

**Strategic and critical thinking:**

- Analytical skills
- Navigating complex decisions
- Strategic or holistic thinking
- Tactical planning and operational implementation

**Managing change:**

- Adaptability or resilience
- Driving change
- Innovation



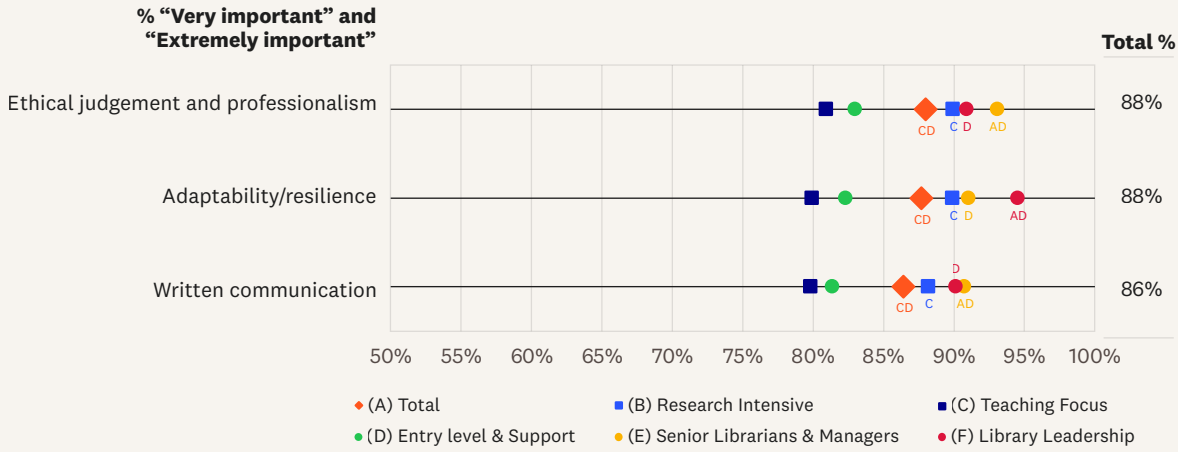


# Exploring today’s top three skills

Librarians report that the top three skills they need today are ethical judgement and professionalism (88% consider very or extremely important), adaptability or resilience (88%) and written communication (86%).

Figure 1

## Today’s most important librarian skills to support research




**Question:** How important are the following skills for librarians supporting research at your institution today?. Don’t know answers are excluded from the base. Letters show a significantly higher score than that segment (95% confidence): A=Total (1,087-1,095), B=Research Intensive (849-855), C=Teaching Focus (222-225), D=Entry level & Support (488-492), E=Senior Librarians & Managers (291-292), F=Library Leadership (262-266).

Base: n= 1,087-1,095

### Ethical judgement and professionalism

When explaining the importance of this skill, many librarian respondents acknowledge the complexity in politics, education and research as a reason for needing strong ethical judgement. AI is also raised frequently in this context, as ethical judgement is a vital aspect of ensuring its responsible use and building confidence.

### Adaptability or resilience

In their written survey responses, librarians note the dynamic nature of the research environment including changes in technology, funding and politics, and highlight the importance of being agile and resilient to successfully navigate unexpected change. Library leaders are most likely to consider this skill very or extremely important, at 95% compared with 82% of entry-level librarians.

### Written communication

Librarians acknowledge needing to deliver a consistent service, and ensure accurate and trusted communication, noting the need for good written communication. Many consider written communication more important or valuable than face-to-face contact.

Further, library leaders are more likely than entry-level librarians and support staff to consider this skill very or extremely important, at 90% vs. 81%.

Institution size also matters: respondents at large institutions are more likely than those at smaller institutions to agree (96% vs. 80%).

*"Accelerated digitalization and the intensive use of artificial intelligence are greatly expanding the impact that human decisions have on the rights of individuals and organizations."*

**Acquisition Librarian, Spain**

*"Libraries are no longer about books but about people. Communication with both our users and our teammates is essential for ensuring consistent, transparent, and compliant library services while supporting scalable, self-directed user learning. And, of course, as we adopt more digital and AI-driven tools, clear documentation also enables effective automation and continuity."*

**Library Director, Singapore**

*"The reference librarian role isn't static. Adaptability helps [us] to keep up, especially with the evolving research tools landscape. Every day new tools emerge and end-users expect us to be well equipped in terms of knowledge."*

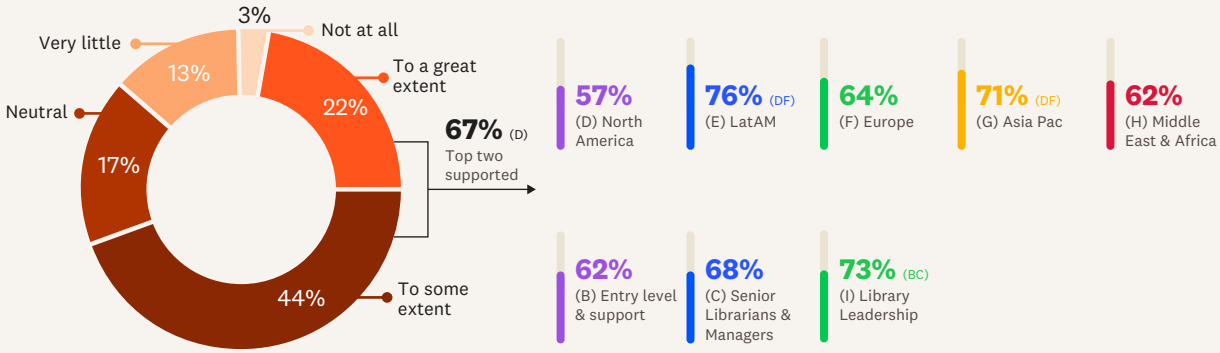
**Library Support Staff, Lebanon**

# Institutional support for skill development is lacking

Despite the clear importance of this range of skills, there is still room for improvement when it comes to institutional support for skill development. Two-thirds (67%) of librarians feel that their institution provides some support and training to develop future-facing skills; library leadership are the most likely to agree (73%). Librarians in Latin America are most positive about their institutions' support for skill development, with 76% saying they provide some support, while those in North America are the least positive, at 57%.

Figure 2

**Institutional support for librarian skill development**




**Question:** To what extent does your institution provide sufficient support and training to help you develop future-facing research support skills? Don't know answers are excluded from the base. Letters show a significantly higher score than that segment (95% confidence): A=Total (1,091), B=Entry level & Support (488), C=Senior Librarians & Managers (290), D=North America (283), E=Latin America (94), F=Europe (306), G=Asia Pacific (335), H=Middle East & Africa (65), I=Library Leadership (268).

Base: n= 1,091

# Librarians' use of AI today

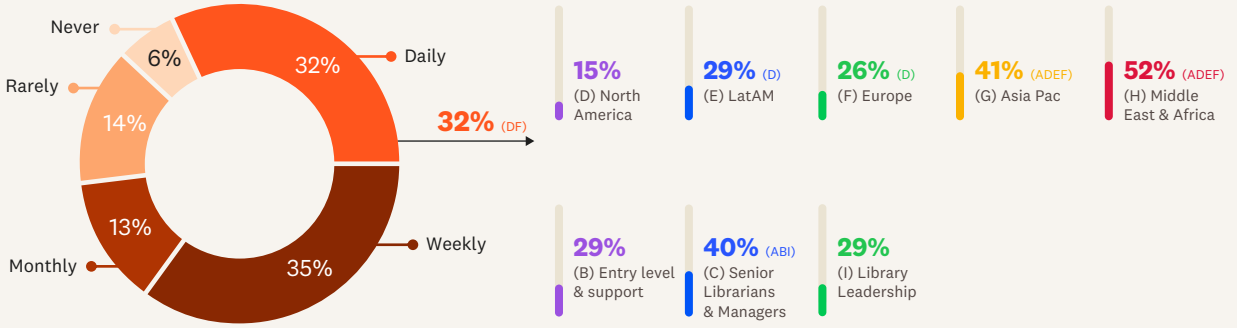
In the past four years, since the launch and proliferation of ChatGPT and a host of other generative AI tools, research institutions have seen a dramatic increase in the use of AI among librarians.[5]

Elsevier's report Attitudes toward AI: Through the librarian's lens showed that, in 2024, 60% of librarians had used AI, 41% for work purposes.

Two years later, AI use has continued to rise. Globally, two-thirds (67%) of librarians use AI tools daily (32%) or weekly (35%); only 6% never use them. This suggests that librarians are active users of emerging technology – their use of AI tools today is higher than researchers' reported use for work in 2025 (58%).[6]

Figure 3

## Frequency of AI use




**Question:** Currently, how often do you use AI tools in your role supporting research? Letters show a significantly higher score than that segment (95% confidence): A=Total (1,100), B=Entry level & Support (492), C=Senior Librarians & Managers (292), D=North America (285), E=Latin America (94), F=Europe (310), G=Asia Pacific (337), H=Middle East & Africa (66), I=Library Leadership (269).

Base: n= 1,100

Regional usage is highly variable, echoing patterns shown in previous surveys of researchers and clinicians.[7,8] Overall, North American librarians are the least active AI users (46% rarely or never use AI), while those in Asia Pacific are the most active (81% use AI daily or weekly). Drilling down to country level, librarians in India are most likely to use AI tools daily (53%) and those in the USA are least likely (16%).

See the accompanying databook for a full breakdown.



# Today's librarian: facing the recognition gap

The recognition gap between how librarians see themselves and how their institutions perceive them has long been acknowledged as a barrier to demonstrating the impact librarians have on academic institutions pursuing excellence.

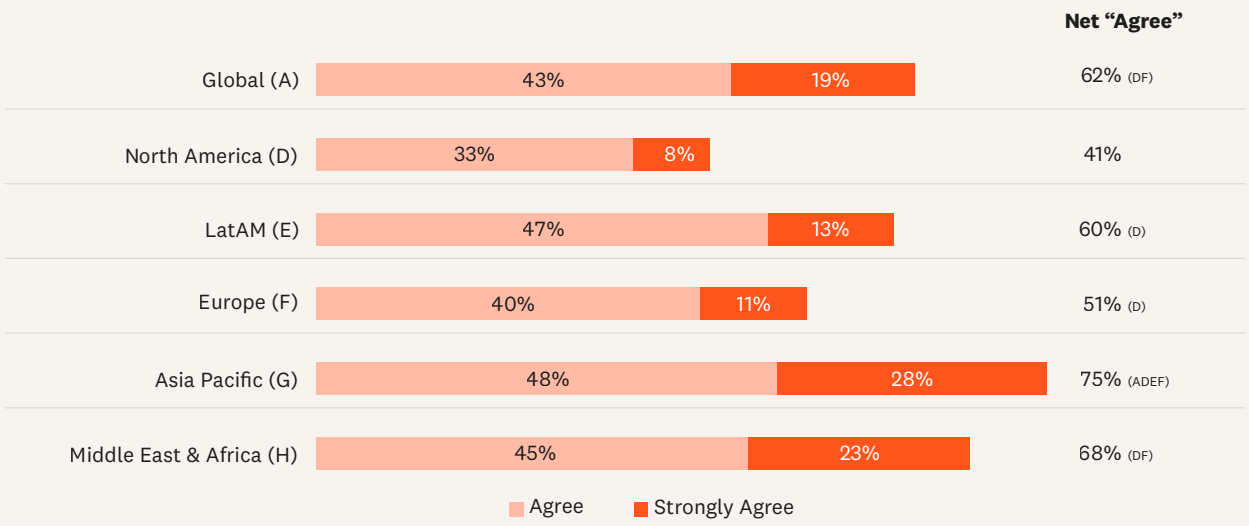
A 2021 report highlighted a disconnect between librarians and their patrons, noting that 60% of librarians surveyed said they support students and researchers by teaching about research best practices, while only 17% of students and 6% of faculty surveyed said the same.[9] Despite this, 84% of faculty said they appreciate librarians 'a lot' or 'a great deal.'[10]

> *"Libraries and librarians cannot be an afterthought anymore. We need to be more involved."*
>
> **Web Services Librarian, USA**

These findings are somewhat supported by this survey: 62% of librarians globally agree that the library's positive impact on research is widely recognized, and 68% say their research support skills are valued by their institution. While the numbers are encouraging, a proportion of librarians are less optimistic: 13% disagree or strongly disagree that their impact is recognized.

Figure 4

**The positive impact of the library on research at my institution is "widely recognized," by region**




**Question:** To what extent do you agree with the following statements about Librarians impact on research?: The positive impact of the library on research at my institution is widely recognized. Don't know answers are excluded from the base. Letters show a significantly higher score than that segment (95% confidence)

Base: (A) n= 1,073; (D) North America (273), (E) Latin America (94), (F) Europe (300), (G) Asia Pacific (334), (H) Middle East & Africa (65)

However, librarians report a perception gap when it comes to their role. About half (54%) believe researchers see them as a strategic partner, while 59% indicate they are perceived primarily as a resource provider.

Despite feeling undervalued, librarians are relied on by their patrons: 83% say researchers seek support when they need help.

*"The supporting role libraries play in building institutional knowledge bases – helping to increase global research visibility — deserves more recognition."*

**Librarian, China**

*"I wish researchers better understood that the library is a strategic partner in the research lifecycle, rather than just a repository of content. Beyond providing access, we actively manage the financial and legal complexities of Open Access, enhance the global visibility of their results, and ensure their work meets the increasingly strict requirements of international funders. When researchers collaborate with the library early, they don't just find information — they amplify their impact."*

**Public Services Librarian, Hungary**



## From the patrons' perspective

Through interviews with researchers and academic leaders, we can get a glimpse of the perception gap from the other side. Insights show that libraries have strategic potential, but current experiences vary greatly, resulting in two main groups: one seeing librarians as research collaborators and the other with limited awareness of the value they bring.

Over half of interviewees see librarians as an integral part of the research infrastructure — partners who provide AI guidance, support research data management and offer open access and publication advice, training and trusted information.

> *"The library has... very nicely developed... It's really a contact point for many of our students and researchers if they need support in data mining... research data management plans... training courses... and access to literature."*
>
> **Academic Leader, Europe**

Providing a different perspective, a number of interviewees shared stories of underuse, limited awareness and lack of access. Some researchers viewed the library almost exclusively as a source of journal subscriptions. Others described less positive interactions with librarians, citing missing databases, slow document delivery or limited access to research support expertise.

Some interviewees had a split perspective, citing instances where their library hadn't fully met their expectations, but acknowledging their potential as a future research partner and collaborator.

> *"I'm so sorry that I give you the pessimism of the librarian. I know that it should be much more. I see that... there are so many advantages that I can get from accessing librarians, but I was just not yet [able to]. So [it] would be really exciting actually to know what kind of facilities that I can access with librarians... because I'm sure that it will really improve my research productivity [when I move to my new research institution]."*
>
> **Researcher, Asia Pacific**

From the patron point of view, interview responses suggest that this perception split is related to seniority and resources: senior leaders generally imagine an expansive role for the librarian of the future, and researchers in well-resourced environments value seamless, even invisible support from librarians. In contrast, some participants from less well-resourced environments described basic access barriers and limited awareness of the broader services libraries provide, often reacting positively when these services were mentioned during the interview.

This indicates that the problem is often not negative perceptions of libraries, but an awareness, discoverability and service-consistency gap.

# Contributors to feeling valued and perceived

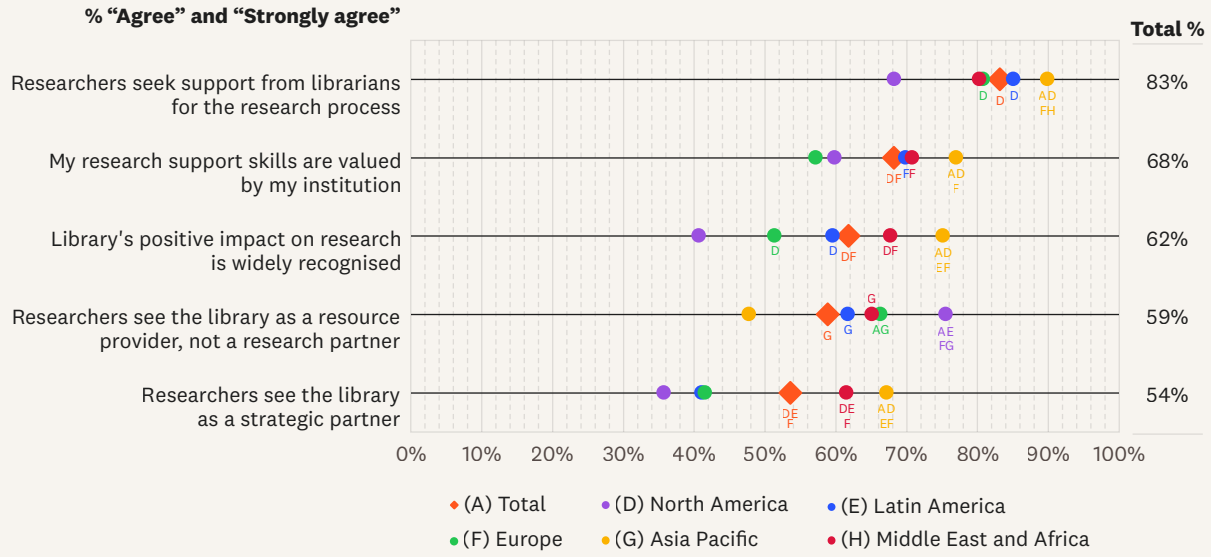
The picture might look straightforward at the global level, but significant differences emerge when we explore the recognition gap at a regional level and across institution types. The recognition of librarians' impact closely mirrors librarians' perceptions of how valued their skills are.

## Region

The regional picture suggests more positive sentiment among librarians in Asia Pacific compared to those in North America and Europe – a split in perception that we have also seen across research communities (see previous Researcher of the Future[11] and Clinician of the Future[12] reports, for example).

Figure 5

**Librarians' perceived impact on research, by region**




**Question:** To what extent do you agree with the following statements about Librarians impact on research? Don't know answers are excluded from the base. Letters show a significantly higher score than that segment (95% confidence): A=Total (1,058-1,086), D=North America (266-277), E=Latin America (90-94), F=Europe (296-307), G=Asia Pacific (334-336), H=Middle East & Africa (65-66).

Base: Total n= 1,058-1,086

### Role

The current survey distinguishes three main librarian roles: library leaders, managers and entry-level or support staff. Generally speaking, librarians in leadership are more likely to have a positive view of how libraries are perceived than those in entry-level roles.

### Institution focus

Previous research has shown that library patrons at research-intensive institutions tend to depend on libraries and appreciate them more compared to those where little or no research is undertaken.[13] This survey reflects a similar pattern: librarians at research-intensive institutions are more likely to agree that their impact is recognized than those at teaching-focused institutions (67% vs. 42%).

### Institution size

Librarians at large institutions are far more likely to feel their impact is recognized (86% vs 49% at small institutions). Those at large institutions (85%) also feel their skills are valued more than those at small institutions (57%).

## Obstacles to demonstrating impact

Despite the barriers they face demonstrating their impact on research, two-thirds (62%) of librarians believe their impact is recognized. However, alongside ongoing budget constraints in higher education, some librarians mention broader external factors adding to the pressure to demonstrate and communicate their impact.

Only 11% of librarians globally feel fully able to demonstrate their impact on research. Responses vary by role, with 17% of leadership saying they can do so, compared with just 7% of entry-level and support staff. Regional differences are also evident: librarians in the Middle East and Africa (17%) and Asia Pacific (15%) are most likely to agree, while those in North America (5%) are least likely.

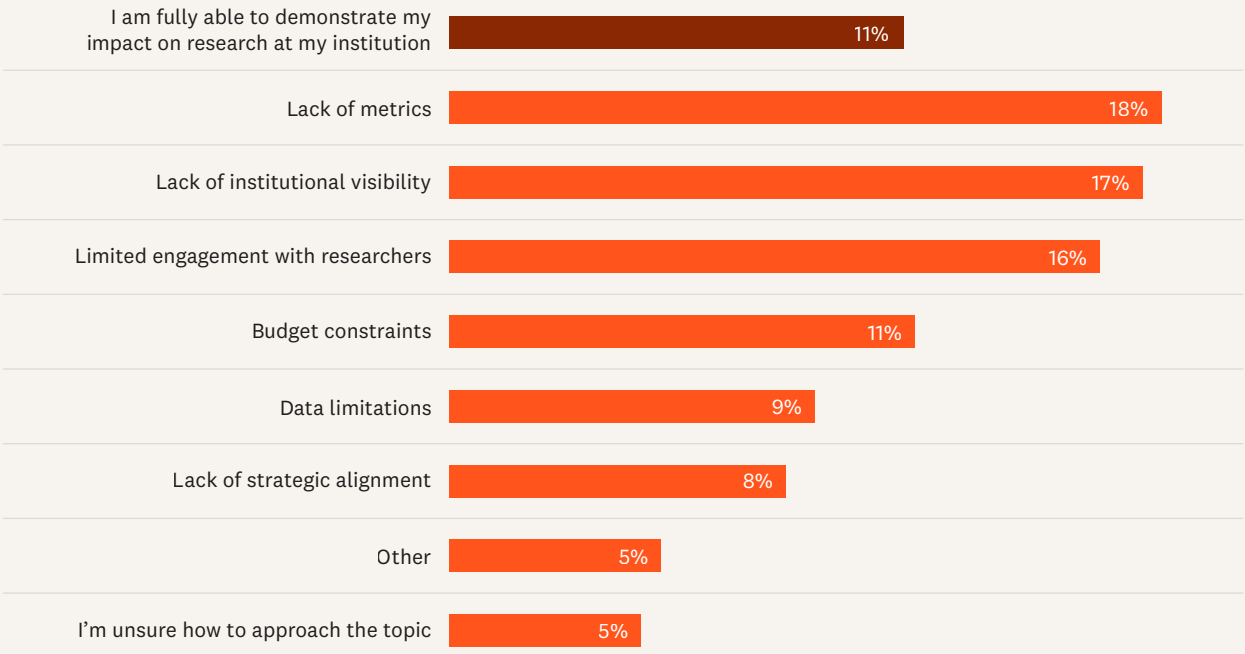
Librarians most commonly cite a lack of metrics (18%), lack of visibility (17%) and limited engagement with researchers (16%) as the top 3 limiters on demonstrating their impact on the research ecosystem. Librarians at large institutions see a lack of metrics as a greater barrier than do those at small ones (at 29% vs. 11%), while librarians at small institutions consider visibility a bigger barrier (at 22%, vs. 11% at large institutions).

These obstacles vary by region. For example, the lack of metrics is of greater concern to librarians in Asia Pacific, while those in North America are more likely to cite lack of visibility and limited engagement as barriers to demonstrating impact – see the chart on the next page and accompanying databook for a detailed breakdown of regional results.

> *"With so many digital tools now, the library can easily get lost in the noise unless we intentionally highlight our role."*
>
> **Librarian, Philippines**

Figure 6

## Factors limiting librarians' ability to demonstrate impact




**Question:** What most limits your ability to demonstrate your impact on research?

Base: Total (A) n= 1,100; North America (D) (285), Latin America (E)(94), Europe (F) (310), Asia Pacific (G) (337), Middle East & Africa (H) (66)

| Region | Top 3 blockers | % selected |
|---|---|---|
| **NOAM** | Fully able to show impact | 5% |
| | Lack of institutional visibility | 24% AG |
| | Limited engagement with researchers | 23% AEG |
| | Budget constraints | 14% |
| **LATAM** | Fully able to show impact | 10% |
| | Lack of metrics | 22% DF |
| | Lack of institutional visibility | 20% G |
| | Data limitations | 14% DF |
| **Europe** | Fully able to show impact | 8% |
| | Lack of institutional visibility | 23% AG |
| | Limited engagement with researchers | 18% E |
| | Lack of metrics | 12% |

| Region | Top 3 blockers | % selected |
|---|---|---|
| **APAC** | Fully able to show impact | 15% ADF |
| | Lack of metrics | 26% ADF |
| | Data limitations | 14% ADF |
| | Limited engagement with researchers | 13% |
| **MEA** | Fully able to show impact | 17% DF |
| | Budget constraints | 26% ADEFG |
| | Limited engagement with researchers | 20% E |
| | Lack of institutional visibility | 14% |

# What librarians wish researchers knew

About half of the academic leaders and researchers we interviewed indicated that they are often unaware of the value librarians bring to their institutions and research. To help understand the perception gaps and potential opportunities, we asked librarians: "what do you wish researchers knew about libraries?" Their responses reveal a strong global desire for greater understanding of the broad role librarians play and meaningful impact they can have on research processes and outcomes, from providing access to information to supporting research integrity. The following selection of comments illustrates the themes that emerged.

## Role in research

*"I wish more faculty saw librarians as embedded collaborators who can directly enhance research outcomes rather than support staff only involved at the beginning stages of information gathering."*

**Librarian, Australia**

*"Librarians contribute strategic insight into the changing scholarly communication landscape particularly around open research and funder compliance expectations."*

**Librarian, UK**

*"I would like them to understand that we are not a bureaucratic procedure, but multipliers of their visibility and scientific impact. That our role begins before publishing, acting as strategic consultants in the design of data plans and author profiles. We are the guarantors of your legal security in intellectual property and the allies that transform information management into a competitive advantage to obtain financing and prestige."*

**Library Director, Spain**

## Collaboration

*"I hope researchers will view libraries as indispensable partners throughout the entire research cycle, from ideation and data management to publishing, dissemination, and impact tracking."*

**Librarian, China**

*"The library can act as a reflection partner on the research journey"*

**Librarian, Colombia**

*"When librarians can help with research project management strategies and research design from the start [researchers can] avoid those roadblocks they face later on."*

**Electronic Resources Librarian, USA**

## Behind the scenes

*"People rarely think about how something as simple as searching for an article actually depends on multiple systems working together quietly."*

**Librarian, India**

*"We are desperately understaffed and underfunded and undertrained. Although I want to do more to support research, our administration does not prioritize it in any functional way. They want something for nothing."*

**Reference Librarian, Canada**



## Skills

*"There is still a great lack of knowledge of our role and our expertise. Some people have difficulty understanding that all the work of data processing and analysis is not done by magic, that there is a whole team behind it that is working to ensure that the institution's research shines."*

**Librarian, Canada**

*"Our librarians can solve many of the regular problems encountered by researchers (data management, planning, lit reviews, searches, etc.) and if we can't directly solve it, we're generally able to locate a solution for them. There's an overload of information and tools, but the library has already vetted and reviewed a large portion of them on behalf of our patrons. We can't answer questions if we aren't asked."*

**Scholarly Communications Librarian, USA**



Chapter 2:

# Drivers of change in the research ecosystem

What is driving the changes reshaping the librarian's role in research? Understanding the needs of key stakeholders, along with shifts in research, funding, politics, technology and more can help predict what will be needed for librarians to succeed in the future. This chapter examines how librarians perceive the factors reshaping their role and complements these insights with perspectives from researchers and academic leaders.



**83%** cite AI among the biggest drivers of change in the research ecosystem.



**43%** of librarians globally say research integrity is driving change throughout the research ecosystem.



Library patrons mention AI, research integrity, collaboration, funding and administration, and career sustainability and wellbeing as shifting their needs.



**67%** of librarians feel their institution provides some support for skills training.

Seismic shifts in digital technology (particularly AI),[14] research funding,[15] geopolitical instability[16] and global challenges like climate change[17] are shifting the research landscape.[18] This constant change is impacting librarians' roles and the skills they need,[19] and librarians are vocal about it.

> *"I believe there are many changes ahead of us, still, with the traditional roles of libraries fading away and becoming obsolete."*
>
> **Librarian, Czech Republic**

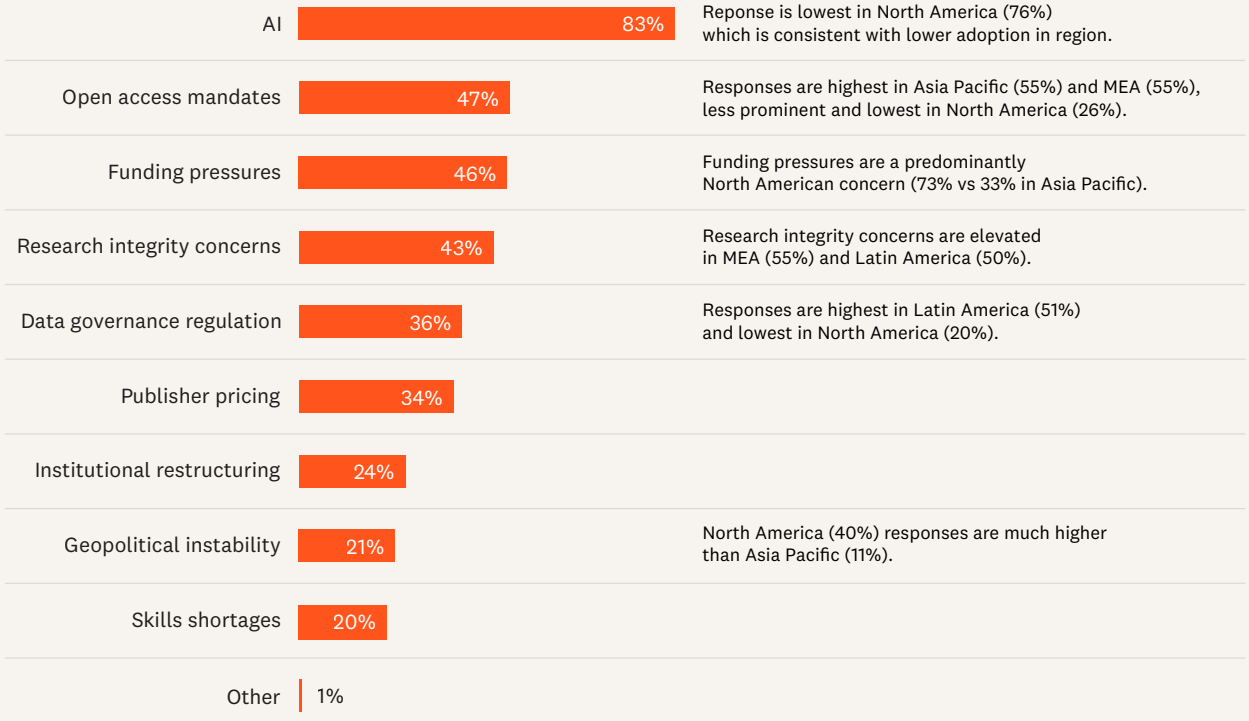
> *"The pace and unpredictability of change is accelerating, and success over the next five years will depend less on having a perfect long term plan and more on how well individuals and institutions adjust when conditions shift."*
>
> **Library Director, India**

# The librarians' perspective: what is catalyzing change

In the current survey, librarians shared their views on what is driving change in the research ecosystem, with AI emerging as the biggest catalyst (see page 34 for more details on AI as a driver of change).

Figure 7

**Biggest drivers of change to the research ecosystem in 5 years' time**




**Question:** Thinking about the future research ecosystem in 5 years' time, what do you think will be the biggest drivers of change? (Select up to three)
Base: 1,100

### Technology

Most librarians (83%) cite AI among the biggest drivers of change in the research ecosystem. Agreement ranges from 76% in North America to 86% in Asia Pacific. At the country level, librarians in Japan are the least likely to cite AI among the biggest drivers of change (58% vs. 83% globally), while those in China are the most likely (93%).

Data governance and regulation are identified as drivers of change by 36% of librarians globally. Mirroring their perception of AI, librarians in North America are the least likely to rank data governance regulation highly (20%).

### Approach to research

For nearly half of librarians (47%), open access mandates are a key driver of change in the research ecosystem. This view is particularly common among librarians in Asia Pacific and the Middle East and Africa (55%), and less so in North America (26%).

Research integrity is another important factor shaping change in the research ecosystem, according to 43% of librarian respondents globally. Library leaders were more likely than entry-level and support staff to identify it as a driver of change (50% vs. 37%).

### Budgets

Funding pressures are a driver of change for 46% of librarians globally; this is especially the case for those in North America (73%). Related to this, 34% of librarians globally believe publisher pricing is driving change (ranging from 15% in Latin America to 52% in North America). Funding pressures are also ranked highly more often by those at small institutions than by those at large ones (53% vs. 34%).

# The patrons' perspective: changing stakeholder needs

Many of the drivers of change identified by librarians are also challenges described by their patrons: researchers and academic leaders. From lack of AI training and governance to the growing need for collaboration and complexities of securing research funding, their obstacles map closely onto the shifts experienced across the landscape.

### AI: lack of training, governance and trust

AI is here to stay, and its rapid adoption across the research ecosystem is clear. However, the uptake of tools seems to be outpacing institutional preparedness, raising concerns for researchers and academic leaders about training, governance and trust.

The 2025 Academic Leader of the Future report revealed that 69% of academic leaders believe AI will help drive new knowledge, while only 35% say their institution has good AI governance.[20]

Similarly, 61% of researchers believe AI will be the creative force driving new knowledge in the next two to three years, but only 32% agree that governance of AI at their institution is good and almost half (45%) feel undertrained in AI.[21]

In all 19 interviews conducted as part of the current research, researchers and academic leaders discuss AI as a meaningful force for positive change, yet almost always mention concerns. This is in line with previous research, where optimism about the potential positive impacts of AI tools, such as saving time, was countered with drawbacks, such as environmental impacts and safety concerns.[22]

For example, an academic leader in North America acknowledges the vision of AI five years in the future as having utopian and dystopian elements, discussing AI tools as "fabulous productivity tools" that also raise serious cybersecurity concerns. Their conclusion, though, is that AI adoption may be inevitable.

Interviewees also describe using AI tools for a range of tasks, from writing and editing to coding, literature discovery, institutional knowledge management, research optimization, teaching and virtual research infrastructure.

> *"AI has genuinely changed how I approach the early stages of a project — literature scoping and hypothesis generation are faster. It has not changed how I approach the core research design, and I think that is appropriate. The scientific judgment still has to be mine."*
>
> **Researcher, Europe, Middle East and Africa**

> *"I think AI is not going to replace the library, [people] would want both. So [students] will check AI for an instant answer, but they also want to understand whether that is true. So they actually leverage the library to get a paper… but they want to read that also to reconfirm, which is what we are continuously promoting for both faculty and students. That if AI is given, AI is not replacement for AI god. AI is one of the tools."*
>
> **Academic Leader, Asia Pacific**



## Research integrity: risks and pressures

Research integrity is mentioned in 13 interviews (unprompted in six), raising issues such as pressure to publish and produce results quickly, particularly in publication and peer review, emphasis on impact over intellectual quality and concerns about AI.

AI-related concerns include misinformation generated by AI tools when conducting research, in particular hallucinated references. Librarians are already encountering this in their daily work as researchers request articles that do not exist.[23] These concerns are related to broader issues, such as fabricated data, plagiarism, homogenized scientific writing and ambiguity around authorship.

> *"So theoretically, you can make everything up now… you can have AI thinking about writing a paper, even producing the data that you want, which poses a lot of ethical concerns. And… sometimes I feel that the field is developing so fast that we sort of are always behind in… how can we… and how sharp should we regulate this?… I think research ethics and also the way that we perform research and evaluate research is going to be changing a lot."*
>
> **Academic Leader, Europe**

Loss of critical skills is another concern related to research integrity. Interviewees consistently emphasize that researchers need to remain responsible for original thinking, as well as verifying and interpreting their findings.

The reported loss of critical skills is already having a tangible impact, as some researchers report spending time checking others' work. As a researcher in North America, explains: "It's doubled my workload with them [junior scholars using AI] because I'm having to check everything so carefully."

As seen in previous research,[24] the pressure to publish is also a threat to research integrity, pushing scholars to accelerate their work. According to one interviewee, a researcher in Europe, "publish or perish" is reducing publication quality. A researcher in Latin America feels similarly: "the pressure for me was that I wanted to publish before everyone else did because I thought, well, if someone is having the same idea as me, maybe I will lose the opportunity to be the first person to publish about the topic."

Taken together, these interviews reflect growing concerns about maintaining trust in research quality and originality. Librarians can play an important role here, offering AI guidance, governance, training and approved tool access, as well as continuing to support researchers in their publication activities.



**Skill in focus:**
Ethical judgement and professionalism

## Collaboration: essential research infrastructure

In line with librarians' emphasis on collaboration (with 85% considering cross-functional collaboration an important skill today), researchers and academic leaders also describe collaboration and interdisciplinarity as increasing priorities. The topic appeared in 17 interviews, with four interviewees raising it unprompted. Far from being an optional approach, collaboration has become an integral part of the research infrastructure.

> *"It's all one big collaboration while also having specialized individualized knowledge... there's just no way that this would be possible to have one person who's knowledgeable about all of the aspects of research."*
>
> **Academic Leader, North America**

Interviewees discuss international partnerships, interdisciplinary teams, university–industry relationships, multi-institutional funding coalitions, mentoring networks and peer validation under this theme, highlighting how multi-faceted collaboration is in practice. They acknowledge it as a vital ingredient in getting funded, as well as ensuring legitimacy and making an impact on society.

At a personal level, interviewees indicated collaboration is critical to career progression and pushing research forward. The main divergence concerns capacity: well-resourced institutions are building systems to facilitate it, whereas researchers in more constrained environments often depend on personal networks, informal workarounds and even AI tools.

> *"Research support is increasingly collaborative, as institutions become more focused on reducing duplication and harnessing the power of collective skills and knowledge."*
>
> **Library Director, Australia**

This is highly relevant to librarians, who have been called "conduits and catalysts of collaboration between multiple groups and disciplines."[25] Librarians support cross-departmental collaboration by providing resources and spaces, expertise in and access to databases and tools that help identify research collaborators and the interpersonal skills needed to act as liaisons.



**Skill in focus:**
Cross-functional collaboration

## Funding, administration and research-support complexity

Administrative burden and funding concerns have long been challenges across the ecosystem. As economic downturns cause budgets to shrink and funding sources to dry up, the research support infrastructure can become fragmented and complex. These topics emerge in most interviews, reflecting their importance as drivers of change.

For many, the funding outlook is not positive: according to previous research, 47% of academic leaders expect research funding to increase in the next few years, compared to just 30% of researchers.[26] In the interviews, researchers and academic leaders discuss not only the challenges in securing grants, but also deeper issues, such as unstable funding priorities.

Difficulties securing funding can involve costly administration according to researcher interviewees: they must navigate fragmented research information to repeatedly prepare grant proposals and may experience ethics and compliance delays due to institutional bureaucracy. With insufficient specialist support, these challenges can exacerbate already heavy teaching and administrative workloads.



**Skill in focus:** Storytelling and advocacy for the value of the library

> *"Given that we have faculty that has already reached a level of research seniority that is suitable with the code of the funding, we can attract the resources, but it's also time intensive and time consuming at this point."*
>
> **Academic Leader, Latin America**

Librarians support researchers and academic leaders as they face these financial and administrative challenges through grant proposal writing and access to specialist tools and resources that help identify funding opportunities. Yet patrons' reports of insufficient specialist support suggest a potential gap, highlighting an opportunity for librarians to raise awareness of their skills and services.

> *"As grant funding becomes more difficult and research becomes increasingly interdisciplinary, it will be vital to work with multiple sectors of the university and also to be able to provide a broad range of support across the library's services/units."*
>
> **Library Director, USA**

## Career sustainability, talent retention and researcher wellbeing

Career sustainability emerged as a prominent theme in 14 researcher and academic leader interviews and was raised unprompted in eight of them, making it the most frequently mentioned unprompted topic. The finding is clear: researchers' careers are becoming less sustainable.

The issue takes different forms depending on the career stage. For early-career researchers, short-term contracts, continual grant applications and unclear progression are critical concerns, while senior leaders are more concerned with talent competition, brain drain and the loss of researchers to industry.

Mentoring and researcher development, closely related topics, also appear unprompted in several interviews.

For some researchers, the library might not be the obvious point of call for solutions to these challenges. However, librarians can offer support in various domains, such as writing grant proposals and providing tools to streamline research, that ultimately save researchers time and enable them to focus on career progression.

> *"I think that ends up ultimately with a lot of the most gifted scientists leaving academia because of this lack of progression pathway and this feeling of a lack of permanence in science."*
>
> **Researcher, Europe**



**Skill in focus:**
Written communication

# Technology in action: how AI is transforming the library

AI use among librarians' patrons – particularly researchers – is already having an impact on the role. Elsevier's 2025 Researcher of the Future report reveals that AI adoption in research has surged: 58% of researchers have used AI tools for work, up from 37% in 2024.[27] As the Taming the Crocodile (2026) report puts it, "A third of researchers' information-seeking now [starts] in an AI setting – which is an unimaginably huge shift to have taken place within a year."[28]

For librarians, this poses significant challenges, including supporting their own and their stakeholders' adoption of AI tools while ensuring research integrity.[29]

It also provides opportunities, with AI use raising demand for technical support from librarians.[30] In turn, this demand puts pressure on librarians to strengthen certain skills, such as innovation. As one librarian in China says: "one of the biggest reasons innovation is crucial to libraries is that students are increasingly using AI tools to complete assignments and conduct research, because [of this] libraries can no longer rely solely on traditional information literacy methods."

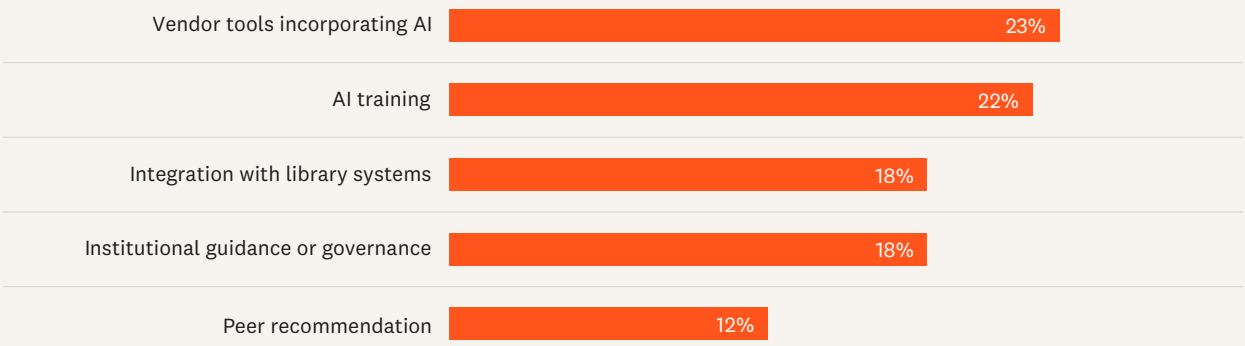
Understanding what enables librarians' use of AI, as well as what blocks it, opens the door to ensuring the technology serves them optimally.

> *"The rapid integration of AI and data-driven technologies is creating unprecedented challenges for intellectual property and personal privacy. Librarians must serve as the ethical gatekeepers who protect patron data and navigate complex copyright landscapes to ensure information remains both protected and accessible."*
>
> **Librarian, Indonesia**

## AI enablers

Figure 8

### Primary enablers of AI use among librarians supporting research




**Question:** What is the single biggest enabler of your AI use in supporting research? Single-select question: respondents chose one option only, so percentages sum to 100%.

Base: AI users (n=834).

## AI blockers

For librarians who do not use or rarely use AI to support research, (20% of those surveyed) the top three blockers cited are ethical concerns such as bias and accountability (67%), data privacy concerns (52%) and copyright concerns (48%). Across the board, librarians in North America report more concerns than those in Europe.

It is perhaps unsurprising that ethical concerns are a bigger blocker to AI use than more practical issues like a lack of training. This echoes librarians' skill set, with ethical judgment or professionalism among the skills considered very important (see page 14).

Figure 9

### Barriers to AI use among librarians who rarely or never use it




**Question:** What are the biggest blockers to your use of AI? Multiple-select question: respondents could choose more than one option, so percentages sum to more than 100%.

Base: Respondents who rarely or never use AI (n=266).

Chapter 3:

# Tomorrow's librarian — digital, collaborative, in demand



Librarians envision their future role as involving more collaboration, requiring a broader set of skills and being enabled by technology. The drivers of change they identify, from funding and political uncertainty to AI advancements and the shifting needs of their stakeholders, will shape the role of the librarian of the future. The skills that librarians apply in their work today are expected to be even more vital in the future, when technology will put added pressure on concerns around research integrity and protecting the scholarly record, while institutions will lean on librarians’ expertise to showcase their output in an increasingly competitive environment.

This is a unique moment for librarians to embed further into the research ecosystem, demonstrate and drive impact for their institutions, and strengthen their position as strategic partners for research success.



**95%** of librarians expect demand for AI support to increase over the next five years.



**81%** of librarians say AI misuse is the greatest future risk to the scholarly record.



**76%** of librarians expect collaboration between the library and other departments to increase in the next five years.



Adaptability or resilience **(92%)** and ethical judgment and professionalism **(92%)** are the top skills for the future.



The skill preparedness gap is largest for strategic influencer skills such as negotiation and influencing (**27pp**) and navigating complex decisions (**23pp**).

# Tomorrow's valued librarian: visions of the future

Librarians' expectations are clear: the librarian of the future will hone and apply today's skills to an even greater extent as they continue to support research in the future. Librarians anticipate greater demand for support across areas such as data analysis and bibliometrics, research integrity, open research and AI. They also expect to collaborate more with researchers and predict that AI will impact their role both indirectly and directly.

## Digital experts in an AI-driven institution

While AI will likely have an impact on librarians' day-to-day work, and therefore the skills they need to carry it out, studies suggest that the effect will be augmentative: in short, AI tools are not expected to substitute librarians' skills.[31]

> *"[Managing stakeholders and building relationships] are things that AI cannot (or only to a limited extent) do for us."*
>
> **Librarian, Germany**

However, looking five years ahead, librarians foresee AI having an even bigger influence on their role, and across the research landscape, than it does today. Nearly three-quarters (74%) of librarians agree that AI will increase demand for librarian expertise. More specifically, almost all librarians (95%) expect demand for AI support to grow over the next five years.

Agreement that AI will increase demand for librarian expertise varies by region, in line with the overall pattern of AI sentiment: librarians in Asia Pacific are most likely to agree (86%) and those in North America least likely (55%). Institution size has an impact here too, with librarians at large institutions (81%) more likely than those at small institutions (69%) to agree.

> *"We are on the cusp of a new generation of tools that will change people's lives. We thought the internet was a seismic shift, that was nothing compared to AI."*
>
> **Collection Development and Management Librarian, USA**

Librarians acknowledge the risks AI poses to research quality and integrity, including the challenge of identifying high-quality content from the rest. According to the 2026 report Taming the Crocodile, users of AI tools often do not know when those tools have hallucinated and, as noted earlier, librarians report being asked by researchers to find articles that do not exist.[32]

There is global concern for the risk AI may bring to the research ecosystem: 81% of librarians say AI misuse is the greatest future risk to the scholarly record.

> *"As AI tools and digital platforms become more common, people will need strong ethical judgement to decide how to use content responsibly and avoid misuse or plagiarism."*
>
> **Librarian, Argentina**

Librarians' responses suggest a shared sense of responsibility to mitigate this risk, with many envisioning librarians playing a leading role in institutional AI initiatives.

For example, most (82%) agree that librarians should lead AI literacy initiatives for researchers. Again, echoing broader patterns in the survey, those in North America and Europe are least likely to agree (though the majority still do, at 73% and 74% respectively) and librarians in Latin America and Asia Pacific are most likely to agree (at 88% and 90% respectively).

Similarly, over three-quarters (76%) believe that librarians should play a governance role in AI use within research. Library leadership (81%) and those at research-intensive institutions (79%) are the most likely to hold this view, while those at teaching-focused institutions are least likely to agree (62%).

> *"Thinking five years ahead is difficult due to the constant evolution of AI… I think we will be in the same place we are now, as the trusted source. We will be more involved in teaching ethical use, evaluating information and helping implement tools that researchers need. The tactical planning will be trying to map where AI is going, understanding what tools are most valuable, and sustainable, and which tools make sense for an academic library to provide."*
>
> **Collection Development and Management Librarian, USA**

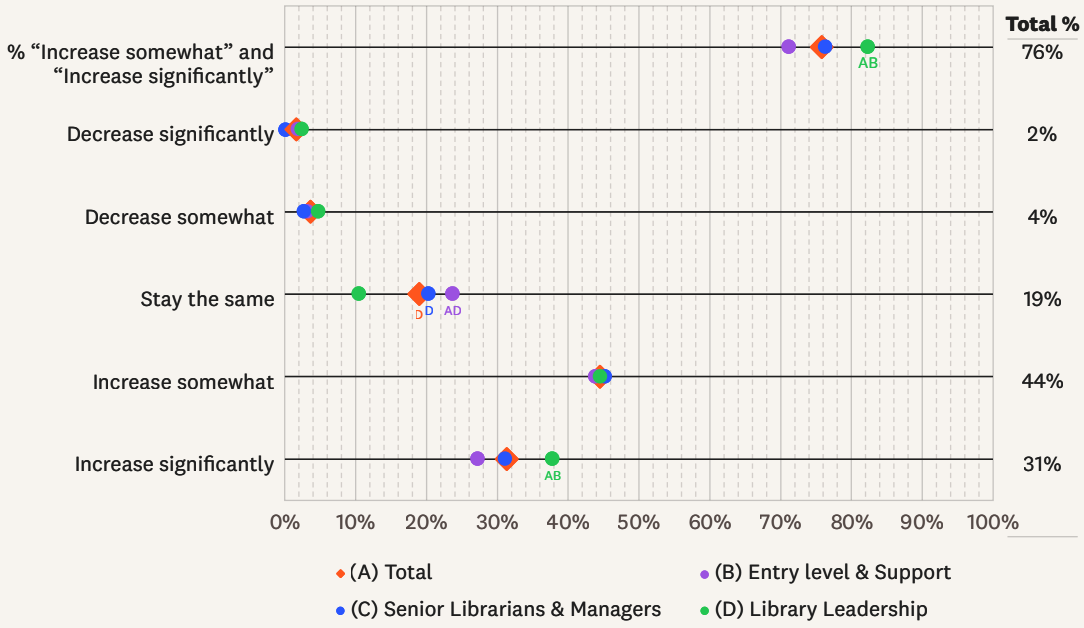


# Collaborators strengthening the research ecosystem

Collaboration is already a key aspect of the librarian role, and a core skill for librarians globally. They expect its importance to grow: 76% of librarians expect increased collaboration between the library and other departments in the next five years. Expectations are highest among library leaders (82%) and librarians in Asia Pacific (83%), Latin America and Middle East and Africa (82%). Conversely, librarians in North America (66%) and those at small institutions (68%) are less likely to expect collaboration to increase.

Figure 10

**Expected change in library collaboration with other departments over five years**




**Question:** Do you expect collaboration between the library and other departments in your institution to increase in the next 5 years? Don't know answers are excluded from the base. Letters show a significantly higher score than that segment (95% confidence): A=Total (1,022), B=Entry level & Support (450), C=Senior Librarians & Managers (268), D=Library Leadership (262).

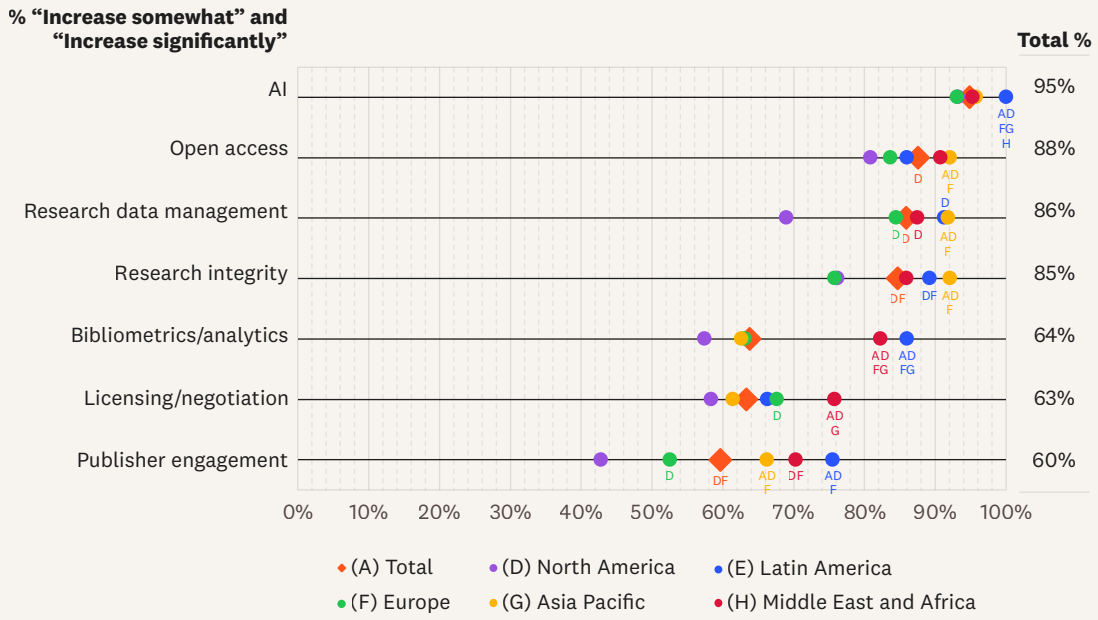
Base: n= 1,022

Zooming in on librarians' work supporting research, there is an increase in demand for support in certain areas. The areas of growing demand include:

- open access (88%)
- research data management (86%)
- research integrity (85%)
- bibliometrics and analytics (64%)
- licensing and negotiation support (63%)
- publisher engagement (60%)

Figure 11

## Anticipated increase in demand for research support areas, by region




**Question:** In the next 5 years, how do you expect demand for research support in the following areas to change at your institution? Don't know answers are excluded from the base. Letters show a significantly higher score than that segment (95% confidence): A=Total (1,000-1,061), D=North America (236-269), E=Latin America (90-93), F=Europe (274-300), G=Asia Pacific (327-332), H=Middle East and Africa (62-65).

Chart shows the % of respondents expecting demand to increase somewhat or significantly. "Don't know" responses are excluded from the base, so bases vary by area.

Base: all respondents (n=1,000-1,061).



# Tomorrow's skilled librarian: exploring the future skillset

Driven by changes in the research ecosystem, particularly advances in technology, librarians share their views on the skills they expect to be most important in five years' time. From top skills like adaptability and ethical judgment to emerging areas like leadership and navigating complex decisions, librarians are already preparing for the future demands of the profession. But there may be challenges along the way.

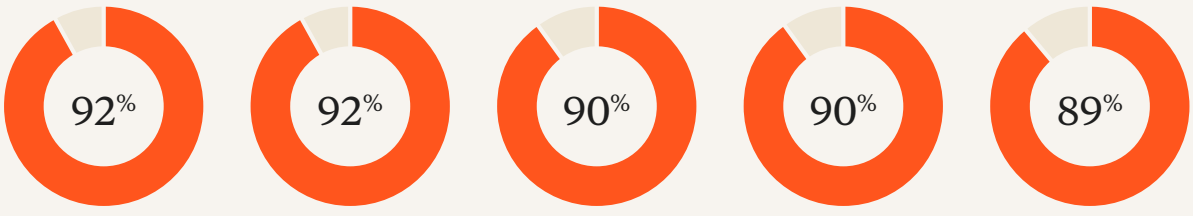
By comparing the top skills they expect to need in the future with their current level of proficiency, we can better understand what librarians need to help them succeed.

## The top five skills for tomorrow's librarian

Librarians expect to need a mix of soft skills at the core of their skill set in five years. The skills they consider most important in the future respond to many of the forces catalyzing change (such as ethical judgment and analytical skills, which will be vital as digital technology continues to develop) and more broadly to change itself (through such skills as adaptability and resilience).

> *"The pace and unpredictability of change is accelerating, and success over the next five years will depend less on having a perfect long-term plan and more on how well individuals and institutions adjust when conditions shift."*
>
> **Library Director, India**

**The top five skills that librarians globally expect to be important in five years:**




Adaptability or resilience

Ethical judgement and professionalism

Cross-functional collaboration

Driving change

Analytical skills

# Rising stars in the librarian's skillset

How does this picture of the librarian's future skillset stack up against what we see today? (See page 13 for a breakdown of today's most important skills.) Understanding these projected changes can help direct skill development priorities and identify possible gaps.

Librarians' responses paint a clear picture of a future role in which a broad skill set is critical. Indeed, librarians expect all skills, especially those they consider relatively less important today, to gain importance in five years. This perspective is consistent across the board, with only one skill remaining largely unchanged in importance: written communication.

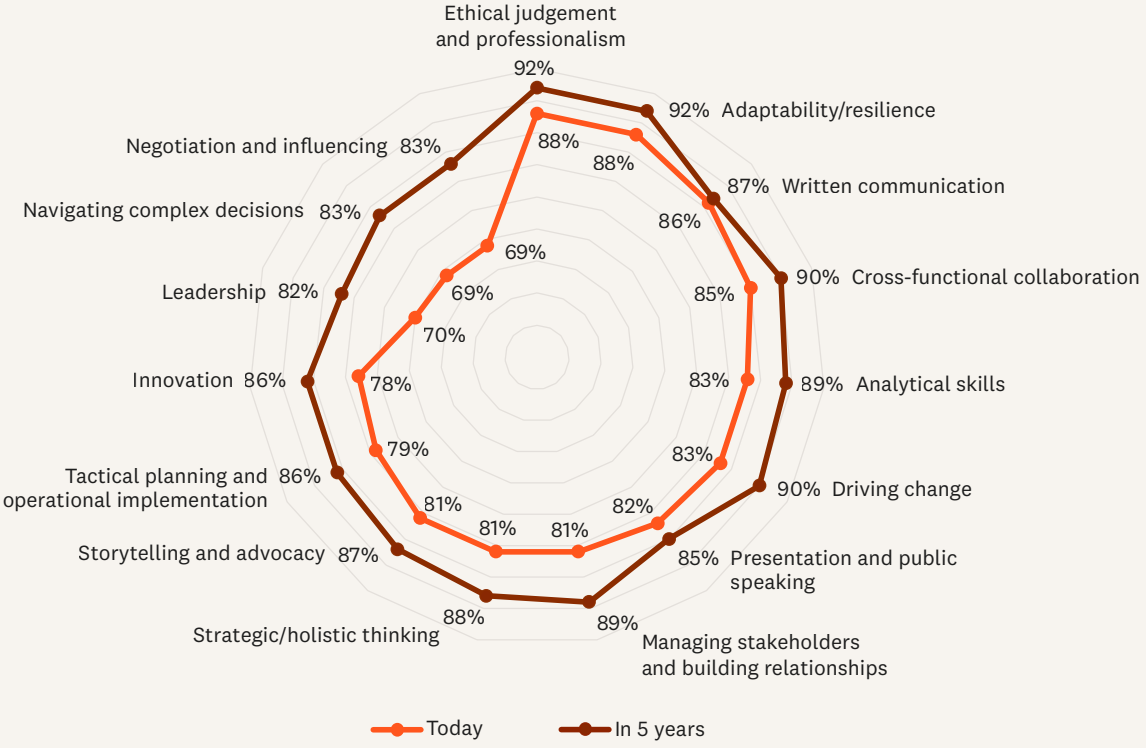
The greatest increase in perceived future skill importance was observed among skills that are considered relatively less important today, with the gap reaching 14 percentage points (pp).

- Negotiation and influencing (+14pp)
- Navigating complex decisions (+14pp)
- Leadership (+12pp)
- Innovation (+8pp)
- Managing stakeholders (+8pp)

> *"As [the] technology changes with the implementation of AI and other tools, Librarians and their teams will need to have the skills to pilot these new services. Of course, this is no different than the skills librarians have needed to pilot new services over the decades like computers, internet, online catalogs, eBooks, and more."*
>
> **Library Director, USA**

Figure 12

**Librarian skills for research support, current and future importance**




**Question:** How important are the following skills for librarians supporting research at your institution today? How important will the following skills be in 5 years' time for librarians supporting research? % rating each skill as very or extremely important, today and in five years' time. "Don't know" responses are excluded from the base.

Base: All respondents (n=[1,083–1,095] today; n=[1,069–1,082] in five years).

## Some things never change

Several of today's top-tier skills remain highly rated, with more than 80% of librarians expecting them to be important in five years' time.

- Managing stakeholders and building relationships (89%)
- Strategic/holistic thinking (88%)
- Written communication (87%)
- Storytelling and advocacy (87%)
- Tactical planning and operational implementation (86%)
- Presentation and public speaking (85%)

## The skill proficiency gap

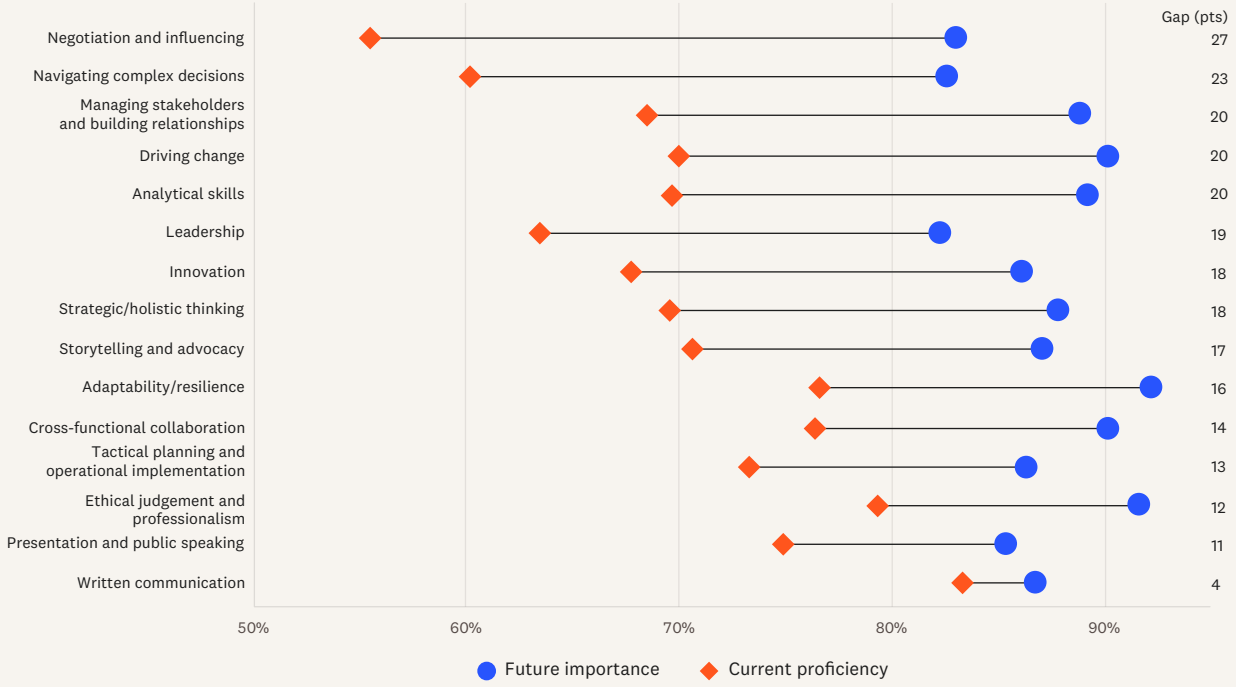
With a picture of librarians' skill set today, the skills they expect to be the most important in five years, and the gap between future importance and current proficiency, we can see a shift in what librarians believe their future role will require of them. An important question, then, is whether they feel equipped for that future.

Research has pointed to a potential skills gap among librarians. For example, the 2023 Librarian Futures III study found that more than a third of librarians (37%) don't feel prepared to answer patrons' questions about using GenAI.[33]

In this survey, we asked librarians to assess their current proficiency in the skills they expect to need in the future. Across all 15 skills measured, perceived importance increases over the next five years. Moreover, comparing current proficiency with expected future importance helps identify the most significant proficiency gaps across skill areas.

Figure 13

**Building for the future: future importance vs. current proficiency in research support**




**Question 1:** How important will the following skills be in 5 years' time for librarians supporting research?

**Question 2:** When supporting research within your institution, how would you rate your current proficiency in the following skills?

Top-2-box scores: % rating each skill very or extremely important (today and in five years' time) and % rating their current proficiency as [high/top-2-box label, e.g. "good or excellent"]. Skill gap = future importance minus current proficiency, in percentage points. "Don't know" responses are excluded from the base.

Base: all respondents (Question 1 n=1,069-1,082; Question 2 n=1,042-1,088).

The global results reveal skill gaps across three clusters: stable skills, growing skills and new skills. These gaps highlight the areas where librarians need the most support to prepare for their future roles.

Figure 14

### Skill clusters

Perceived future importance of skills outpaces current proficiency. The percentage points (pp) show the extent of the gap for each skill.

| Stable skills | |
|---|---|
| Storytelling and advocacy | 16pp |
| Tactical planning and operational implementation | 13pp |
| Ethical judgement and professionalism | 13pp |
| Presentation and public speaking | 10pp |
| Written communication | 4pp |

| Growing skills | |
|---|---|
| Analytical skills | 19pp |
| Strategic/ holistic thinking | 18pp |
| Innovation | 18pp |
| Cross-functional collaboration | 14pp |
| Adaptability/ resilience | 15pp |

| New skills | |
|---|---|
| Negotiation and influencing | 27pp |
| Navigating complex decisions | 23pp |
| Managing stakeholders | 21pp |
| Driving change | 20pp |
| Leadership | 19pp |

## Stable skills

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given that these are vital skills for today's librarian, this cluster shows the smallest gaps between current proficiency and future importance. They are skills that librarians already use widely and that have long been part of the profession's skill set.

*"People don't understand what libraries do, historically. I don't see this changing – we always have to advocate for ourselves, especially now with AI added to the already complex media landscape."*

**Librarian, USA**

*"Visibility of the library is very much influenced by the ability of the librarian to present well and capture opportunities for collaboration, especially at the international level."*

**Library Director, Malaysia**

*"Ethical judgement is always important [in my opinion]; it inspires trust."*

**Library Manager, USA**

## Growing skills

Many librarians cite the influence of digital technologies and the increasing importance of data as factors impacting their roles, and this cluster of skills reflects those trends. Although librarians already use analytical, strategic and innovation skills today, they expect these capabilities will become even more important in the future. However, many also acknowledge feeling unprepared for the shift.

Although librarians at teaching-focused institutions report lower proficiency in this cluster of skills, they still consider them as important for the future, highlighting an area where additional support may be needed.

> *"Resilience is important because librarians must continuously adjust to evolving digital tools policy updates and shifting academic priorities"*
>
> **Librarian, Brazil**

> *"With the shift towards responsible research assessment, librarians will need stronger analytical skills to interpret metrics meaningfully rather than just chasing numbers."*
>
> **Librarian, UK**

## New skills

Overall, this cluster of skills reflect the strategic influencing role librarians expect to play in the future. Several skills within the cluster have relatively low proficiency today.

The widest gaps in this cluster are reported by librarians in Europe, where their self-reported proficiency is as much as 13pp lower than the global average.

> *"With the rapid technological transformation, [driving change] reshapes the speed we adopt and build competencies for the library workforce. With these complex problems evolving, users expectations are continuously adapting and changing with varied service models."*
>
> **Liaison Librarian, Singapore**

Chapter 4:

# Imagining the librarian of the future

The librarian of the future will play a multi-faceted role, relying even more on the skills they use today as they navigate a dynamic, technology-enabled research ecosystem. Here we imagine the future role from three angles:  librarians' expectations, their patrons' needs and what gaps might need to be addressed to enable the librarian of the future to succeed.



# Technology takes a new role

The librarian of the future will have an even greater focus on digital technology, using it in their own work while also supporting researchers in their use of AI tools. As institutions are often perceived to lag behind in AI governance, librarians will have an opportunity to take a leadership role in ensuring successful AI adoption through governance and training. Armed with adaptability, ethical judgment and the ability to navigate complex decisions, the librarian of the future will also play a key role in protecting research integrity.

- 83% cite AI as the #1 driver of change in the research ecosystem, yet among the 1 in 5 who rarely or never use AI tools, 67% say ethical concerns are the barrier.
- 82% say librarians should lead AI literacy initiatives, and 74% believe AI will increase demand for library expertise.
- 85% expect demand for research integrity support to increase.

## The future librarian's top skills

- **Driving change, planning and implementation**
  90% say driving change will be important with 70% feeling proficient today.
- **Ethical judgement**
  92% consider this an important future skill with 79% feeling proficient today.
- **Communication skills**
  Presentation and public speaking (85%), written communication (87%) and storytelling and advocacy (87%) are considered important future skills.

> *"The university library has come to play a key role in the modern research process, as it moves from a traditional 'repository of books' to an active partner in the generation, dissemination and preservation of knowledge. And in the context of digitalization and artificial intelligence, the role of the library will only increase in the future."*
>
> **Librarian, Ukraine**

## Bridging the gap to success

- **Support skill development** — as a top skill, driving change shows a significant proficiency gap of 21pp.
- **Provide suitable AI tools** — librarians say integrated and vendor AI tools are key enablers of AI adoption.
- **Strengthen institutional support for AI governance, guidance and training** — this can help address librarians' top concerns, including ethical, data privacy and environmental issues.

# Collaboration becomes even more vital

Collaboration is already embedded in the research infrastructure, and for the librarian of the future it will be a fundamental part of the role. Positioned at the center of a vast web of researchers, administrators, suppliers and external stakeholders, librarians will apply their broad skill set in training, negotiating, mentoring and communicating the library's impact within the institution and beyond. While cross-functional collaboration skills will be central, librarians will also draw on leadership, stakeholder management and communication skills to build partnerships that benefit the institution.

- 83% say researchers seek support when they need help, and 76% expect collaboration with other departments to rise.
- 16% rate limited engagement with researchers as a top-three barrier to demonstrating impact today.
- Academic leaders and researchers see librarians as partners who provide AI guidance, support research data management and offer open access and publication advice, training and trusted information.

## The future librarian's top skills

- **Cross-functional collaboration**
  90% consider this an important future skill with 76% feeling proficient today.
- **Leadership and communication**
  82% say leadership will be important with 63% feeling proficient today; communication skills exhibit smaller gaps.
- **Managing stakeholders and building relationships**
  89% say this will be an future important skill with 68% feeling proficient today.

> *"The library is not just an administrative support service or a space of study, but a strategic partner in the entire research cycle. Its value goes far beyond the loan of books or access to databases."*
>
> **Librarian, Spain**

## Bridging the gap to success

- **Support skill development** — leadership and managing stakeholders are expected to be important skills, but librarians feel they are less proficient in these areas.
- **Provide opportunities to tell the library's story** and raise awareness of the services and collaboration opportunities librarians offer.
- **Align with institutional strategy and goals** to strengthen visibility.



# Embedding further into the research ecosystem

In the fast-changing research ecosystem, the librarian of the future will occupy a central role, providing technical input, analytical support and publication guidance that boosts research excellence. Direct research support activities, such as grant proposal writing and data management and analysis, will continue to be part of the librarian's work, alongside providing access to resources and tools. The library will become increasingly embedded within the research infrastructure, helping researchers access the tools, services and metrics they need to advance their work and demonstrate its impact.

- 95% say the research community will need more support for AI.
- 86% foresee a rise in demand for research data management support.
- 88% expect an increase in demand for open access support.

## The research-fundamental librarian's top skills

- **Analytical skills**
  89% agree this will be important in the future with 70% feeling proficient today.
- **Adaptability and innovation**
  92% think this is an important future skill with 77% feeling proficient today.
- **Negotiation and planning**
  83% consider negotiating an important future skill with 56% reporting proficiency today.

> *"I would like researchers to see the academic library as [...] a space for collaboration and the development of research skills – a place that supports experienced researchers and young scientists in navigating the increasingly complex ecosystem of scientific information."*
>
> **Librarian, Poland**

## Bridging the gap to success

- **Support skill development** — librarians identify a significant proficiency deficit for negotiation.
- **Raise institutional awareness of the role librarians can play in research,** and at what stage they can be involved.
- **Provide structured facilitation** of engagement with researchers.



Chapter 5:

# Implications and recommendations



In the dynamic future research ecosystem, the librarian will continue to hold a unique position, focusing on key parts of their existing roles. They will apply their technical expertise and analytical skills in collaborative research environments while providing the resources and services that underpin the research infrastructure. This is a pivotal moment of change for the wider research ecosystem, and we have seen how librarians' expectations of future demands translate into a skills profile that will enable them to embed themselves further into that ecosystem.

Five implications emerge, suggesting potential opportunities for institutions, librarians and others in the research ecosystem.

## 1. Strategic skills are a growing opportunity for librarians

- Soft skills play an important role in helping librarians collaborate, provide research support and advocate for themselves. Librarians identify these skills as vital to their roles. However, skill gaps point to a growing need for new capabilities.
- Librarians reporting needing strategic influencing skills, such as negotiating and navigating complex decisions, to effectively achieve their objectives in the future.
- Career stage also plays a role in skill development needs. Entry-level and support positions report the greatest need for support in developing these skills.

## 2. Ethics of the profession become a greater focus

- AI is already transforming the library, and its growing influence brings both opportunities and ethical concerns. Many librarians are already using AI, but the ethical concerns remain a significant barrier to adoption.
- Librarians recognize the risks AI poses to the scholarly record, as well as institutional shortcomings related to AI infrastructure. Given their expertise in ethics and literacy, librarians see a role for themselves in AI governance, training and resource management to address these concerns. Researchers and academic leaders also express concerns about the impact of AI on research integrity. Because protecting the scholarly record is a collective responsibility within the research community, there is a role for all members.
- Ethical judgement and professionalism are already core skills for librarians and are expected to become even more important in the future, requiring support and training.

## 3. Regional differences require localized changes

- While librarians globally agree on many broad themes, the significant regional differences across several measures in this study mean the results are best viewed through a regional lens, and the implications approached in a localized manner.
- Skills gap: librarians in Europe, particularly Germany, consistently report lower levels of proficiency across the skill set.
- AI concerns: librarians in North America report higher levels of concern about AI across a range of measures, suggesting a regionally-tailored approach to enabling responsible and ethical AI use would be beneficial.
- AI expectations: librarians in Asia Pacific are the most likely to cite AI as one of the biggest drivers of change in the research ecosystem. They say that AI will increase demand for their expertise and to agree that librarians should lead AI literacy initiatives for researchers.

## 4. Persistent visibility issues continue

- Librarians' perception that their work is undervalued appears highly connected to visibility: in the interviews, researchers and academic leaders often highlight a limited awareness of the full range of services libraries provide, particularly in support of research. This lack of visibility may be impacting perception of librarian value and limiting opportunities for greater impact.
- Increasing perception of librarians' value requires greater awareness and visibility. However, librarians identify a number of obstacles to this, including limited engagement with researchers.
- While storytelling and advocacy are key skills for demonstrating impact, there there are opportunities to improve proficiency. Given that only one in five librarians feel there is a great extent of upskilling support from their institution, this may be exacerbating the visibility challenge.

## 5. Expertise continues to grow

- AI is widely seen as an opportunity for librarians to demonstrate expertise and leadership, particularly when it comes to areas such as AI literacy, governance and ethics. Librarians also expect collaboration within the research ecosystem to increase over the next five years.
- Librarians anticipate growing demand for their services, specifically when it comes to open access, research data management and research integrity.

# Opportunities

- Building on librarians' strategic skills is a clear opportunity, particularly in negotiation and influencing, navigating complex decisions and stakeholder management.
- Changes in the research ecosystem create opportunities for libraries to evolve their role.
  - Evolving responsibilities in areas such as AI governance, literacy and tool procurement underscore the library's strategic relevance.
  - Researcher challenges can serve as important touchpoints for increasing awareness of library expertise and services.
  - Expanding services, such as AI data consultations, research impact support and digital scholarship, illustrate the library's evolving contribution to research excellence.
- Supporting ethical and responsible research is an ongoing aspect of the library's contribution. Because research integrity is a shared responsibility, partnering with researchers, academic leaders, publishers and others in the research ecosystem can strengthen these efforts.

> *"This perception [of the library having an administrative role] limits the potential of the library as a strategic agent in key areas such as research data management, open science, open access publishing or responsible evaluation. Storytelling and advocacy are therefore essential to make visible the expert knowledge, accumulated experience and commitment of library staff, and to demonstrate how their contribution can improve the quality, impact and sustainability of research beyond mere regulatory compliance."*
>
> **Librarian, Spain**





# Conclusion

Librarian of the Future brings together the views and voices of 1,100 librarians from around the world, providing a comprehensive picture of the librarian's role today and a vision of what it might look like in five years' time.

Highly skilled and uniquely positioned to support research collaboration, today's librarians are in demand but underutilized, due in part to a perception gap that researchers and academic leaders suggest may stem from lack of awareness and visibility of library skills and services.

Librarians see change in the wider research ecosystem being driven by economic, political and technological factors, as well as changing stakeholder needs. They expect their broad skill set to grow in importance across almost all areas, but they also identify gaps in preparedness for those skills.

What comes through clearly from both the survey and the interviews is the dedication and passion librarians have for their roles. As one academic librarian in India writes: "I love librarianship." There is a strong sense of optimism about the future, with most librarians expecting greater collaboration and highlighting the potential for AI technology.

Yet barriers remain, ranging from infrastructural and ethical challenges related to AI to difficulty demonstrating impact through meaningful metrics. To succeed in their future roles, librarians will need support from the institutions they serve, the patrons they work with and the organizations that depend on their expertise.

## Amplifying librarians' voices

Elsevier recognizes the critical role librarians play in the research system. Having worked with librarians for over a century, we understand the positive impact they can have on researchers, their institutions and the wider world of research.

We aim to amplify librarians' voices by providing opportunities to share their views, challenges, expectations and needs for a future they expect to be dynamic and technology-focused. If you know a librarian working to shape the future of the profession, share their inspiring story with us.

## What's next for this research

Over the next year, we will continue the conversation about the librarian of the future, exploring the findings in greater depth, including important regional nuances. We'll engage with the community in person and online to help librarians understand how these findings relate their own experiences and priorities.

We invite your feedback on this report and welcome your views as a librarian or someone who works with an academic library. Please email: libraryconnect@elsevier.com

# Appendices

## Methodology

The Librarian of the Future is based on a two-phase research project: a global survey of academic librarians and a series of 19 interviews with researchers and academic leaders.

### About the survey

Respondents were academic librarians recruited from two sources: Elsevier's library contact database and an external market research panel. Contacts in Elsevier's database were emailed an invitation to complete an online survey of about 15 minutes, with one reminder to non-responders. Panelists were invited through the panel provider. The survey was offered in English, Spanish, German, French, Japanese and Simplified Chinese.

To qualify, respondents had to be a librarian or information specialist, library manager or director, or library staff member working in a higher education institution. Research administrators, non-library faculty, students, IT staff, publishers and vendors were screened out. In total, 1,100 surveys were completed by librarians in 88 countries. See page 56 for a detailed breakdown.

The survey questions are included in the databook accompanying this report.

Throughout this report, we show statistical differences between groups at the 95% confidence level. At the total level, the maximum margin of error is approximately ±2.5%, which assumes maximum variance in the response. Results were weighted, in the absence of reliable figures for the librarians across the world we used OECD population figures for researchers by region as a proxy, to ensure representation. Base sizes shown in the report are unweighted. Despite weighting, the study has limitations from self-selection, non-response bias and the low response rates typical of online surveys of this kind (~1%). There will therefore be some non-sampling error, and responses may not accurately represent the views of the population in a given country or region. Because the sampling is non-probability, significance tests are indicative only, and notable differences between groups should not be generalized to a whole country.

**Librarian of the Future**

**Survey:** Online survey

**Date:** May-June 2026

**Respondents:** 1,100 academic librarians from 88 countries

*Responses are weighted geographically to improve representativeness.*

### About the interviews

To provide a broader picture of the changes within the research ecosystem and its impact on librarians, Elsevier conducted 19 structured interviews between June and July 2026 with global academic leaders and researchers. The sample of interviewees was chosen to achieve a diverse mix of individuals.

Academic leader titles include Vice Chancellor, Vice President, Provost, Dean, Director, Executive Director and Department Chair.

Researcher titles include Professor, Research Scientist, Assistant Professor, Post doc researcher, PhD student.

### Interviewees by region

| Region | Academic leaders | Researchers |
|---|---|---|
| Americas | 4 | 3 |
| Asia-Pacific | 2 | 3 |
| Europe, Middle East and Africa | 3 | 4 |

Questions for the interviews covered shifts in research priorities, current pain points, success metrics and perceptions of the library. A full list of interview questions is included in the databook accompanying this report.

## Sample bases by region/country

| | |
|---|---|
| **North America** | **285** |
| Canada | 21 |
| United States of America | 264 |
| **Latin America** | **94** |
| Argentina | 13 |
| Bolivia | 2 |
| Brazil | 29 |
| Chile | 3 |
| Colombia | 19 |
| Dominican Republic | 1 |
| Egypt | 1 |
| Jamaica | 2 |
| Mexico | 16 |
| Peru | 5 |
| Puerto Rico | 3 |
| **Europe** | **310** |
| Albania | 1 |
| Austria | 8 |
| Belarus | 2 |
| Belgium | 7 |
| Channel Islands | 1 |
| Croatia | 4 |
| Cyprus | 5 |
| Czech Republic | 5 |
| Denmark | 3 |
| Estonia | 1 |
| Faeroe Islands | 1 |
| Finland | 4 |
| France | 27 |
| Georgia | 1 |
| Germany | 56 |
| Greece | 6 |
| Hungary | 1 |
| Ireland | 8 |
| Italy | 10 |
| Kazakhstan | 1 |
| Latvia | 2 |
| Lebanon | 1 |
| Lithuania | 1 |
| Malta | 1 |
| Netherlands | 13 |
| Norway | 7 |
| Poland | 13 |
| Portugal | 5 |
| Romania | 1 |
| Russia | 3 |
| Slovakia | 4 |
| Spain | 28 |
| Sweden | 13 |
| Switzerland | 6 |
| Turkey | 4 |
| Ukraine | 6 |
| United Kingdom | 50 |
| **Asia Pacific** | **337** |
| Australia | 29 |
| Bangladesh | 2 |
| China | 150 |
| French Polynesia | 1 |
| Hong Kong | 1 |
| India | 47 |
| Indonesia | 7 |
| Japan | 43 |
| Malaysia | 7 |
| Mongolia | 1 |
| New Zealand | 7 |
| Pakistan | 3 |
| Philippines | 12 |
| Singapore | 12 |
| South Korea | 5 |
| Sri Lanka | 2 |
| Taiwan | 3 |
| Thailand | 3 |
| Vietnam | 2 |
| **Middle East and Africa** | **66** |
| Algeria | 1 |
| Bahrain | 3 |
| Botswana | 1 |
| Egypt | 2 |
| Eritrea | 6 |
| Ghana | 3 |
| Iraq | 2 |
| Israel | 4 |
| Kenya | 1 |
| Lebanon | 3 |
| Lesotho | 2 |
| Mauritius | 1 |
| Morocco | 1 |
| Namibia | 2 |
| Nigeria | 19 |
| Qatar | 1 |
| Senegal | 1 |
| South Africa | 2 |
| Tanzania | 2 |
| Tunisia | 2 |
| United Arab Emirates | 5 |
| Zimbabwe | 2 |
| **Prefer not to say / Other** | **8** |
| Other | 6 |
| Prefer not to say | 2 |
| **Total** | **1,100** |

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