

M25 Consortium of Academic Libraries Mutual Support Agreement: May 2004 revision

Introductory paper and Revised Mutual Support Agreement

Purpose of Introductory Paper

To propose and contextualise amendments to the existing M25 Consortium of Academic Libraries Mutual Support Agreement, prior to discussion of the proposal at the M25 Consortium AGM on 11 June 2004

Current position

The global M25 Consortium of Academic Libraries Mutual Support Agreement (“the Agreement”) has been in force since 1 February 1999. All members of the M25 Consortium, by virtue of joining the Consortium, are deemed to be signatories to this Agreement. The basic provision of the Agreement is that, in the event of a disaster affecting a member Library, Consortium members will endeavour to allow students from the affected library to have access to study space for up to one month after the disaster occurred. To the date of this paper, the Agreement has not been invoked. The text of the Agreement currently in force may be found at <http://www.m25lib.ac.uk/m25sec/business/disaster/mutualsupport.html>

In addition to the Agreement, a single subject-specific agreement exists between 11 Consortium member libraries with strong collections in the field of education. This agreement was additionally negotiated between these 11 Consortium members and remains in force until end June 2004.

Recent interest has been expressed by the M25 Consortium Creative Arts Working Group in a similar subject-specific agreement for their members. However, in discussion with the M25 Disaster Management Group, the challenges in negotiating stand-alone subject agreement were highlighted, not least because of the inter- and cross-disciplinary nature of many collections, and researchers’ routine need to consult sources across traditional subject boundaries.

These discussions have prompted a thorough-going strategic review of the Agreement, leading to this proposal of a different approach within the Consortium in the future in the event of a disaster between Consortium members. Such an approach would tie in more closely with risk assessment and management strategies determined at the level of the parent institutions, and would be a demonstrable step in these contexts to mitigate risk in the event of a library disaster. It also recognises fully that access arrangements to libraries have changed considerably in recent years, not least through the introduction of the SCONUL Research Extra (SRX) programme and widespread participation in UK Libraries Plus.

An initial discussion paper was proposed at the M25 Consortium Business Day on 26 January 2004, when the issue was giving a thorough airing, and it was agreed that the views of Directors would be canvassed further, prior to a proposal to the June 2004 meeting of the Consortium.

The text of the amended Agreement is appended to this introductory paper.

The principles which underlie the proposed amendments to the Mutual Support Agreement

The new approach to the Agreement builds upon the accepted principles of the Agreement dated February 1999. The following general principles underpin the proposed amendments.

1. The purpose of the Agreement is to define and make available with minimum delay and negotiation services available to staff and students from a member Library where a disaster has occurred from host Consortium member Libraries.
2. The Agreement is invoked only in case of evident need in an emergency situation. Participating member Libraries undertake to apply their best efforts to honouring the principles of the scheme, but the scheme confers no rights on individual users, access to member libraries being ultimately at the discretion of the Libraries concerned.
3. The responsibility for invoking the Agreement rests with the Director of the affected Library and initial and subsequent communication is made via the closed M25 Directors' email discussion list.
4. Where the affected Library operates from several sites or buildings across a campus, the Director would normally be expected to make provision for basic study space and access to networked electronic resources in other unaffected buildings.
5. In order to register particular subject strengths in collections, each member Library in the Consortium uses InforM25 Find-a-Library (www.M25lib.ac.uk/Guide/directory). If the Agreement is invoked, it is this directory which would be consulted by the affected Library to identify other Consortium members which could provide access to staff and students for particular subject needs and, depending on the initial responses from other Directors, to make direct approaches as required.
6. Physical access arrangements and the level of services provided by the host Library to staff and students from the affected Library will normally be in line with those offered under the SRX and UK Libraries Plus programmes and, for a small number of M25 Consortium members, the M25 Consortium Access and Borrowing scheme¹. Access to specialised services, such as Inter-Library Loans and electronic resources which are not covered by standard JISC agreements, would be by specific negotiation and exchange of letters between the Directors of the host and affected Libraries. Liability arrangements for the affected and host Libraries will operate in a similar way as for UK Libraries Plus.
7. The Mutual Support Agreement is invoked for a time-limited period of a maximum of one month in the first instance. Any extension to that period or variation in the level of service provided would be determined by negotiation between the affected Library and the host Library and agreed by exchange of letters.

Next steps

M25 Consortium Directors will be invited to consider and adopt the amended Mutual Support Agreement at the Consortium AGM on 11 June 2004, to come into effect from 1 August 2004.

¹ The SRX scheme enables borrowing rights at the discretion of the host Library for all academic and research staff and students. The UK Libraries Plus Scheme enable borrowing rights at the discretion of the host Library for part-time, distance learning and placement (6 weeks or more) students, and reference access for all other staff and students.

The M25 Consortium of Academic Libraries Mutual Support Agreement: May 2004 revision

Introduction

The Consortium, at its meeting on 19 January 1999, agreed to ratify the implementation of a formal scheme for mutual support in the event of a disaster with effect from 1 February 1999.

It is generally agreed that the Mutual Support Agreement will be invoked only on rare occasions.

Definitions

A Library disaster is seen as an event or series of events that significantly disrupts a Library's ability to support institutional teaching and research over a period of one week or more. Disasters might include major accidents (such as fires or floods) or the sudden unavailability of key staff. Such a disaster may disrupt services (including study facilities) as well as threaten materials. The impact will vary according to the availability of other libraries within the same institution and according to the time of year when the disaster occurs. By their very nature disasters are sudden, unpredictable and severe.

Objective

The purpose of the scheme is to enable staff in the affected Library to focus on dealing with the disaster in their institution through the provision of access to study space in other member institutions, and to provide mutual support for colleagues.

Participating member Libraries undertake to apply their best efforts to honouring the principles of the scheme, but the scheme confers no rights on individual users, access to member libraries being ultimately at the discretion of the Libraries concerned.

Service provision

To support this objective Consortium members have agreed, in the event of a disaster, to endeavour to allow staff and students from the affected institution to have access to study space for up to one month after the disaster occurred, providing physical access and services in line with the arrangements in place and normally offered under the SCONUL Research Extra (SRX) and UK Libraries Plus programmes and, for a small number of members, the M25 Consortium Access and Borrowing Scheme.

Where additional support in specialist subject areas is required, InforM25 may be used to identify host Libraries to provide these services, using www.M25lib.ac.uk/Guide/directory. A request for subject-specific support will be made by the Director of the affected Library. This specialised subject-specific support will be provided after negotiation and exchange of letters between the Directors of the host and affected Libraries².

Any variations on the standard agreement, for example, to provide specialist services such as access to Inter-Library Loans or access to networked electronic resources would be provided only after specific negotiation and exchange of letters between the Directors of the host and affected Libraries.

Liability arrangements for the affected and host Libraries will operate in a similar way to the UK Libraries Plus programme.

² The SRX scheme enables borrowing rights at the discretion of the host Library for all academic and research staff and students. The UK Libraries Plus Scheme enable borrowing rights at the discretion of the host Library for part-time, distance learning and placement (6 weeks or more) students, and reference access for all other staff and students.

Activating the Agreement

The Director of the affected Library will arrange to inform all members of the Consortium that the disaster has occurred via the M25 Directors' email list, in order to activate these arrangements. The Agreement will be invoked in appropriate circumstances, for example, where sufficient study space cannot otherwise be provided from within the institution's own resources.

Monitoring and evaluation

These arrangements are intended to provide basic mutual support in the event of a disaster affecting a Consortium member Library. At the conclusion of the period in which the Mutual Support Agreement has been invoked, the Directors of the affected and host Libraries will be encouraged to evaluate the process and to feed their comments to the M25 Disaster Management Group.

The M25 Disaster Management Group has delegated responsibility from the M25 Consortium Steering Group where necessary to facilitate these agreements and to monitor their effectiveness. The Group will work as required to support the Directors in the affected and host Libraries and make reports as necessary to the Steering Group and to the Consortium as a whole.

Dissemination

As part of their internal disaster planning and risk management strategies, M25 Consortium Directors are encouraged to advise their staff of the details of the Mutual Support Agreement, and the rights and responsibilities of the affected and host Libraries.

Mutual Support Agreement
M25 Consortium of Academic Libraries
May 2004