

Bodleian Libraries' AI Policy

29 September 2026



1. INTRODUCTION

The Bodleian Libraries' mission is to provide an excellent service to support the learning, teaching, and research objectives of the University of Oxford, and to develop and maintain access to Oxford's unique collections for the benefit of scholarship and society. In recent years, artificial intelligence (AI)¹ has been changing how information is created, discovered, accessed and used. This is creating both opportunities and challenges for libraries.

We recognise that AI can support better discovery of collections, improve access to information, enhance services and assist staff in appropriate ways. Because of this, we will engage constructively with AI and explore its potential where it can advance the Libraries' mission. At the same time, our use of AI must protect trust in the Libraries, in the integrity and provenance of our collections, in the rights and interests of creators and users, and in our scholarly and professional judgement.

This policy sets out the principles that guide the Bodleian Libraries' approach to AI. Taken together, these 8 principles are intended to preserve and strengthen trust in the Bodleian Libraries as a steward of collections, a provider of reliable information and services, and a responsible user of AI.

The policy is intended to be read alongside relevant University policies and guidance and will be supported by practical resources and use cases. It was shaped through an extensive consultation process within the University of Oxford community and will be reviewed annually in response to our community of users, and as AI tools and technologies develop.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to guide the Libraries' use, development and stewardship of AI in relation to our collections, services and ways of working. It provides a shared framework for decision making by the Libraries and a reference point for people who use, contribute to, access or work with the Libraries and their services.

The policy is concerned with matters specific to the Libraries, so it complements, rather than replaces, relevant University, departmental and faculty policies and guidance. If there are more detailed rules or procedures that apply to your activities, you should follow those requirements.

The policy sets out principles rather than an implementation plan or detailed procedures. Guidance and procedures to help implement this policy are not set out in this document. Everyone working at

¹ This policy refers to AI as defined by [Oxford's Policy for using Generative AI in Research](#).

the Libraries has a responsibility to consider how these principles apply to their work and how they may need to adapt their practices to put these principles into effect.

3. SCOPE

This policy applies in relation to the Libraries':

- collections, including the description, creation, management, access and reuse of collections and metadata
- services², systems and user-facing tools, including services provided directly by the Libraries and services to which the Libraries provide access
- ways of working, including internal workflows, procurement, partnerships, service development and decision making.

The policy applies to members of the University, as well as external and public users of the Libraries' collections and services. The policy also informs the Libraries' approach to suppliers, partners and other organisations where their AI-enabled products or services affect the Libraries' collections, services or ways of working.

4. PRINCIPLES

I. 'Trustworthy: Protect and enhance our collections

As custodians of information and cultural heritage, when considering the use of AI we will always prioritise the integrity, provenance and long-term value of our collections and the metadata describing them.

We will use AI in ways that support access to, and discovery of, our diverse collections. We recognise that AI can support valuable activities such as metadata creation and enrichment, search, discovery, reference extraction and navigation. When we use AI in these activities, we will apply appropriate human oversight and professional judgement and will seek to maintain the reliability and verifiability of information.

We will provide clear information about the way we allow our collections and metadata to be used. We recognise that these will vary according to collection type, rights, licensing arrangements and other relevant considerations. We will manage risks associated with large-scale automated data extraction or AI-driven reuse.

We will consider how AI affects the visibility and representation of different forms of knowledge. We will seek to avoid reinforcing existing biases or making collections, languages, perspectives or communities that are less visible harder to discover.

² Library services are defined as those listed in the [Bodleian Libraries Service catalogue](#).

II. Open: Support responsible openness

We are committed to openness and to supporting legitimate access, research and reuse of scholarly outputs and cultural heritage. This includes a commitment to uphold academic integrity and the reliability of the information that we hold. However, we recognise that AI-driven access and automated extraction can create new ethical, technical, operational and rights-related challenges.

We will continuously seek a proportionate balance between openness – supporting access to high-quality research outputs – and the protection and expectations of authors, rights holders, depositors and content creators. We will review this balance as AI technologies, user behaviours, legal frameworks and long-term impacts develop.

We recognise that the purpose of academic repositories is to enable research to be shared and reused with as few barriers as possible. In determining how, and under what conditions, we make our collections openly available, we will ensure that this purpose is balanced against the ethical, operational and technical challenges associated with AI-enabled web crawling and AI-assisted search. Where appropriate, we may apply technical, contractual or other measures to manage these risks while preserving legitimate research and educational use of collections.

III. Ethical: Advocate for lawful and ethical actions

We will always endeavour to act ethically and lawfully. We recognise that ethical and legal norms in the creation and use of AI are evolving. This process of changing norms is likely to continue for some time as AI technologies fundamentally change the information ecosystem.

We will use AI in accordance with applicable law and our contractual and licensing responsibilities. This includes requirements relating to copyright, intellectual property, data protection, privacy, confidentiality and other relevant information law.

Our priority is to provide equitable access to knowledge, research and cultural heritage. To achieve this, we may need to balance our contractual responsibilities with statutory exceptions, permitted uses and other legal rights.

Where appropriate, we will also advocate for public policy reform in support of research, education and cultural heritage. This will involve engaging with lawmakers and related stakeholders to develop new regulatory frameworks that reflect the value and the importance of libraries and cultural heritage collections.

We will consider wider ethical questions that are relevant to the library, cultural heritage and higher education sectors. These include:

- the provenance and responsible use of content and data
- the impact of AI on creators and researchers
- algorithmic bias and discrimination
- academic and scholarly integrity

- the ethical and reputational implications of working with AI suppliers and partners.

We will exercise appropriate caution where legal or ethical expectations are uncertain and will acknowledge and be transparent about relevant limitations, risks and areas of uncertainty.

IV. Proportionate: Adopt AI responsibly and proportionately

We will use AI where it is an appropriate means of achieving a clear service or organisational purpose. We will refrain from treating AI adoption as an objective in itself. We will consider non-AI alternatives where they may better achieve the same aim. Where appropriate, we will provide an option for users to opt out of AI use.

Before we adopt, develop or scale significant AI-enabled services, systems or workflows, we will proportionately consider:

- their strategic fit (including benefits for users and staff)
- operational feasibility (including security)
- financial impact (including over-reliance)
- reputational risks (including legal and contractual factors)
- ethical implications (including environmental sustainability).

We will consider how dependent we are on external AI providers and the implications of supplier or partner arrangements for data, service continuity, interoperability, governance and accountability. We will undertake appropriate due diligence on significant AI-enabled partnerships and suppliers.

Where AI is incorporated into services provided by the University or external suppliers, we will seek clarity about relevant responsibilities by working within the governance and assurance arrangements that apply to those services.

V. Accountable: Maintain human accountability

Human accountability and meaningful oversight will remain central to the use of AI in the Libraries. We will assign responsibility at an appropriate level for significant AI projects, deployments and decisions. We recognise that we may share accountability across individuals, teams, managers, partners and the University.

We will use proportionate human review and professional judgement where AI outputs may affect collections, services, users, decisions or the reputation of the Libraries. The expert skills and judgement of staff is essential to any use of AI and will always be applied and developed so that we can prioritise maintaining accuracy, completeness and verifiability of outputs.

Each user of the Libraries' services is responsible for their own use of AI tools. Staff and users are encouraged to report concerns about, challenges with and corrections to AI-assisted outputs. Staff and Library users who are using AI should be able to understand when they can override or correct its outputs.

VI. Informed: Support informed and critical AI use

We will support staff in developing the knowledge, confidence and skills needed to use AI and to assess its outputs responsibly in their work. This includes signposting relevant advice and guidance, as well as opportunities for professional development and support.

We will help our users to understand where AI-enabled features are used in our services, and the capabilities and limitations of these AI tools. We will communicate about AI in clear and accessible language and will signpost relevant University, departmental or faculty guidance where appropriate.

We recognise the importance of staff expertise and professional judgement as AI changes our services and ways of working. When considering significant changes in the use of AI in our organisational processes, we will use appropriate existing governance routes.

VII. Transparent: Be transparent about AI use

We will clearly state when AI is used substantively in Bodleian Libraries tools, collections, systems and workflows. We will provide information that helps people to understand the purpose and relevant limitations of those uses. We will follow good practice for transparency as the relevant standards develop.

Where AI materially affects our Libraries' services or outputs, we will, where reasonably practicable, explain whether AI is being used. This includes the role of human review, relevant limitations of AI, and how concerns or errors can be reported. We will avoid presenting AI-generated content as though it were solely human-generated or independently verified when that would be misleading.

We will be clear about the presence of AI features in third-party resources and services where we have sufficient information to do so, for example whether these features are optional or integrated. However, we recognise that some features and information are outside of the Libraries' direct control. Where we do not have relevant information – for example, about the training data used in large language models (LLMs) – we will be transparent about what we do not know.

VIII. Sustainable: Minimise AI's environmental impact

We recognise that the development and use of AI technologies carry environmental impacts and wider sustainability implications, including energy use, water use, hardware demand and reliance on digital infrastructure. We will use AI in ways that are proportionate, responsible and aligned with the University's and Bodleian Libraries' sustainability commitments.

We will consider the environmental impact when adopting, developing, procuring or scaling AI-enabled services and tools³. This will include:

- whether AI is necessary for the task

³ Our ['Using AI sustainably' guide](#) will help colleagues to make informed choices. Please note this link is available to University of Oxford staff only.

- whether a lower-impact, non-AI or smaller-model approach could achieve the same aim
- the likely frequency and scale of use
- hosting arrangements
- supplier sustainability information
- the limitations of carbon offsetting claims.

We will help staff and users to understand the environmental implications of AI so they can make informed choices about its use. We will ask partners and suppliers to provide transparent information about the environmental performance of their products, including relevant reporting on energy use, infrastructure, model choice and sustainability commitments, where available. We will review evidence of environmental impact through the relevant bodies as AI technologies develop.

5. REVIEW

The AI Strategy & Policy Group is the owner of this policy statement and is responsible for reviewing and updating its content, escalating decisions to the Bodleian Libraries' Senior Management group (Round Table) or the Libraries' non-executive body (Curators of the University Libraries), as appropriate.

We will review and update this policy at least once a year to ensure that it remains current and effective.

6. SUPPORTING RESOURCES AND USE CASES

This policy should be read alongside the resource list and use cases which illustrate how the principles apply in different library contexts. We will review and update supporting material as necessary, and potentially more frequently than the policy itself.

7. REVIEW

Please contact the Bodleian Libraries' Office for Strategy & Delivery at strategy@bodleian.ox.ac.uk if you would like to:

- suggest an amendment to the policy
- provide an example use case for how the policy has applied in practice
- request or share a supporting resource or procedure to help apply the policy
- ask a question about the policy.

We will review your question and, if appropriate, pass it to the AI Strategy & Policy Group for consideration.