

Biological sciences

Collecting policy

User profile

This collection statement covers Library provision for the School of Biological Sciences. The collections serve all staff and students in the School, together with staff and students in some related areas of the School of Agriculture, Policy and Development, the School of Chemistry, Food and Pharmacy. The study of biological sciences is interdisciplinary and there are numerous overlaps, in terms of coverage, with other schools/departments in the University.

Research interests

The School of Biological Sciences (SBS) has about 44 permanent academic staff. It has benefited from substantial recent investment in research facilities and infrastructure, including the Institute for Cardiovascular & Metabolic Research and the newly completed Hopkins Building.

Research interests span the broad scope of modern biology, from individual molecules to global biodiversity and sustainability, and we emphasise cross-disciplinary and quantitative approaches.

These activities fall within the two main research sections of the School:

Biomedical Sciences

- Microbiology
- Molecular & Cellular Medicine

Ecology & Evolutionary Biology

- Ecology Research
- Evolution Research

These provide key research themes that focus on our main strengths in Environmental Biology and Biomedical Science. SBS researchers obtain funding and attract high-quality postgraduate students from many sources in the UK and overseas.

Dimensions of teaching and learning

The School of Biological Sciences is large in terms of student numbers. In 2013/14 these were almost 700 registered undergraduates (fte) together with 50 taught postgraduates (fte) and 73 research postgraduates (fte).

External users include: academics and postgraduates from other institutions, visitors to the School, and short course students.

Current Undergraduate and Postgraduate courses are detailed on the school website:
www.reading.ac.uk/biosci

Current holdings

Most materials are in the classification range 570-579, 580-589, 590-599, 610-616, and 630-635. However, the interdisciplinary nature of this subject means that relevant materials will be found at a variety of numbers in the Sciences and Social Sciences. For more detail see the Biological sciences *LibGuide*:

<http://libguides.reading.ac.uk/biological-sciences>

Books and e-books

There are large collections in the 570-579 and 580-599 call number range, together with complementary sections in the agricultural and medical sciences.

Budgetary pressures caused by journal price inflation have led to a relatively small departmental book budget - this, combined with pressure to support the significant undergraduate numbers, has led to very little research-level material being purchased. Pressure has been eased slightly by the continuing use of the Library's Course Support Fund to buy e-books, extra copies and new editions of course texts.

If available, all new purchases are preferentially acquired as e-books to maximise availability to staff and students. However this isn't always possible with key undergraduate texts.

The core multiple copy titles were given a significant boost and upgrade in the 2010-11 session. This has helped with access. A programme to keep reading list material up-to-date is in operation.

Periodicals and e-journals

There are 31 current periodical subscriptions, excluding general science titles. A few are shared with other Schools, such as Agriculture, Policy and Development and Food Biosciences. The Library also holds a significant number of back runs of titles.

Relevant e-journals are available via the catalogue. These are part of various subscriptions, bundles and publisher packages. For example ScienceDirect offers full text articles from 1995 and the Blackwell Science, Technical and Medical service offers access to full-text journals, many from 1997. The full text Wiley package has also been recently subscribed to.

The JSTOR periodical archive is used for core ecology titles.

Any new subscriptions are usually taken as e-only titles

Reference materials – print and electronic

There are many reference items relating to Biological sciences. Significant works include: Encyclopedia of agricultural science; Encyclopedia of life sciences; Encyclopedia of microbiology and Encyclopedia of biodiversity. There is also a range of biological and plant science dictionaries, pesticide guides, Flora guides and indexes and dictionaries of fungi.

Many other reference sources –dictionaries and encyclopedias - are also available electronically: www.reading.ac.uk/library/eresources/reference

Bibliographic databases

There are a number of electronic databases (some offering links to full text of books or journal articles) for Biological Sciences:

<http://libguides.reading.ac.uk/biological-sciences/e-resources>

There are key subject-specific databases, eg BIOSIS Previews and CAB Abstracts, and several general science databases of relevance. The Library has a subscription to Web of Knowledge which contains the Science Citation Index, which is useful for calculating journal citation information and h-indexes (a calculation for impact analysis). This information is used in the Research Assessment Exercise as well as for checking the ranking of journals academic staff in the department are published in.

Strengths, exclusions and areas for development

There is a large collection at undergraduate level. Zoology, Plant Science and Biomedical Science are particular subject strengths.

The Main Library collection is strong in the areas which are taught, and these largely reflect the research interests of academic staff. General areas of particular strength include:

- Crop science (production and protection)
- Horticultural science
- Plant taxonomy
- Plant genetics and breeding
- Endocrinology
- Cancer biology
- Ecology
- Reproduction
- Cell signalling
- Bioinformatics
- Cardiovascular biochemistry

There are no significant areas which are not collected. There are no recently established courses that are not supported adequately by the Library.

Staff would like to see more online access to journals, though this has improved in recent years

Collecting level

The collections aim to support the teaching and research requirements of the School. In some respects the journal acquisitions have been oriented to maintaining a research collection, with less emphasis placed on introductory texts or multiple copies of course texts as a result.

The book collections principally serve the teaching requirements of the undergraduate courses. Undergraduates doing dissertations find much of the material they need in the Library (but are also supported by Inter-Library Loans).

Reference material: provision is reasonably full and currency is maintained.

Some material is bought in support of individual research.

Alternative access

Inter-library loans

Students are expected to make use of the Inter-Library Loans service to find information on topics not covered by the Library's collections.

Due to the interdisciplinary nature of the subject, the School is a relatively heavy user of the Inter-Library Loans service, accounting for over 6% of the total number of ILLs requested by the University.

Other information resources in the University

The **Herbarium Library** in the Plant Sciences Laboratory holds 200,000 plant specimens, supported by a reprint collection, reference works, and Floras.

The **Museum of English Rural Life** is a designated Museum with archival library and object resources unique to Great Britain. These cover the history of the rural sector in general. MERL holds in the order of 1,600 archival accessions and 30,000 printed items. Its library's Collection Development Policy is currently under review.

The **Cole Museum of Zoology**, in the foyer of the AMS Building, contains some 3,500 specimens of which about 400 are on display at any one time. Specimens are arranged in 27 cases in taxonomic sequence, enabling a complete tour of the diversity of the animal kingdom.

The **Cole Library** contains about 8,000 volumes of printed books and scientific papers. It covers the history of early medicine, zoology, comparative anatomy and reproductive physiology.

Use of other libraries

Undergraduates researching for dissertations are recommended to use all possible sources of information, both in and out of the University. Specialist libraries used by staff and students include: the Royal Berkshire Hospital library; Natural History Museum Collections; Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew; Oxford Forestry Institute; Linnean Society; Royal Horticultural Society; and Rothamsted Research (especially for historical records).

Selection, acquisition and stock editing

See the General Collection Development Statement for general principles:

For undergraduate studies, texts in English are preferred. Research level materials may be acquired in other languages since the School recruits a significant proportion of its postgraduates (taught and research) from abroad.

Few second hand purchases are made to fill gaps in the collections, the exception being in garden history and garden design.

Donations relevant to areas being taught and researched are accepted, but only if current or of key interest.

Multiple copies of old editions are weeded without consultation. Any weeding of unique monographs and periodicals is carried out in close consultation with the School.

Stock editing decisions are influenced by the need to maintain historical collections in some areas, for example taxonomic botany. Pathology/epidemiology is an area with an historical dimension where it can't be assumed that 50-year old knowledge is irrelevant, as might be the case in, for example, molecular biology.

As part of the recent Ground Floor refurbishment at the Main Library, pre-1960s periodicals have been relegated to closed access to make space for current periodicals on the subject floors.

Policy written by Tim Chapman and Melvin Morbey, Biological Sciences Liaison Librarians, September 2015