# CHELSA

COMMITTEE OF HIGHER EDUCATION LIBRARIES OF SOUTH AFRICA

# REPORT ON COVID-19 SURVEY

26 June 2020

**COMMITTEE OF HIGHER EDUCATION LIBRARIES OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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## VISION

*To transform existing library practices in Higher Education to respond to existing and new realities and to lay the foundation for the development of a learning society*

## MISSION

*CHELSA strives through visionary and visible transformational leadership to ensure that the Higher Education sector is provided with optimal access to information for the purpose of learning, teaching, research and community development. CHELSA will support knowledge management practices in academic and research libraries.*

# Contents

# Background

The South African government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic was a national lockdown from Mar 26, 2020. The impact of the national lockdown precipitated the introduction of online/remote teaching and learning by universities. Academic libraries migrated to virtual library services in support of the continued institutional teaching, learning and research endeavours.

This survey was developed by CHELSA to determine how academic libraries in South Africa are being managed during the national COVID-19 lockdown and to ascertain the levels of service and support being provided by academic libraries during this time. The results of this survey, which will be shared with various stakeholders, demonstrates the growth and development of academic libraries, cognition of its value and responsiveness of the South African academic library during a time of crisis. Given that the contemporary academic library functions in a highly connected environment, this further demonstrates its ability to continue functioning virtually and its staff work remotely.

The survey, administered by a team from the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) Library Services on behalf of CHELSA from 04-15 June 2020, was sent to all 29 CHELSA members, which comprises of:

- 26 Higher Education Institution libraries
- The National Library of South Africa
- The Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) library
- Medical Research Council (MRC) library


A total of **22** members responded to the online survey using Google Forms, which did not ask for institutional identification. This high response rate, **75.86%,** serves as a credible reflection of the situation on the ground. Given the nature of the survey – i.e. both quantitative and qualitative in nature – both content analysis and quantitative approach were used to analyse the data.


The survey consisted of 4 sections:

- Business continuity plan,
- Services,
- Staff
- Moving to post-lockdown services


CHELSA is considering a follow-up survey to determine the effectiveness of the virtual library services and what could have been done differently. It is also the intention to share this Report with all member stakeholders and the LIS sector.

# Section 1: Business continuity plans

**a. Business Continuity Plans in place**

The majority of institutions (18) indicated they had a Business continuity plan in place.
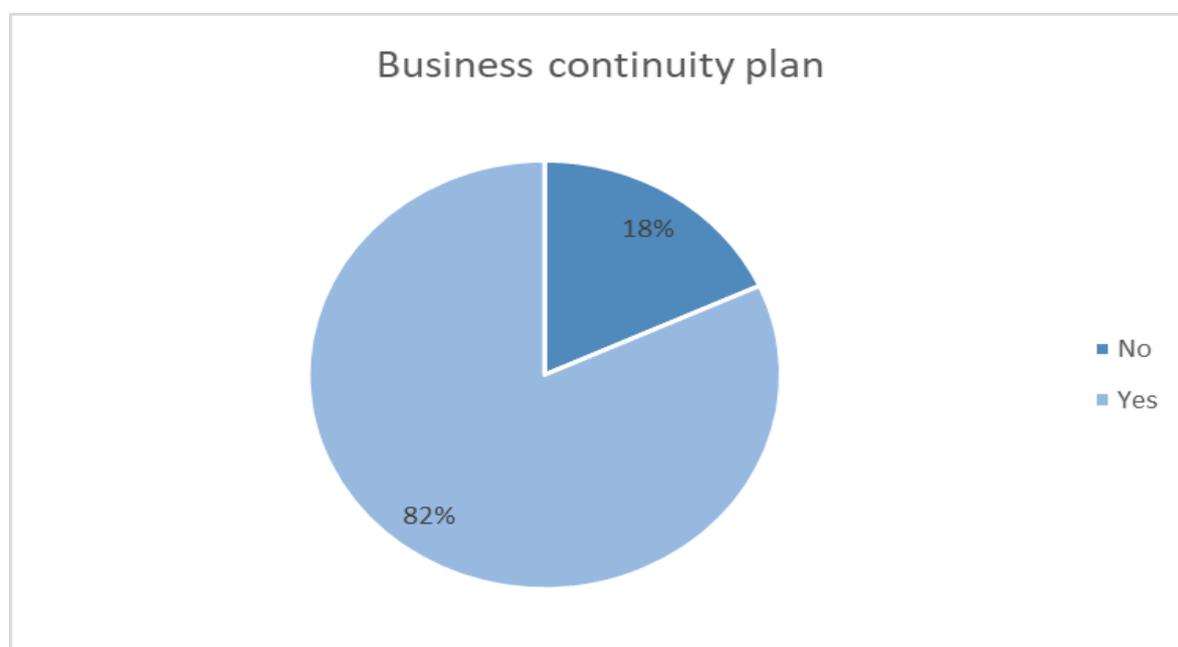


**b. Key elements of the Business Continuity Plans**

Most common key elements of the plans were:

- Provision of support for online teaching and learning (7)
- Communication to end-users (7)
- Continuation of information specialist support (6)
- Staff management and reintegration (5)
- Remote access to e-resources (4)
- Enabling staff to work from home by providing the necessary tools and training to work remotely (4)
- Access to physical spaces and access control (2)
- Data and gadget support (2)
- COVID task team (2)

Other elements mentioned by single institutions were:

- Online guides and manuals
- Distance support activities
- Institutional network security
- Preparations for reopening libraries
- Physical collection management
- Offering interesting events online
- Support systems for staff and students
- General health and safety

- Prioritising services
- Supporting users with disabilities
- Short loan
- Pick-up services
- Fines
- Supplier management
- Physical library planning

One institution indicated that only broad principles had been discussed while another indicated that no formal written plan had been formulated.

### c. Sharing Business Continuity Plans

Of the 20 institutions that responded to the question on their willingness to share their continuity plan, 13 said they would, 6 said they would not and 1 indicated that permission from the university would be required.
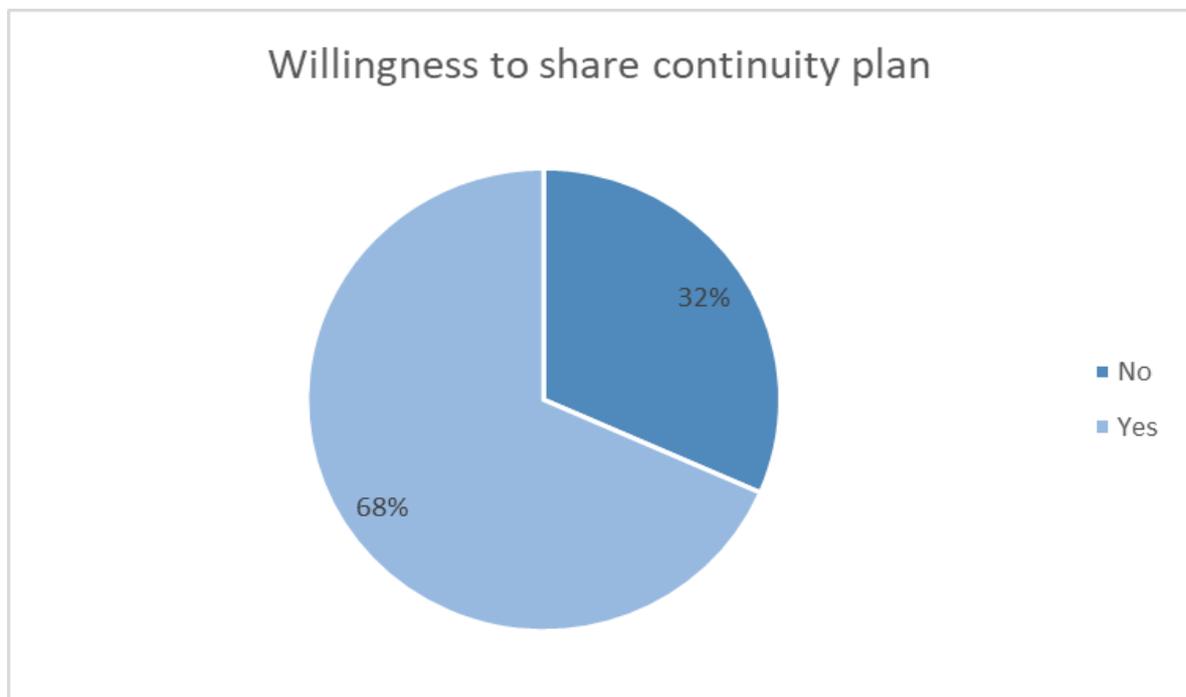
# Section 2: Services

### a. Provision of full virtual service

13 institutions indicated they were providing a full virtual service during lockdown. The move to a full virtual service is indicative of the levels of connectivity and infrastructure in place, as well as level of academic engagement. Two institutions indicated they were providing full access or access to all services except circulation and one indicated that assistance would be offered by the University help desk.
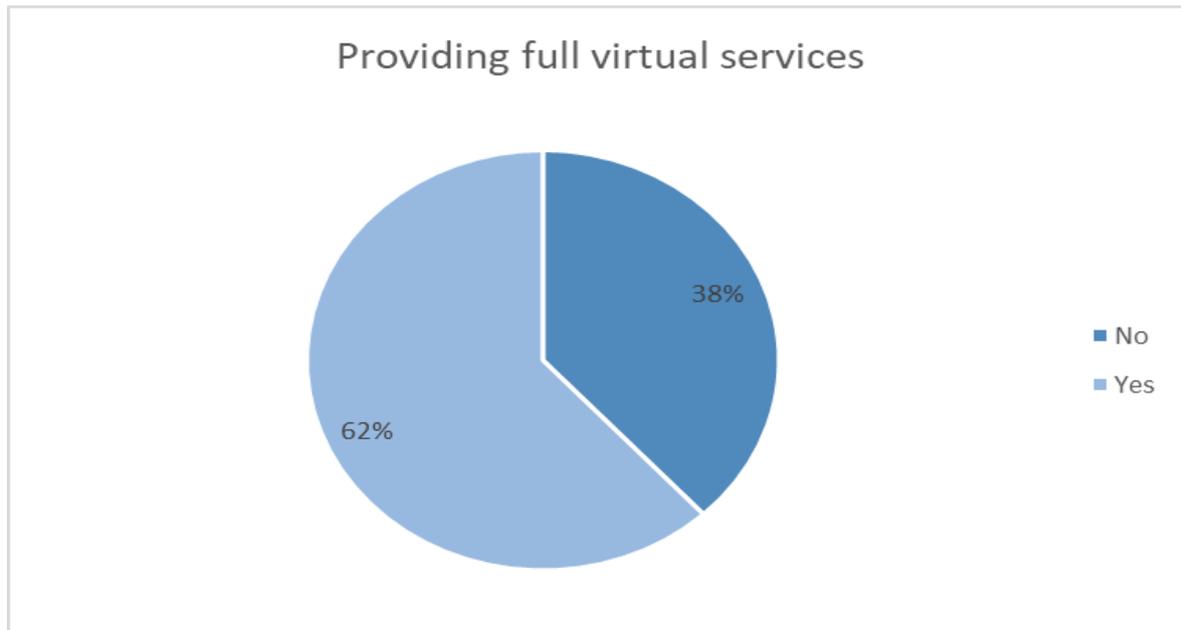


### b. Type of access to online collections being offered

16 institutions indicated they were providing access to e-resources, while 2 indicated they were supporting ILL, Searching assistance, Access to the library catalogue and Online training.

Other options mentioned by single institutions included: ordering of more e-resources, remote access (via VPN), Libguides, Blackboard integration, library website, reference queries, access to the institutional repository, access to electronic theses and dissertations, remote support for software installations, assisting with logon issues, lists of free resources, Libchat and physical short loan.

### c. The use of email, Libchat Services, social media platforms

In response to this question, institutions indicated they were using email (12), social media platforms (9), Libchat services (8), WhatsApp (4) and Blackboard (3). One institution indicated they used a telephonic service while another indicated they used Chatbot.

Institutions indicated they used email to support users with queries, support staff working from home and current awareness for clients. Regular organisational emails were being used to update staff with respect to COVID19 situation, health awareness and organisational activities relating to the virus.

Institutions indicated that the Libchat and WhatsApp services were both being used to support clients with queries; with some institutions indicating that a roster system for staff was in place.

Social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) is largely being used to address common issues and promote library materials.

One institution indicated they provide client support via telephone in addition to the abovementioned platforms and another indicated they use Zoom/MS Teams and Libguides for post-graduate and staff training.

One institution indicated that full service is available and operational hours are as normal.

## d. Promotion of online services

In response to the question on how online material is being promoted or advertised, the most popular options mentioned were Organisation-wide email (13), Social media (9) and the Library website (9).
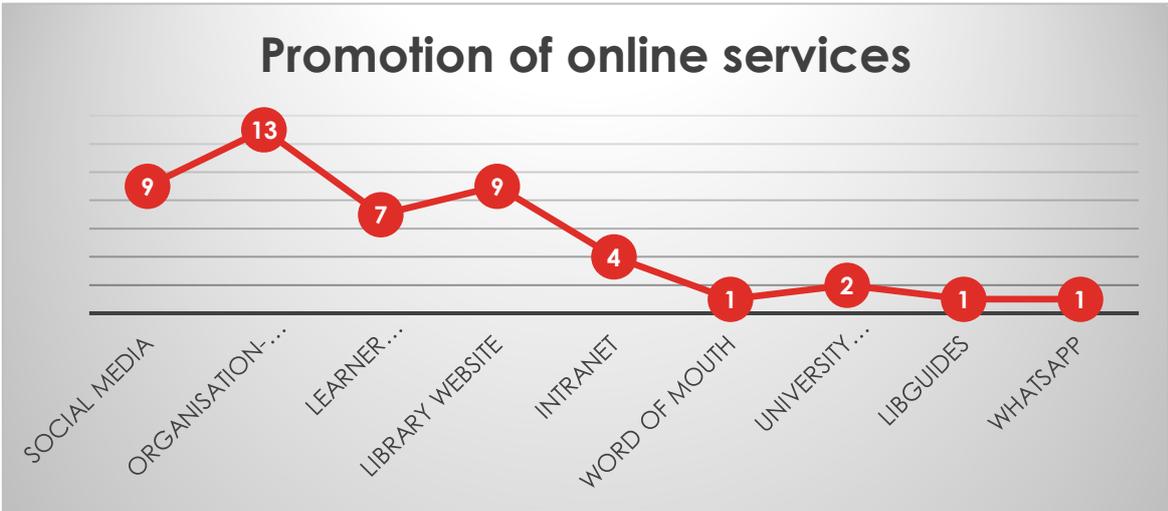


## e. New/innovative services being used to reach clients

When asked what innovative ways libraries are finding to reach their clients, 21 different options were provided. Of these LibChat, social media, library presence on Blackboard and email were most popular (3), followed by WhatsApp, cell phone support and central University Communication Office (2). Other options mentioned once included working closely with Heads of Departments, hotlines, LibApp, library blog, bulk SMS, online ordering, Toplist, Kortext, Moodle, MS Teams and Zoom.

### f.  Types of Materials embedded in Learning Management Systems (LMS)

13 institutions indicated they had embedded material, 1 indicated they did not and 1 indicated that they have plans to do so. While 4 institutions indicated they had embedded e-resources, single institutions indicated the embedding of InfoLit modules, LibChat, online presentations, free Covid-19 information, Moodle, Kortext, digitised items, course reserves and online textbooks (CHERTL).

However, one institution queried what LMS stood for (Library Management System or Learner Management System). Based on this query, it could be assumed that respondents may have had different interpretations of the question.

### g.  Libraries and the creation of online content

With regard to creating online content, 1 institution indicated they are continuing as normal and 5 indicated they were not currently producing online continent (of these 2 indicated it was due to staff not having data). Two institutions indicated that they were creating content in collaboration with faculty or specialist staff; while 1 institution indicated they had work teams and another that they ensured staff had the relevant equipment.
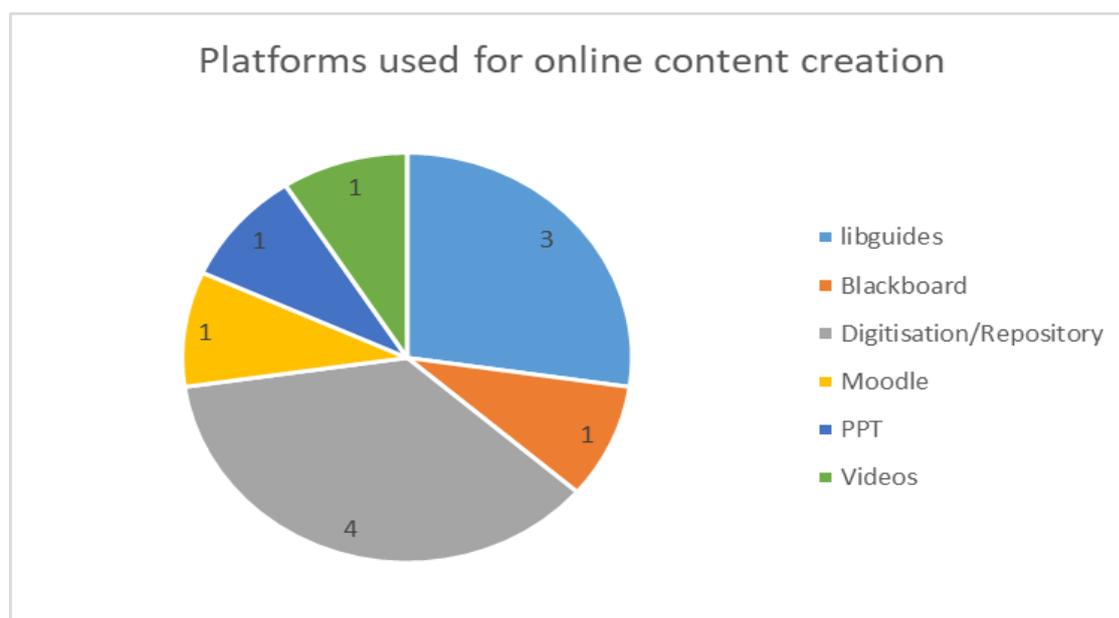


### h.  The provision of training sessions

When asked what training is currently being done, 11 institutions indicated Infolit training (including searching the cataloguing, plagiarism, evaluating information and referencing) and 9 referred specifically to e-resource usage. Three institutions indicated vendor resource webinars. Other areas of training included academic writing, research, Endnote, ORCid, Open Access, RDM, Turnitin and fake news.

While 3 institutions indicated they provided an online infoLit training course, 1 institution indicated they provided recorded training modules and another online video conferencing. One institution indicated they customised training as required.

### i. Information Literacy support

A total of 18 institutions indicated they provide some level of information literacy support with 4 providing online access, and single institutions providing support using the telephone, Ask-a-Librarian, the library website, Blackboard, webinars, MS Teams, email and libguides.

### j. Promotion of e-resources especially COVID-19 related freely available material

Twenty institutions indicated that they promote COVID-19 related freely available material and one indicated "Not really". The most popular method for promoting these materials was the Library website (10), followed by email (4).
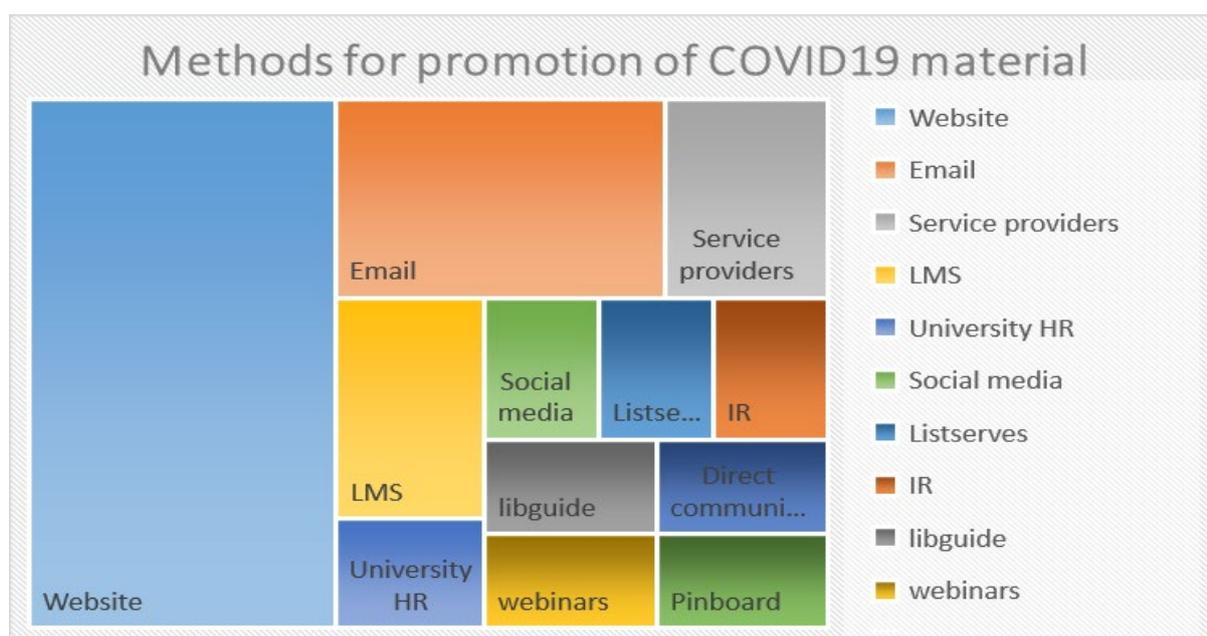


### k. Access to print material

Ten institutions are currently not allowing any access to print material, while 6 indicated that they resumed access at lockdown level 3 and 1 indicated they are in process of resuming access. Three institutions are scanning critical material and making it available electronically; 2 are limiting access to physical material to academics (without an option for browsing) and one is using a book-drop and quarantine system.

### l. Inter Library Loans (ILL)

Regarding ILL, 5 institutions are not providing any ILL service, while 4 have resumed normal ILL functions and 1 only allows for pick-up but is not accepting any new requests. Eight institutions are only processing requests for items available online.

# Section 3. Staff

## a. LIS Directors and the provision of support to staff iro their physical health

Eight institutions indicated that support was provided by the University, while 2 of these indicated it is the responsibility of the Library Director for providing support for their staff. Key support was in the form of information sharing (5), allowing staff to work from home (5) and contact via WhatsApp (4).



## b. LIS Directors and the provision of support to staff iro their emotional health

In respect of emotional health, 11 institutions indicated that the university was responsible, with 2 indicating the Library Director. One institution indicated that they were not in touch with staff.

Communication (including information sharing and meetings) (11) was cited as the key factor for ensuring emotional health.

## c. Institutional support to staff iro the challenges of working at home

Most of the respondents indicated that access to data and equipment was provided:

| Access to Data | Laptops | Office PC | Equipment Provided | Remote access (VPN) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 15 | 13 | 3 | 2 | 5 |

| Zero-rated sites | WhatsApp (moral support) | Monitoring system | Travel permit |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 |

A few problems were also recorded:

| IT not reliable | Devices on order | No support |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1 | 1 |

**d. Staff contacts with line managers on a daily/weekly/other basis**

Of the 20 respondents, only 1 indicated there was no system in place for reporting to a line manager. One institution indicated that the supervisors were responsible for contacting their staff. In a number of cases the check-in may be daily for some activities and weekly or monthly for others; or online activity (such an email) is regarded as acceptable in place of reporting in.
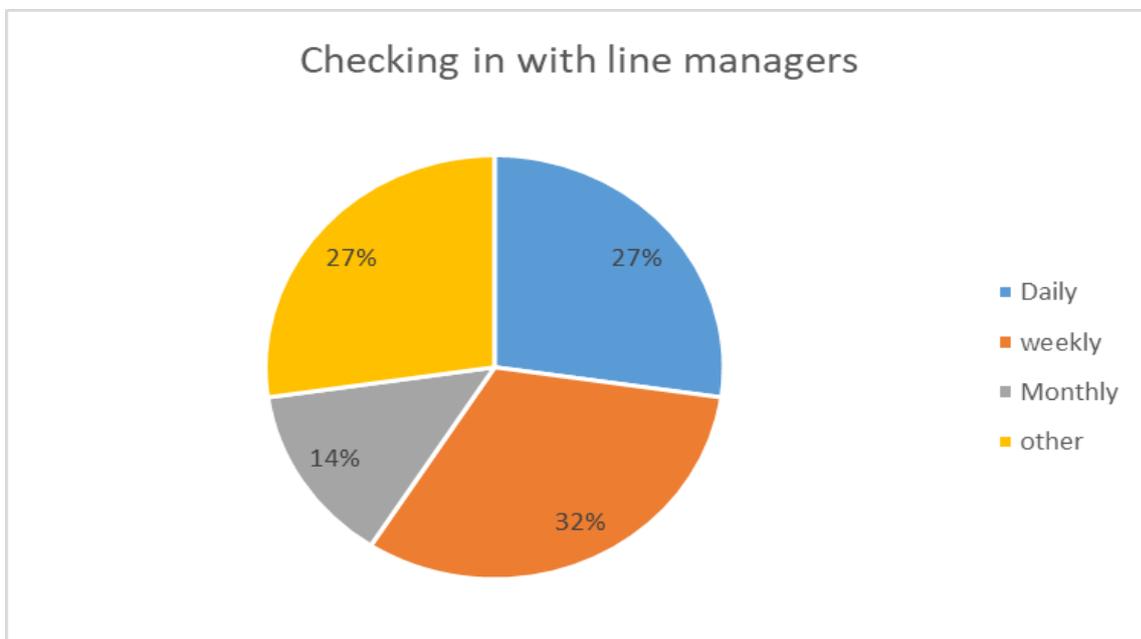


**e. Special Leave arrangements**

The various institutions seem to deal with leave issues very differently.

| Leave arrangement | No. of institutions |
|---|---|
| Special leave for those who cannot work from home | 4 |
| Not required to take leave | 6 |
| Leave application as normal when working remotely | 7 |
| Leave system to kick in at Level 3 | 1 |
| Granting of leave based on operational requirements | 1 |
| Staff encouraged to take annual leave | 1 |
| HR decision | 3 |
| Medical certificates always required for sick leave | 1 |
| UIF salary funding | 1 |

**f. Institutional support for professional development around coping with work-from-home challenges**

While 18 respondents indicated Yes, (4 of whom indicated that training was being done by the University), 3 respondents indicated that there were no plans for staff training.

**g. Changes in libraries staffing complements**

14 libraries indicated No and 5 Yes. However, there was a difference in interpretation of the questions. While some libraries answered the question in respect of appointments and retirements; others answered with respect to changes in activities by staff during this period. Only 2 of the respondents who responded Yes to this query indicated the appointment of new staff. A further 2 respondents did not indicate Yes or No but indicated that staff were working from home and assisting in other departments.

**h. How libraries are helping staff deal with social isolation**

Although 12 libraries indicated they have constant contact with staff; 4 indicated the university as assisting with any assistance needed by staff; 3 said no assistance was being offered and 1 provided a neutral answer.



Assistance with social isolation

- University 20%
- Yes 60%
- No 15%
- Neutral 5%
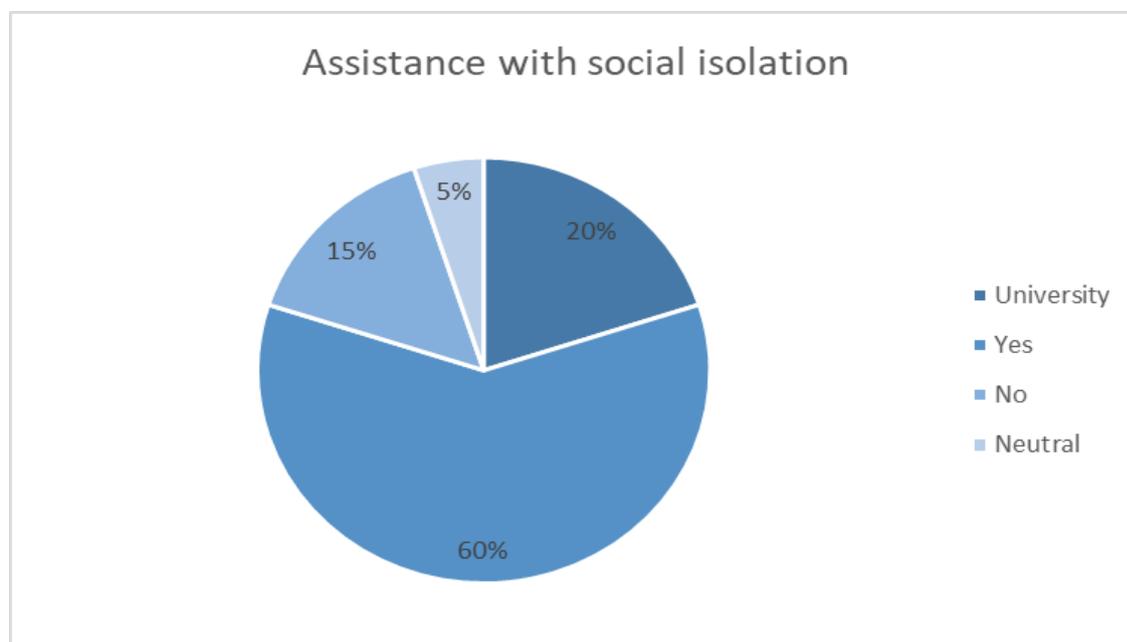
# Section 4: Moving to post-lockdown services

## a. Social distancing in library spaces/commons

While 5 libraries answered Yes and 2 answered that the University was putting measures in place, the other respondents gave a breakdown on how their libraries were responding. Most (9) indicated that library seating was being rearranged to adhere to the 2 metre rule; 5 indicated that some areas in the library would remain closed. 3 respondents indicated they were following Government guidelines and 2 respondents indicated that screening and testing protocols were in place and that the number of people in the library was being limited.
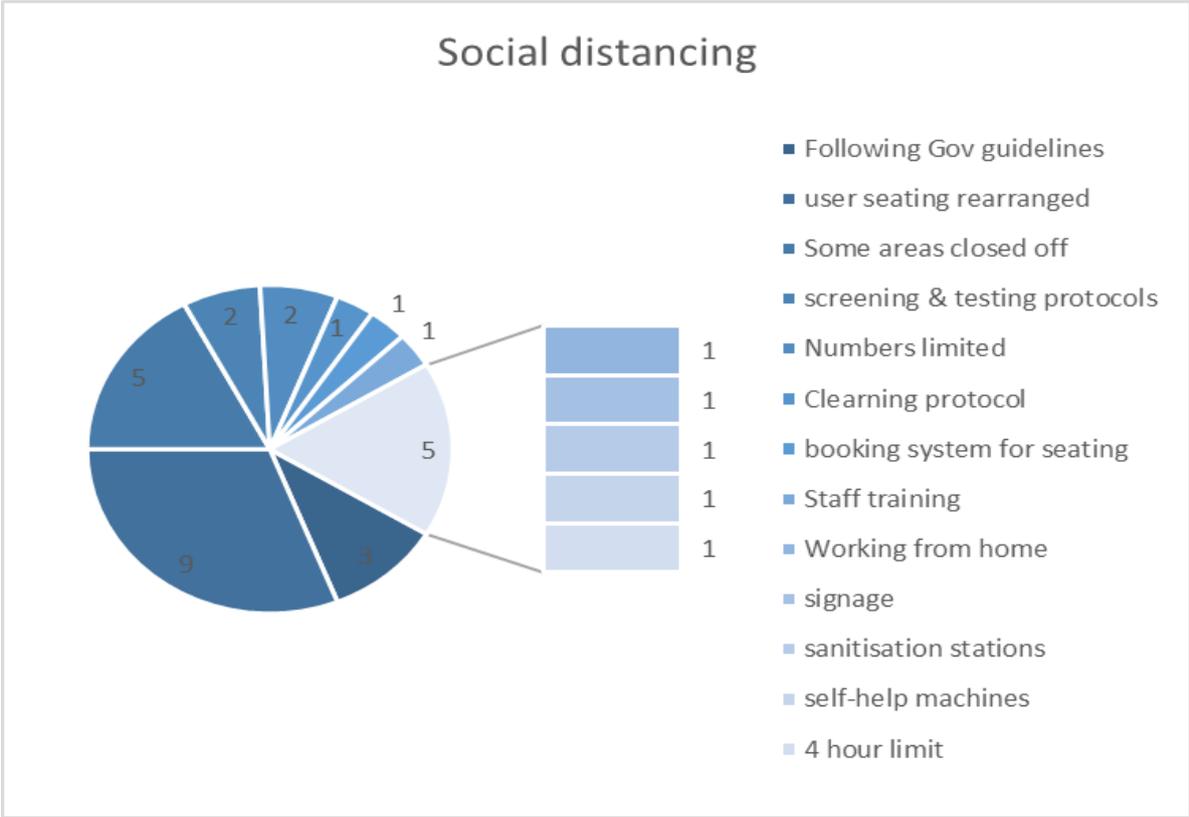


## b. Physical access to book collections

Libraries have offered a variety of actions with regard to access to book collections. In most cases (4) it was indicated that while clients would not have access to the collection, items could be collected for them by staff. 3 institutions indicated that circulation services had been suspended.

## c. Sanitisation of spaces/equipment

20 institutions indicated that sanitisation was being done (5 indicated that this was being arranged by the university). One institution indicated that staff were working

from home and one that the reduced number of cleaning staff would make daily sanitisation difficult.


Physical access to book collections
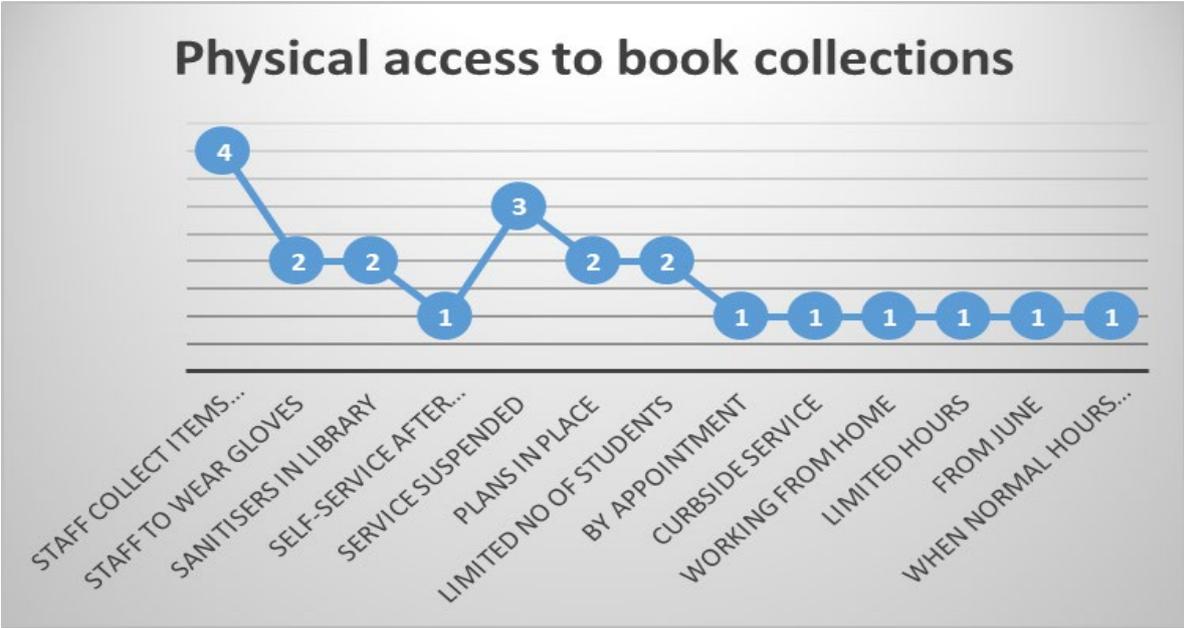
### d. Quarantining of returned materials

A total of 18 respondents indicated that they will be quarantining items or are investigating methods for quarantining items. Only 2 respondents indicated no plans for quarantining while a further 2 gave neutral answers.


Quarantining of returned materials
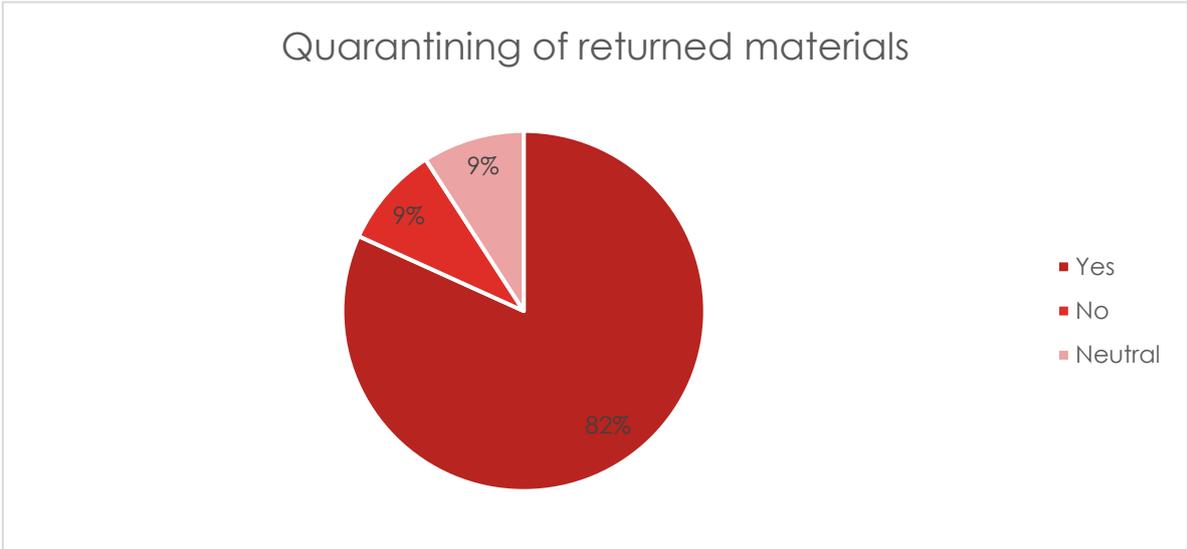
Of the libraries which shared their plans for quarantining items, 5 indicated use of sanitisers and 1 indicated they were investigating an ultra-violet solution. With regard to the length of the quarantine period 2 respondents indicated 3 days and 1 indicated daily and 12 hours.

### e. Provision of self-service circulation options

Of all the respondents, only 4 indicated that they either do not have or are not considering any self-service circulation. One institution indicated self-service circulation was not applicable. While 9 libraries are already providing a self-service solution, 3 were planning for self-service and 1 was investigating the option.
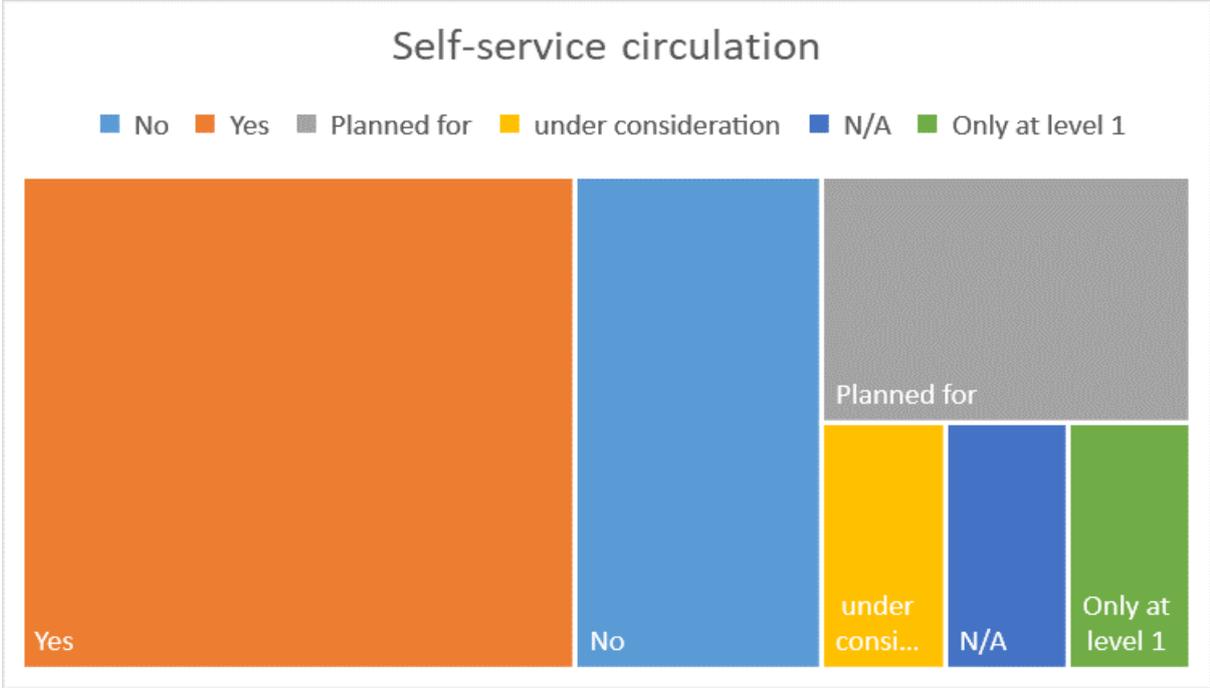
# Section 5: Other

## a. Reintegration plans

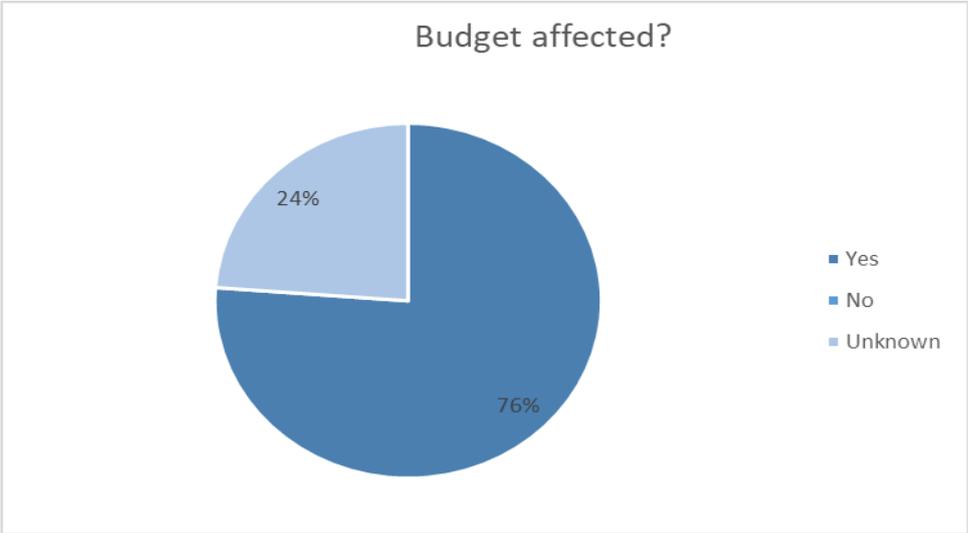The majority (19) respondents indicated that they had a reintegration plan in place.
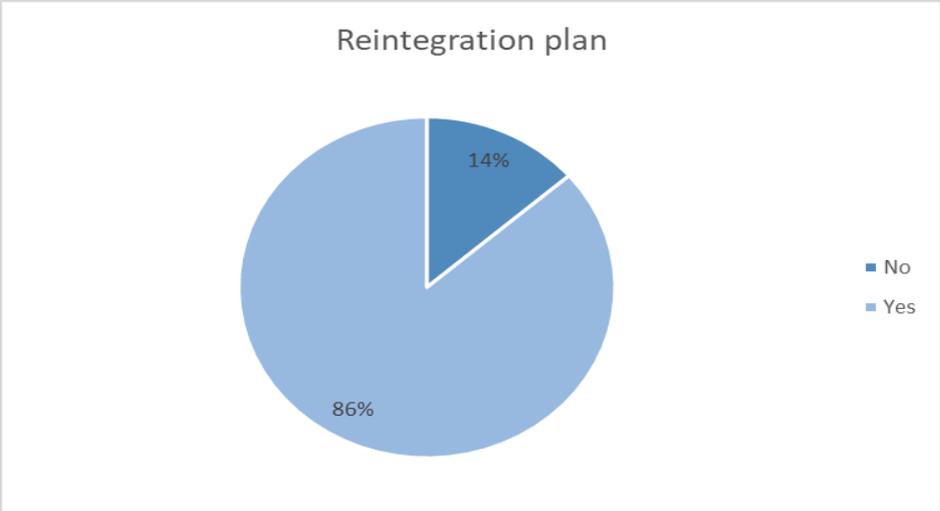


## b. Reopening of institutions and return of staff to campuses

While 3 institutions indicated that they were already open and some staff were back at work; most (7) indicated they were expecting to open in June; 1 indicated possibly June or July, 1 indicated July and 1 September. 5 respondents did not know when they library would be reopening or staff returning.

## c. Effects on the 2021 budget

Of the 16 respondents who expected the budget to be affected, 11 expected budget cuts; one expected the unspent budget to be moved to 2021, one indicated that even if the budget was reduced, the amount allocated for resources would not be affected and 1 expected a better allocation. Five respondents did not know if the budget would be affected.

### d. Successes/challenges

**Successes**

| Services | Training | Staff | Other |
|---|---|---|---|
| • Online access mode improved and made easier<br>• Getting to know the pressing needs of users<br>• Finding new ways to serve clients<br>• LibChat<br>• Online ordering<br>• Open access resources<br>• Seamless migration to complete virtual service | • The recording of the credit bearing Information Literacy training program for inclusion on Black board<br>• Development of online materials<br>• Delivering of online seminars by library staff | • Use of Zoom/ MS Teams<br>• Improved staff attitudes to using technology<br>• Agility of staff<br>• Realisation of integrated nature of technical and user services<br>• Reimagining the online library<br>• Introduced new ways of working<br>• Able to give time to small projects which were previously neglected | • Improved collaboration within the library and with other departments of the university |

**Challenges**

| Access | Staff | Risks | Other |
|---|---|---|---|
| • Connectivity<br>• Lack of data for staff<br>• Lack of devices for remote work a huge challenge. | • Loss of productivity and performance<br>• Keeping staff morale high<br>• Difficult to respond to all staff uncertainties during these uncertain period<br>• Staff in Acquisitions, Cataloguing and Shelvers, General Information Desk<br>• Staffing with 1/3 of staff a challenge | • Circulation and computer usage will be high risk<br>• Library buildings too huge to afford all cleaning and social distancing requirements. None of them are ready as yet | • Relying on other campus services<br>• Provision of Archival Material not on digital format<br>• Library staff ready to support online teaching programme, but programme did not start on 1 July |

# Acknowledgements

The following persons are acknowledged:

CHELSA Executive: Ujala Satgoor (Chair), Shirlene Neerputh (Chair-Elect), Zanele Mathe (Secretary), Mushoni Mulaudzi (Treasurer), Paiki Muswazi (Additional Member) and Lucille Webster (Additional Member)

CHELSA Project Manager: Anke McCallum

Cape Peninsula University of Technology Library and Information Services: Elisha R.T. Chiware (Director) and Deborah Anne Becker

CHELSA members for their participation in the survey and willingness to share their information.

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