CHECKING THE BOOKS

The Value and Impact of Public Library Book Reading

Jackie Toyne
&
Bob Usherwood

Centre for the Public Library and Information in Society
Department of Information Studies
The University of Sheffield

Report of research funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Board
2001

Contents

	Page
Abstract	**2**
Acknowledgements	**3**
Executive Summary	**4**
Chapter 1: Introduction	**8**
Chapter 2: Methodology	**14**
Chapter 3: "The significance of anybody's reading anything"	**25**
Chapter 4: The role of the public library in the reading experience	**53**
Chapter 5: Fiction Promotion and Reader Development activities	**82**
Chapter 6: Managerial issues affecting impact	**101**
Chapter 7: Persuading policy makers of the value of reading	**128**
Chapter 8: Conclusions	**146**
Bibliography & References	**151**
Appendices:	
Appendix 1: Members of Steering Group	i
Appendix 2: Student Dissertations	ii
Appendix 3: Questionnaire issued in November 1999	iii
Appendix 4: Local authorities selected for further data collection	vi
Appendix 5: Schedule of questions for focus groups	viii
Appendix 6: Schedule of questions for Managers of Stock Management and Selection Policy	x
Appendix 7: Schedule of questions for people working in arts & cultural industries	xiii
Appendix 8: Schedule of questions for Library Chair of Committee	xvii
Appendix 9: List of focus group participants	xix
Appendix 10: Results of postal survey	xx

Abstract

A combined qualitative methodological approach involving a social process audit, uses and gratification's technique, and reader response theory has been used to evaluate the value and impact of public library book reading. In order to establish a greater understanding of the function of the public library in providing a reading experience, this research examines and analyses the views of the people who read fiction and other forms of imaginative literature borrowed from public libraries. Their views are then compared with those of library professionals, arts and cultural workers, and policy makers. The data show the benefits reading imaginative literature brings to individuals and to society in general. They also demonstrate the unique role the public library plays in establishing and maintaining the reading experience and why it is often the preferred resource of reading material. Through an analysis of these data factors, relating to library stock and infrastructure, are identified which prevent some people using the library and prevent the public library service from realising its full potential as a contributor to the reading experience. Many of these factors are influenced by the way in which services are managed, but others lay outside the immediate control of the staff. The evidence suggests that, in evaluating the value of reading, quantitative data, particularly book issues, are still relied upon to too great an extent by professionals and policy makers alike. The authors argue for a change of emphasis and conclude that qualitative data, properly gathered are valid evidence and should be used as such by policy makers and professionals.

Acknowledgements

The research and writing of this interim report has not been an individual venture – many others have contributed to its creation.

First, we would like to thank the AHRB for supporting and funding this project.

Second, our thanks go to the elected members, library practitioners, and arts and cultural workers who gave generously of their time during the interview process and assisted the project team in making further contacts.

Third, we very much valued the input of our steering group; together they made a considerable contribution to the research.

Fourth, an early draft of this report was subject to examination at a workshop, and we would like to thank everyone who contributed to the debate.

Finally, our greatest thanks are extended to all members of the focus groups. They received the opportunity to be involved in the research with great enthusiasm, and were prepared to have their group meetings interrupted in order for the research to take place. Often the interviews were carried out within a member's home and the research is indebted to the warmth and generosity shown to the research staff. The discussions that took place were very open and at times confidential experiences were shared.

Executive Summary

The research had three objectives:

1) To investigate and identify the library's role in developing and promoting reading through:
   a) Choice and selection of reading material
   b) Direct intervention to give users the best possible reading experience
   c) Promotional activities
   d) Partnerships with literary and community organizations
2) To determine and demonstrate the contribution that library access to imaginative literature makes to:
   a) The nation's mental and physical health
   b) Self-expression and educational achievement
   c) Personal creativity
   d) Attitudes and values
   e) The national economy through the development of cultural industries
3) To establish the kind of data required by policy makers as evidence of the value of reading.

The research combined a social audit process with "uses and gratifications" technique and reader response theory to evaluate the value and impact of public library book reading. The basic approach was to cross-check the views and perceptions of selected stakeholders. The key stakeholders for this study were:

- Elected members
- Library staff
- Arts and Cultural workers
- Groups of Library users and non-users.

The report evaluates the value and impact of public library book reading by examining the outcomes of this activity as perceived by these four key groups.

The research findings have been organised around the following key themes:

i. The significance of anybody reading anything;
ii. The role of the public library in the reading experience;
iii. Fiction promotion and reader development activities;
iv. Managerial issues affecting impact;
v. Persuading policy makers of the value of reading.

The data show that reading imaginative literature is regarded as a special activity which serves to satisfy a wide variety of needs. In addition they help to dispel the stereotypical image of a reader as someone who is introverted and reluctant or unable to participate fully in society. There is persuasive evidence that, through reading, a person's life is transformed for the better. For those who regard themselves as readers, reading is not only deemed a special activity but a crucial one. The data suggest that reading identities are not fixed but change according to time and personal development. In addition, the non-readers included in the research process acknowledge the potential benefits for those who choose to spend their time reading.

The public library was revealed as making a unique contribution to the reading experience. Book lending is still perceived to be the major function of the public library, and libraries are seen as natural places for those who wish to develop as readers.

- The public library impacted on the reading experience by providing free access to reading material and a wide range of stock. These aspects of the service were shown as being imperative for establishing and maintaining the reading habit.

- Providing people with the opportunity to borrow rather than buy material was seen to add significantly to the reading experience in that it enabled individuals to exert greater personal control over their reading.

In addition, readers recognised that they received further personal benefits.

However, several factors were felt by some respondents to prevent the library from realizing its potential with regard to the reading experience. These included:

Difficulties of physical access; the intimidating atmosphere of some services and a lack of standard facilities. It is suggested that libraries needed to be more pro-active in challenging society's perception of reading.

A crucial aspect of the public library's role was seen to be its work in reader development and fiction promotion. A recurring theme, which runs through all the data, is that users of the service are increasingly expecting library staff to act as intermediaries in the reading experience. Novice readers and more developed readers alike perceived this to be the case. Choosing a good read is a skill, which library staff should help to develop. In addition libraries need to develop their role as community centres.

A number of management and other related issues have been identified, that can affect the value and impact of public library book reading.

- Readers needs are not perceived as a priority in all public library authorities
- Stock management and selection must be viewed as an interdependent process. The findings from the study suggest that action or inaction in any one area will affect other links in the chain and ultimately impact on the reader's reading experience.
- Stock selection and management needs to be governed by a clear locally determined philosophy, which is acted upon in practice.
- In most instances, evaluation is still reliant on the number of book issues. The value of qualitative techniques is becoming increasingly recognised but there is little evidence of their introduction. Non-users are being overlooked in many evaluation procedures.
- Reader Development policies are recognised as being of value within stock management and selection policies.
- The role of library staff needs to be determined. It was revealed that staff often lack confidence or have inappropriate skills for reader development and fiction promotion work.

The final aspect of the research determines the kind of evidence required by policy makers on the value and impact of public library book reading. The findings indicate that:

- Policy makers stress that they do not need convincing of the library's role and the value of reading
- Policy makers still largely interpret value and impact through the use of quantitative data, but it is becoming increasingly recognised that qualitative data should be used as evidence.

These findings are largely derived from qualitative, often anecdotal, evidence. This reflects our belief that qualitative data, rigorously gathered are valid evidence and should be treated as such by both politicians and policy makers. The data suggest that reading imaginative literature provided by the public library, enriches the lives of many people and has the potential to influence many more. The combined methodological approach used in this study has demonstrated the value and impact of reading, and has the potential to make the value of a basic public library service more visible to policy makers and professionals alike.

Chapter one: Introduction

> ***Wanted: Facts About Fiction***
>
> *The librarian who tries to frame a policy with regard to the contents of his fiction shelves, who is concerned to do more than please the immediate authorities, who has a feeling for the immense influence which novels have on the lives of many individuals, is forced to realise that he is working in an almost complete vacuum as far as facts are concerned. The administrators of business concerns are fully equipped with facts about the effects as well as about the costs of their policies, and are able to reach a point where they can choose between spending more on better results, and losing results in order to economise. But so far as the effects of fiction are concerned, we are almost entirely in the dark.*[1]

The above quotation taken from an article by H.S.A. Smith, published in *The Library Association Record* in April 1938, aptly describes our current understanding of the impact of reading, and the library experience. Sixty years on, the Arts and Humanities Research Board (AHRB) have provided funds to enable the *Centre for the Public Library in the Information Society* at the University of Sheffield to examine the value and impact of public library book reading.

The Aims of the Project

In order to establish a greater understanding of the function of the public library in providing a reading experience, this research examines and analyses the views of the people who read fiction and other forms of imaginative literature borrowed from the public library.

There are three strands to the project. These are:

i. To investigate and identify the library's role in developing and promoting reading through:

[1] Smith, H.S.A. (1938:164) "Wanted: facts about fiction", *Library Association Recor*d Many thanks to Alistair Black for forwarding this article to the research team.

- Choice and selection of reading material
- Direct intervention to give customers the best possible reading experience
- Promotional activities
- Partnerships with literary and community organizations

ii. To determine and demonstrate the contribution that library access to imaginative literature makes to:
    - The nation's mental and physical health
    - Self-expression and educational achievement
    - Personal creativity
    - Attitudes and values
    - The national economy through the development of cultural industries

iii. To establish the kind of data required by policy makers as evidence of the value of reading.

Relevance and Timeliness of the study

Statistical data are readily available. For instance, the most recent issue of *Social Trends* identifies reading as a significant leisure activity with 58% of men and 71% of women identifying it as an important leisure pursuit. More recently, the results of the British Reading Habits Survey commissioned by public libraries and Waterstones found that more than 75% of young people enjoy fiction and would like more time to read. Similarly within the profession, there is a great deal of statistical evidence to show the use made of public libraries in the nation's fiction reading. Some 501 million books are loaned in a year, and of this 52% is fiction, of one form or another, that is 260 million books (Davidson, et al.:1999).

However, statistical evidence, which focuses on the number of book issues and the number of library users, is not enough. Often these figures are out of date and, more important, they do "not reflect or in any way measure those elements and values that the public treasures about the library" (Landry 1993:16). Also, the data appear to

have little or no meaning to those outside the profession. As Landry continues, the figures are not interpreted in "... a way that takes account of what outside interests might find important" (1993:16).

The profession is slowly beginning to recognise that it needs to find new methods of demonstrating the value of the public library. Recent publications such as *Learning development (*Matarasso 1998) and *New Measures for the New Library* (Linley & Usherwood 1998*)* stress that statistical methods in themselves do not reveal the full value and impact of the public library service. A point recognised, but not acted upon, by the old Office of Arts and Libraries which stated nearly a decade ago: "Ideally, one would like to know exactly how the application of public library funds affects the quality of life, learning, work, etc." (1990:4). New approaches are urgently required that go beyond the collation of statistics and begin to address the questions of 'why' and 'how' libraries affect the lives of its users.

Although the role of fiction in libraries is still debated, the days are over when it was treated as "the ghost at the banquet, the irreverent intruder into a more dignified gathering" (Greenhalgh, et al.: 1995:131). The past decade has seen a growing resurgence in the prominence given to fiction and fiction promotion. Research indicates that reading and reading promotion is resuming a central role in the modern public library (Aslib: 1995; Kinnell & Shepherd: 1998). In recent years professionals have examined various ways of promoting reading through libraries and have developed methods of training staff to engage and assist the reading public.

There are numerous reader development initiatives including the *Well Worth Reading* scheme, and the Society of Chief Librarian's *Branching Out Project,* which seek to improve the reading experience. In addition, the National Year of Reading's "Read Me" campaign and its successor "Read On" have shown that the promotion of reading is high on the Government's national agenda. In addition, as from 2000, the £3 million challenge fund, joint-funded by the Wolfson Foundation and the DCMS, has been made available for programmes which enable public libraries to promote the enjoyment of reading.

Behind all of this lies the assumption that reading is a good thing and that by lending imaginative literature libraries are providing a worthwhile and necessary function. For example, early in the life of the Blair administration members of the government suggested that there were links between low literacy levels and crime and other anti social activity (Fisher: 1997). However, some commentators feel that librarians have failed to develop "ways of demonstrating the impact of its work with readers [its] impact on individual lives and, on community life and on national priorities" (McKearney: 1998). Although they are not prevalent in the present administration there are still those who find it difficult to justify the free loan of books. It was only a few years ago that Iain Sproat asked the Public Library Authorities Conference: "Is there something sufficiently distinctive about reading as a recreation, to justify its being made publicly available without charge?" A little earlier the authors of *Ex Libris* called for a "thoroughgoing reform" of the library service which they felt had been reduced to "a system which largely supplies free pulp fiction to those who could well afford to pay for it" (Adam Smith Institute 1986: 41).

The present research provides new evidence on the impact of imaginative literature on individuals and groups in society. The Reading Partnership and Waterstones' survey has demonstrated that readers are "eager to talk about the role reading plays in their lives"(Guardian 1995:5). The current project has tapped into this rich resource by using qualitative methodologies to evaluate how the reading of fiction affects the day-to-day life of the library user. In so doing reference is made to a number of existing studies that have examined the functions of reading across a range of disciplines, including psychology, sociology, education, and literary criticism.

The Research Process

The project combines the methodology developed in the social audit work carried out by Sheffield (Usherwood & Linley: 1998) with the "uses and gratifications" techniques used by researchers in the mass media, (Brown: 1976; McQuail: 1969) and the "reader response" approach to reading, which is seen, by some, as integral to an understanding of literature (e.g. Rosenblatt: 1991; Radway: 1983; Van Riel: 1996). These methodologies have already been applied usefully within the department in Masters' dissertations assessing various aspects relating to the value and impact of reading. (Spenceley: 1989; Hampshere: 1990; Lee: 1996; Taylor: 1999).

The project involved an extensive literature review. A preliminary questionnaire was issued to all public library authorities to assess the current level of activity in relation to fiction and fiction promotion. In addition, stock management and selection policies were evaluated and used to inform interviews with library stock managers and those responsible for reading promotion. Local politicians responsible for library policies have also been asked about the value of reading and the type of evidence that they require for policy decisions. Consultation with library practitioners and politicians has been an integral part of the research. Throughout the research, the project team has worked closely with a steering group drawn from relevant professional and academic backgrounds. Preliminary findings were produced for discussion at a workshop of invited delegates. Opinions and views expressed during the discussion at the workshop have been incorporated into this report.

Benefits and Outcomes

It is the research team's intention to provide policy makers and professionals with a greater understanding of the value and impact of public library book reading. This will be of practical help to those responsible for stock management and reading promotion. It will also enable library managers to develop advocacy materials and tools to demonstrate the contribution made by the free provision of imaginative literature to national life. In summary, the project:

- Illuminates the processes applied by public library users when selecting imaginative literature
- Helps professionals and policy makers assess the impact of the services they provide
- Enables them to identify the reasons for their success or failure
- Helps managers monitor and guide the service and improve the way in which the value of the service is reported to policy makers
- Directs professionals on how to intervene to give readers the best possible reading experience
- Enables stakeholders to make a judgement on the service
- Affects organizational behaviour

In short this report provides the much- needed ***facts about fiction***. Facts, which will help to prove and improve the performance of the public library service in what is still a core area of activity.

Chapter Two: Methodology

In this chapter the theoretical framework developed, to examine the value and impact of public library book reading, is revealed.

2.1 Introduction

This research combined the methodology developed in the "***social audit"*** work conducted by Usherwood and Linley (1998) with the ***"uses and gratification's"*** techniques used by researchers in the mass media, (e.g. Brown 1976, McQuail 1969) and the ***"reader-response"*** approach which is now seen as critical to an understanding of literature (e.g. Radway 1983).

- ***Social audit*** techniques have been described as "a means of assessing the social impact … of an organisation in relation to its aims and those of its stakeholders" (Zadek, 1994). In *New Measures for the New Library,* Linley and Usherwood (1998) demonstrated how social audit techniques could be applied as a valid means of evaluating the intangible benefits of the library in order to assess the impact of the service. The application of such techniques is becoming recognised as an effective way of demonstrating the value of a service to stakeholders, and as a management tool that can contribute to the design of better systems and services.

- ***Uses and gratification's*** studies were developed in the 1940's. Previous approaches, for example effects models, viewed the audience as entirely passive recipients of the messages sent out by the mass forms of communication. The "uses and gratifications" approach turned the idea of audience as passive receiver around, and saw the audience as active participants in the creation of meaning of what they saw. "The underlying idea of this approach is that of function, that is it attempts to examine the functions that mass media have for its recipient. It is assumed that people have certain needs that they bring to the media, that they expect to be satisfied by its use, thus they have needs that can be satisfied" (Hamshere, S. 1990:3).

- ***Reader-response approaches*** to literature were developed at a similar time and have come into prominence since the 1960's. Reader response critics examined the nature of the particular relationships between audiences and the texts. These critics shifted the focus away from the traditional conception of a work as an achieved structure of meanings that the reader simply absorbs. Reader-response approaches see readers being active in what they do, and are the producers of meaning of a text. That is, the act of reading a literary text is a transaction between the reader and the author, the meanings of the work being negotiated between the reader and the text. This corresponds with the "uses and gratifications" approach, in that it assumes that people approach literary works with different needs in mind, which the text may or may not satisfy.

In the application and development of the methodology, the project team made use of other traditions of qualitative research, including literature search, semi-structured interviews and focus group research.

2.2 Overview of Research Design
(Figure 1)

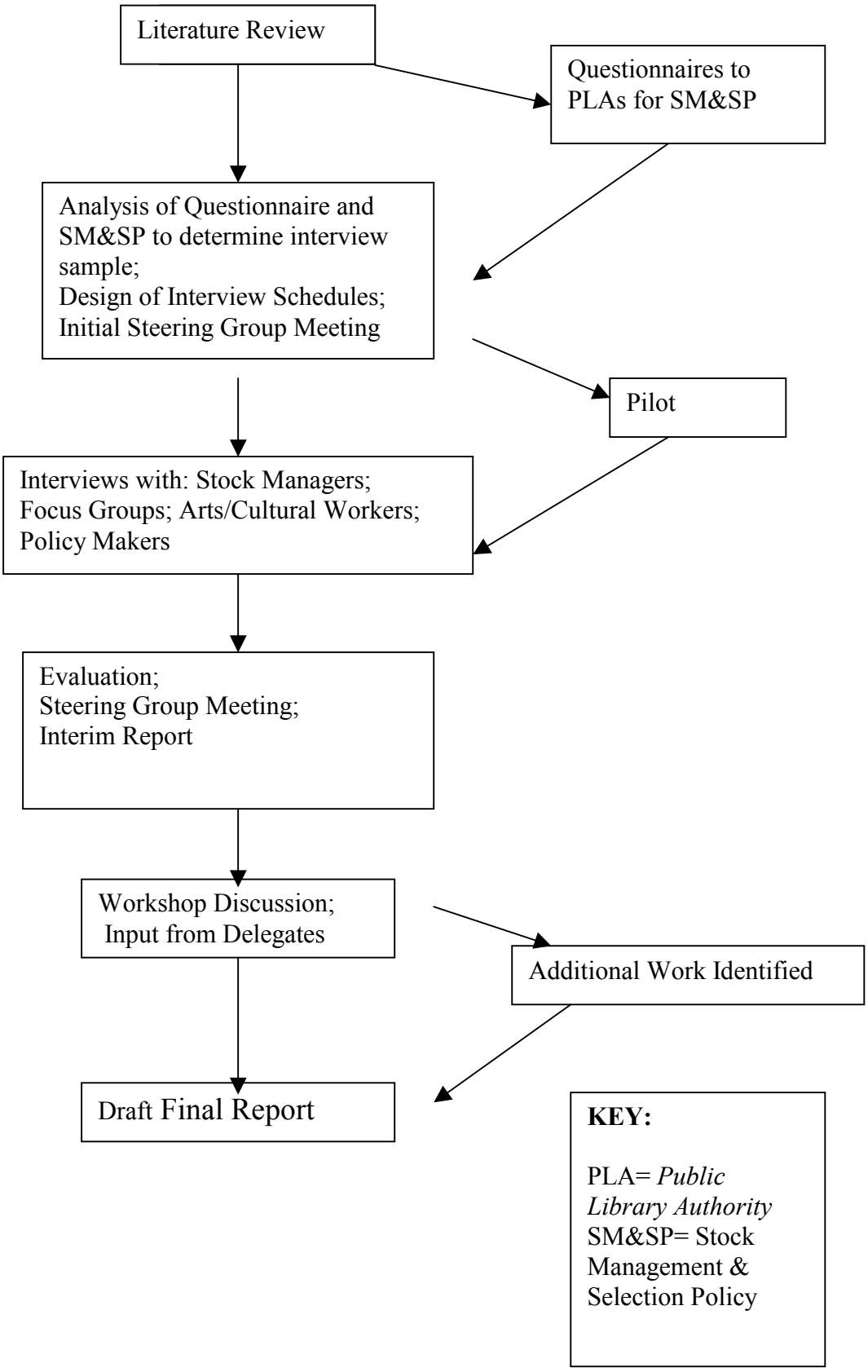


Figure 1 provides a diagrammatic representation of the research design. At any one time, the research team were usually involved in two or more steps of the process but the overview usefully identifies all of the stages involved in the process. Each stage is described to explain the rationale used to determine its selection and inclusion.

2.3 Literature Search

An extensive literature search was conducted at the preliminary stage of the research and continually updated throughout the course of the project. In addition, documentation produced by public library authorities (e.g. stock management and selection policies) were collected and evaluated. The examination of these sources illuminated themes which informed the design of the research instruments. The issues raised during this research will be analysed in accordance with identified themes.

2.4 Student Dissertations

In addition to the above, this project benefited from having access to Masters' dissertations in which various aspects of the reading experience had been analysed by students of the Department of Information Studies at the University of Sheffield. Two dissertations in particular contributed to the design of the current research:

Sarah J. Hamshere, 1990 ~ *"Exploration and Escape": The needs fulfilled by borrowing books from a public library.*

Colin Taylor, 1999 ~ *"How was it for you?" An investigation into the experience of reading imaginative literature, and the benefits that this may have for its readers.*

Also during the course of this project, issues were identified which were considered worthy of closer examination but lay outside the strict remit of this work. These topics are the subject of current dissertations and where appropriate they have informed this report.

A list of the related dissertations is given in appendix 2. (Please note: although the dissertations are unpublished, they may be borrowed from the Department of Information Studies, at the University of Sheffield.)

2.5 Questionnaire

In conjunction with the initial literature search, a short questionnaire was designed and issued to each of the public library authorities in the UK. A copy of this questionnaire can be found at appendix 3. Each authority was asked for information in relation to four areas:

i. The literature promotion and reader development activities with which they were involved.
ii. Whether or not they had written stock management and selection policy. If so, they were asked to forward a copy.
iii. Whether they had a member of staff who specialises in fiction promotion or reader development.
iv. Whether they were willing to participate in the second stage of data collection.

A 91% response rate was achieved to this questionnaire. This is an exceptionally high response rate which indicates professional interest in the area and the findings of the topic. Discussion of the key findings and results of the questionnaire are included in the main body of the report. In the early stages of the research the replies were used in two ways. First, in addition to the returned questionnaires, 68 copies of stock management and selection policies were received and subsequently assessed. The information that they provided helped to inform the design of the research instruments. Second, of the 91% returning the questionnaire 95% of respondents were willing to be involved in the second stage of data collection, that is the interview stage. From this, a "discriminative sample" of twelve authorities was selected. It was felt that this would provide multitude viewpoints whilst maximising the opportunities for comparative analysis. For a description of the authorities included please refer to appendix 4.

2.6 Interviews with stakeholders

Stakeholders are defined as including "all individuals and groups who are affected by, or who can affect, the organisation." (Zadek: 1994). The key stakeholders for this study were identified as:

- elected members
- public library stock managers
- arts and cultural workers
- library users and non-users

In order to gain information from the elected members, public library stock managers, and arts and cultural workers semi-structured interviews were conducted. The interview schedules comprised a series of questions which were arranged into themes according to issues highlighted by the literature. This method of data collection facilitates cross-site comparability whilst at the same time, it enables those being interviewed to stray away from the line of questioning if they wish, particularly if interesting themes develop (Bryman: 1989).

For each of the stakeholder groups separate interview schedules were designed. Each contains the same range of questions but the wording of each is altered slightly to reflect the particular stakeholder's role. Although in essence this is a qualitative project, a Likert scale has been incorporated into several of the questions included in the schedules. The objective behind this was to gain an understanding of the relative strength of feeling towards a point raised within the context of the research and neutralize any possible real or perceived interviewer bias.

A copy of each of the interview schedules can be found in appendices 6 to 8.

Although every effort was made to carry out face-to-face interviews with the various stakeholders, there were a few occasions where due to the distance involved and time constraints, it proved necessary to carry out telephone interviews. However, there were no discernable differences to the responses. All interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed in full.

❖ ***Focus Groups***

The nature of this study lends itself to listening to people's accounts of how the public library affects their lives. Therefore, individual readers were interviewed and focus groups were undertaken to examine the reading experience. The focus groups were selected to reflect the variables in population and give example of the effort made to ensure that non-users as well as users of the public library service were included. Focus groups were used to test the claims that reading has physical and mental benefits, in that it allows individuals to take a measure of self control; that it has economic benefits in creating a workforce that can think creatively, and social

benefits in "creating a society that uses reading … as a way of sharing and developing a national life" (Davidson, 1998:6).

Focus groups were recognised as offering two main advantages. First, this method enables information to be gathered from a larger number of respondents. Second, the participants are able to listen to other members of the group and this can lead to them developing their own ideas (Krueger: 1994).

In order to assist in the free flow of discussion, the focus groups used were already established groups, and the discussions took place at the usual time when and location where the group would meet. By involving groups of library users and non-users it was felt that the groups would reflect the variables in the population. The focus group interview guide incorporates the key elements based on the ideas of R.A.Kruegar (1994). Appendix 5 contains a copy of the focus group guide.

Focus groups were held in nine of the twelve public authorities included in the interview stage of data collection. Practical constraints meant that in total 29 focus group interviews were carried out. Appendix 9 provides a description of the participating groups.

Again as with the semi-structured interviews, all focus groups were tape recorded and later transcribed in full.

2.7 Steering Group

Constant interpretation has been described as the "*hallmark* of qualitative data" (Barton & Hamilton 1998:69). To this end, every opportunity was taken to test the findings and throughout the project team worked closely with a steering group. The steering group included library professionals and arts workers. For a list of Steering Group members see appendix one.

The Steering Group met twice during the course of the project. Each meeting was used to review and discuss the findings and develop ideas. Together the members of the group brought a wide range of perspectives and experience to the research.

2.8 Workshop

In previous work undertaken by the Department of Information Studies, workshops with library professionals and politicians to discuss and review findings provided substantial contributions to the research process. (Quality Management Workshop 1995, Social Audit 1998, Public Library Workforce Study 1999). A similar workshop discussion was seen as an integral part of the present research. It provided a further opportunity for the project team to share and discuss the significance of their findings. At the workshop, the research team summarised the information to date. Prior to participation in the workshop, delegates received a preliminary report of the findings. Delegates were then divided into small groups to discuss the major themes arising from the research. These were identified as:

- The role of the public library in the reading experience
- Managerial Issues
- The kind of data required by policy makers as the evidence of the value of reading

This final report takes account of the views expressed at the workshop discussion.

2.9 Data Analysis

Analysis is concerned with looking for emerging patterns within the data and recognising that some parts of the data are more significant than others. Through constantly going back and forth between the existing literature and gathered data, patterns and regularities are seen to emerge. The approach to analysis involved a set of principles based upon grounded theory, in which the discovery of theory comes from data obtained and analysed systematically. (Corbin and Strauss: 1997)

Within this final report, the emerging issues and themes are brought together in the single thematic report. The contents of this report highlight the central themes of the topic, as:

- The significance of anybody reading anything;
- The role of the public library in the reading experience;
- Fiction promotion and reader development activities;
- Managerial issues affecting impact;
- Persuading policy makers of the value of reading

Each of these themes is discussed in the following chapters, under those headings. The literature review is not presented in a single chapter, but extracts are used in each of the thematic chapters to illuminate and inform the analysis of the data gathered during the course of this study. Conclusions from the research are presented in the final chapter. This final chapter will also contain the recommendations for further research identified during the course of this study.

2.10 Validity of findings

With the presentation of the findings of this empirical study, it is essential that the methods used in this research are made explicit. Throughout this chapter every action involved in the methodological process has been described, in order for it to be evaluated and also, to assist those who wish to replicate or do similar work. Therefore, rather than just naming a methodological approach an explanation has been given of the rationale that determined its inclusion and also, how it was located and developed within the current study. Also, the study involved the collection of data from a variety of sources, using different techniques: one to one interview and focus groups, and from pre-existing literature. In the selection of focus groups every effort was made to select groups that reflect the variables in population. The project research associate facilitated the semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Consultation with the steering group and discussion at the workshop brought additional perspectives and understanding to the findings.

The research approach has been to take a number of perspectives on the topic in an attempt to obtain a firm hold on the shifting realities of the reading experience. The use of a variety of data sources or "triangulation" is a common practice in social research (see Denzin 1978). It has also been used, with some success in the L.I.S field.[2] It is an over simplification to claim that it results in revealing an independent truth about a topic. However, such a mixed methodology does have a number of advantages which can enhance the quality of a project.

[2] Refer to the Aslib Review.

In this final report, quotations expressed during the course of the interviews have been included to illustrate the findings. These quotations are presented verbatim and consequently will not always be grammatically correct. Punctuation has been added, it is hoped in a way that is faithful to the delivery of the dialogue, to make the text more readily intelligible to the reader. Also in the inclusion of the quotations, the project team respect the respondents' trust, information was given in a confidential manner, and therefore statements are presented anonymously.

In the incorporation of the quotations the following system has been applied. Authorities are given a number 1 to 12 as expressed in appendix 4. For focus group participants the following applies:

- Male=M Female =F
- Age groups:

  18-21 = 21 45-54 = 45 75–over = 75

  22-29 = 22 55-64 = 55

  30-44 = 30 65-74 = 65

- Group number as allocated in appendix 9.

2.11 Generalising from the findings

Generalising from qualitative research is an "impossibility" (Patton, 1987:167).

But having said that, there are many ways of relating such a study, a finding or an explanation to broader entities, including referring to other literature and theoretical frameworks. Consequently, within the final report reference will be made to existing literature and the findings will be contextualised by juxtaposing previous studies that on occasions offer different information.

2.11 Summary of chapter

This chapter has examined the research strategy adopted for the purposes of the project. It has addressed the stages involved in formulating the methodological framework. Each element of the research design is not discrete and the selection of one phase is seen to have implications upon another, and indeed the overall research.

This chapter places the research in context, and sets the stage for the following sections containing the analysis and discussion of data.

Chapter three: The significance of anybody reading anything

3.1.Introduction

Before examining the distinctive role of the public library in the reading experience, it is important to begin by returning to the question of what motivates adults to invest their time in reading? Writing in 1993, O'Rourke stated, "… how little we know about the nature and significance of anybody's reading anything" (1993:3). The report *Borrowed Time* develops this further and concludes, "without knowing much more fully what the readers of popular fiction are deriving from their avid reading patterns, formulating policy about fiction stocks is almost impossible" (Comedia 1993:45).

Data from the recent LIC funded project *Reading the Situation*, showed that:

> The average person reads books for 5.5 hours per week; books are still read in 90% of British households and around 80% of adults read books for pleasure. A quarter of adults do so because they consider reading to be a special activity, providing them with something that TV and computers cannot. (2000:9).

Numerous research projects have examined the act of reading and have attempted to elucidate our understanding of this "special activity" and the unique role it plays in our lives. In short, these studies have demonstrated that reading can serve to satisfy a wide range of needs. Also, as stated by McClellan (1977) such motivations tend to be fluid and can change during the course of actual reading. In addition, readers may not be aware of the conscious needs they are seeking to satisfy through their reading. All that having been said, it is increasingly accepted that,

> While each individual of course has individual motives governing the act of reading, there are inevitably common reasons among the reading community. (Lee 1996: 14).

In the present study, the opening question of the focus group interview asked participants to talk about their reading experience. The aim was to establish the significance of the reading experience and to uncover the common reasons which prompt people to spend their time reading. They were asked, "What contribution if

any, does the reading of imaginative literature bring to your life?" The term "imaginative literature" included all types of fiction, play scripts, and poetry. In answering this question, respondents typically described the benefits that they perceived they gained from reading. This chapter describes and illustrates what respondents felt were the most significant uses of reading in their lives.

The selection criteria for participation in the study meant that not all of the respondents were readers. Notably, there were three groups who described themselves as non-readers, and within the other groups there were several members for whom the reading of imaginative literature was not a significant part of their lifestyle. Their reasons for not reading are included as an integral part of the discussion.

3.2 Escapism

In describing the contribution that reading of imaginative literature made to their lives, the typical response interviewees first gave included the word escapism or alluded to it.

-It's escape. [M/55/21].

*-It's my way of unwinding, you know, it's pleasurable, I lose myself in anothe*r *world. [F/45/16].*

-It's so good to go to those other worlds. You can just sort of escape. [F/30/26].

Such a response is in line with the results from previous studies, both by reader response critics and those carrying out uses and gratification's studies into the functions of reading. It demonstrates that escapism is the most conscious perception that people have of what they derive from the act of reading, and supports Taylor's suggestion that escapism is "the use that they find easiest to articulate" (1999: 41).

However, escapism is a complex term and contains many connotations, often contradictory and not always positive. In the past, escapism was used as a derogatory term with the implied meaning of either being reluctant or unable to participate fully in the real world (Gerrig: 1993).

Others have argued that, escapism is more than merely a denial or retreat:

> I do not believe that reading is the same as living. But neither do I believe that reading is merely 'as if' living, life at second-hand, reading as essentially an escape into fiction and fantasy (Davis1992: xix).

Escapism can be very positive, but the benefits it brings can only be understood if it is examined within its social context (Barton & Hamilton 1998:23). Only then will we begin to appreciate what readers mean by escapism and what needs this satisfies within their lives.

From the "reader response" perspective, Appleyard suggests that we might begin to understand the experience better if we begin by asking what readers are escaping *from?* (1990:164). In the collection of data for the present study, it was clear that people felt, for varying reasons, they needed to be able to escape their day-to-day life experience, and the pressures of living in the twenty-first century. When prompted, the descriptions of these pressures were diverse and the intensity of the need to escape were seen to vary accordingly.

3.2.2 Relaxation

One of the most frequently cited motivations for reading revealed that interviewees saw it as providing relaxation and release from daily pressures. Most typically, it was seen as simply a way of relaxing, particularly in bed at night.

-*When I go to bed at night I read; it's my way of cutting off. [F/30/10].*
-*It helps me to unwind at night. [F/55/18].*

Similarly, respondents used this form of escape as a method of inducing relaxation into their leisure time. For example whilst on holiday,

-*I don't read very much ... but in my leisure time or if I go on holiday I read one writer only and it's a woman called Audrey Howard. She's written hundreds of books and they're not wonderful books but they've always got a history content. I love it because to me reading books in a way ... is complete relaxation. [F/55/13].*

- One of the pleasures of going on holiday is that you can read all day. It's part of the holiday experience. You come back fully charged up and raring to go! [M/30/7].

3.2.3. Opportunity to abandon the here and now

This method of cutting off or unwinding was often developed further, and it became apparent that for many people reading provides what Gerrig terms as the "opportunity to abandon the here and now"(1993:13). Nell differentiates between two types of readers, those who want to dull consciousness and readers who want to heighten it (1988:124). For those in the first category, reading becomes almost a distraction, a way of keeping busy. Within the focus group discussions, many participants described how they needed a distraction from their everyday existence and turned to reading to provide support.

Many, for varying reasons, sought distraction from their immediate surroundings. For instance,

-It takes you away from your drab environment. [M/55/27].

An example that illustrates Manguel's comment that readers can "transform a place by reading in it" (1996:152). This need to escape was most acutely expressed by a housebound participant.

- I am confined within these four walls; it takes me out of them for a while. [F/55/8]

For others, the experience was about escaping the boredom and monotony of the daily routine which governs their life.

-It's rather facile to say it passes the time, I don't mean that, but it does. [F/55/8].

-It's my escape, I can relax and take time out from washing up and housework. [M/45/13].

-It's escaping from things sometimes. Because when you sit down to read a book that's all you're doing. You're escaping from housework, from those letters you should be writing, those bills you should be paying, from everything. It gets you away from the routine of life. [F/55/12].

For another member who worked full time in an office, it was an escape from the rat-race,

-I really enjoy reading, when I have time through the day, like tea break, lunch and after work, books break up my day. [F/22/27].

O'Rourke describes this idea of removing oneself psychologically from the immediate surroundings:

> Reading is a way of being simultaneously absent and present at the same time … not only do you have something to occupy your mind and deal with boredom, but you also have a way to create inner, private space for yourself in conditions of overcrowding and constant observation. (1993:13).

In this way, reading can be seen as a form of emancipation in that "it is time stolen from the system, spent outside its grasp, outside the strategies that fence off places and set rules" (Hermes 1995:19).

Participants across most of the focus groups described how they used imaginative literature to distract them from how they were feeling and to alter their mood.

-If you've had a bad day, you get up and you think gosh, life's a bit difficult, you can pick up a book after breakfast, and I'm still in my dressing gown ... and I'm still in the same state when lunchtime comes and I've cheered up immensely. [F/55/13].

-I can reflect on things, or find a book that will lift me ... [F/65/17].

-If you're feeling absolutely fed up there's always books or poetry or whatever ... [F/30/19].

For some, it was much more significant than an escape from a mood. They referred to reading imaginative literature as a method through which they were able to find release from actual depression.

-If you read it blocks things that are depressing you out of your mind. I was living in a much more isolated place when my second child was very little and the older one was about three. I really was getting quite depressed and I used to read when they were sleeping in the afternoons and it was a real lifesaver for me. [F/30/12].

Several referred to reading as a preferred and more successful way of dealing with their depression than medication,

-It's better than anti-depressants. And you don't get hooked in the same way! [F/45/12].

-I was put on prozac once… I really didn't get on with it. I felt really out of it all the time. It made me so sleepy. Reading has really helped me. I can always pick up a book. [F/45/18].

For them the world of fiction provides a refuge in which they are distracted from their own circumstances and it provides them with release from their painful real world experience. As Catherine Morris told BBC News Online, "People are always saying that books really cheered me up." Ms. Morris was referring to a scheme in Kirklees where librarians and doctors have joined forces to prescribe a course of novels for patients suffering from a range of illnesses. As part of a pilot project being funded via the DCMS/Wolfson challenge fund Kirklees council were planning to appoint three bibliotherapists to visit local health centres and encourage patients to read. ("Novel Remedy" for Illness BBC On-line 18/7/2000)

Many respondents to the current study provided very moving accounts of how they used imaginative literature to escape from loneliness.

-I started to read from an early age because I was an only child. Books don't let you down, you know. [F/45/12].

-Since my husband died I find it difficult to sleep. So I read. It helps me get through the night. I imagine the characters being there in my room with me. [F/65/3].
-I don't get out as much as I did, so I'm on my own a lot. It really helps me. They [books] are my friends; they are like a companion really. [F/75/9].

These current findings echo McClellan's claim that people read to, "extend the range of communication beyond the circle of personal contacts" (1997:43).

3.3. Means of Escape

As the evidence demonstrates, imaginative literature not only makes life more interesting, but by allowing entrance into other worlds it makes living in the everyday one more tolerable. The data suggests that, "books are an escape, certainly; but for that reason they are also therapy for living" (Salwak1999: 9).

Having examined how the act of reading itself brings escape, it is important to consider how people use the content of the imaginative literature to secure their escape and transform their everyday life.

3.3.1.Escape into other worlds

The notion of being transported into a different world was readily discussed by respondents. For some escapism means actively being involved in another world which provides contrast from the real world.

-Very often it gives you the chance to experience something that you wouldn't normally experience in the normal every day life. Far away places, far away people, fantasy even! [F/65/25].

-I read to make me think. To take me to new places and make me think in ways I've never thought before, go places I've never been before, for revelation and enjoyment of a good story. [M/30/26].

Such ideas have already been discussed in the existing literature, such as Van Riel and Fowler (1996).

For several of the participants, escapism meant being subsumed into the action of the text. One member described how she became the heroine of 19th century novels,

-I go completely into it, and become one of the characters and I have to stop myself from talking like that character. So if its something like Jane Austen then I find myself thinking in that old English way. I have to stop myself coming out with something strange. To me I move into another world when I read fiction particularly. I just get completely absorbed and I'm there and I'm involved and I'm feeling all of the emotions and everything else. [F/30/07].

Respondents described how they saw themselves as the detective endeavouring to solve the murder. One reading group member described herself,

-I*'m the murder and mystery expert of this group. I pick up the clues as I go along. Yes I see if I can guess it. And if I can't it's fantastic. Of course it's got to be fairly done. You don't bring in a character in on the last few pages and then say that that person was the murderer. I don't like that. If it's been fairly done and you've missed it I think it is great because it gives you another angle. [F/65/25].*

Reader-response critics such as Appleyard (1990) and Gerrig (1993) regard this involvement within the text as central to the development of the reader. Respondents could recall their childhood initiation into the narrative world and recalled how often they confused it with their real world experience.

-I remember taking those Beatrix Potter books home, and I remember those little mice. I read them and somehow they got mixed up with the children I went to school with. Next to me were these two little twins and they were the little mice. They became the mice. [M/55/13].

The adult reader can still be transported into another world, but more often it is a conscious choice to be lost in the narrative world. The same respondent described how as an adult you are able to differentiate between the two worlds.

So, [reading imaginative literature] has been a door that's been opened and I've been able to trespass into, that's been very different from my ordinary life, as well as enriching my tangible life as well.

3.3.2. Escape through association.

At the other end of the spectrum, as stated by Gerrig (1993), other readers seek to escape the "here and now" and enter a world that seems closer to his or own world of origin. Some times that world of origin was an earlier period in their life, and reading provided them with the opportunity to reminisce.

-I like those books about the family, you know. It reminds me so much of when I was younger and Mam was still with us. Life's very different today. [F/55/15].

-I like Catherine Cookson, I used to go on holiday with a friend of mine up to South Shields and I know all about that area. I know exactly what she's talking about and even the families. It brings it all back to me. [F/75/8].

For others escapism is sought not through reminiscence but by comparison. This is demonstrated in Radway's study, examining why women read romance (1983). For some escapism is achieved by reading adult books dealing with adult themes, and adult problems, which allows for comparison with their own lives.

-I really enjoyed Bridget Jone's diary and the second one. When you read it, she talks about how many cigarettes she smokes, how much she weighs, how much alcohol she's drunk and she writes how she speaks. You know exactly where she's coming from. [F/22/20].

-I need to read a book that teaches me about human feelings, things that I can relate to… it helps me to laugh at myself! [F/22/26].

-I love the way that authors can describe characters and situations so that you can really identify with them; you can feel a real empathy for the character. [F/30/7].

3.3.3.Escape through aesthetic pleasure

Often as stated by Bennett (1995), critics have condemned fiction as trivial and trashy and consequently, the aesthetic escape provided through fiction has been overlooked. However, in recent years it has become accepted that the literary style of fiction can bring an aesthetic escape similar to any other form of art. When discussing the uses of mass media, McQuail (1983) includes aesthetic pleasure within the broader category of entertainment. Taylor (1999) argues that the whole reading experience can have an effect on the individual that is removed from the message and meaning, in that, the effect can be drawn purely from the text itself (1999:45). Although this form of escape was not alluded to in all of the focus groups, it was mentioned in 20 per cent of them.

-I would say that there is an element of escape … I enjoy reading, I suppose. I write as well and I write poetry and things like that, as I just enjoy the way words work and I enjoy reading … I think it's the use of language I love and you just don't get that in a Science or a History book. You don't get this sort of concentration on the words and the way it's written and you don't get that in most daily life. Those sort of computer manuals or day-to-day conversation don't have that craftedness of word and that's what I enjoy … the art of it. [M/30/07].

-I asked my mate what he thought made the best read. And he said that there were two things: if the words on the page inspired him to go and write something … or else he'd just be amazed by the talent of the writer…and the way he held a story together. [M/22/26].

-I remember I got hold of a copy of a book called "A Man Called Peter"… I remember being stimulated by it, it was certainly very uplifting. And I think to a certain extent, it was a marvellous piece of writing literary wise. [M/55/13].

-For me, literature has given me enormous pleasure from the beautiful prose and poetry. I can get a great deal of satisfaction, something that will stay with me, a sort

of trail of glory behind me, if I've read something very beautiful: Walter Raleigh, Donne whoever. It's sheer beauty. [F/45/12].

-Terry Waite, he was in solitary confinement and he asked for a Bible and he got one in the end. He was very disappointed because it wasn't the King James Version, it was a modern one. The beauty of the language just wasn't there. [M/55/12].

Irrespective of how they use imaginative literature to aid their escape the crucial point is, as stated by Taylor, "by involving themselves in the fiction that a reader reads and escaping the world they are in, when they return that experience may never have fully left them"(1999:53). Thus, whether the experience is fleeting or whether it is long lasting, the reader's real life is transformed.

3.4.Reading for instruction

After, or often during, recalling their accounts of the benefits of reading as escapism, nearly every reader reflected on how imaginative literature contributed to their learning and practical knowledge. The following responses reflect this,

-I think books are informative because it doesn't matter what you read you can learn something from them. [F/55/18].

-I always say that I learn one thing from each book I read and usually I learn many things. There's always one fact, and I say "I didn't know that". [F/55/19].

-Fiction does broaden the mind doesn't it, as you can have that incidental learning going on as well as empathising or being critical of the characters. [F/55/24].

Radway terms this "reading for instruction"(1984:107). However, as the following comments reveal this explanation was most often seen as a secondary function of reading imaginative literature.

-I don't do it for the education. I do it for the sheer escapism and the pleasure I get out of it. [F/65/22].

Indeed for some "instruction" sometimes got in the way of the enjoyment.

-That's what really annoys me … if I have to refer to a dictionary every paragraph then that's stopping the flow of the book. Poetry that's the world's worst, every second line you have to look up in a dictionary to understand a word. I just don't see how you can enjoy it because you're not reading it. You're treating it like an exercise. [M/22/26].

As the group discussions progressed, the reading of imaginative literature was shown to be instrumental in bringing instruction in two ways. The first was in relation to development of practical knowledge; and second was in relation to self-development and personal identity.

3.4.1Practical Knowledge

During the interviews, participants frequently spoke of the practical skills that they attributed to their reading of imaginative literature.

3.4.2 Literary Skills

Previous research, most notably that performed by Krashen (1993) has shown that by reading children acquire involuntarily and without conscious effort language skills. They develop a large vocabulary, an understanding of the use of grammatical constructions, develop good writing style and become good spellers. Less research has been carried out in this area with adults, but in the present study many adults claimed that reading imaginative literature had improved their literacy skills.

Respondents stressed that the importance of this was that it assisted them on a day-to-day communicative level,

-It teaches me things … it helps with my writing, it gives me ideas and shows how things can be worded … [F/30/4].

-It helps me with my letters and things… you know if you want to write to say the council they need to sound as they should otherwise you get ignored. [F/55/24].

For some, reading imaginative literature contributes to their creative writing. For example, one member of a writer's circle stated,

-I'm not a strong or developed reader; I came to literature late on in life. But I feel it contributes to me, without it I wouldn't be able to write. I look at what great books are out there and then adopt their grammar and words. [M/30/15].

Also, the development of literacy skills was seen to extend beyond improvements in first language skills. Evidence from other studies, such as Willig (1985), Krashen (1993), demonstrate that reading in the first language is helpful to second language acquisition. Several of our respondent's used imaginative literature in this way.

-My husband and I are Polish. We have read to our children from a very early age. We believe it educated them and helped them with the English language. [F/65/24].

- I am from Italy and I joined the reading group to help me with my English. I try to read the novels so that I improve my spoken English and also I learn about the English way of life. [F/45/27].

Similar findings were reported in Sheffield University's Social Audit of Public Libraries (Linley & Usherwood: 1998).

3.4.3 Lessons about the world

In addition to literacy skills, many participants described how they had accumulated other knowledge through reading imaginative literature. This other knowledge varied immensely by subject and content, and has been aptly summed up by Taylor as "lessons about the world"(1999:69).

For some these were political,

-I'm reading a Frederick Forsyth novel at the minute. It's about America and Russia and it's set in the Gorbechov era. [M/65/21].

Some listeners to the *Today* programme may question just how accurate a political lesson Mr. Forsyth provides. At a somewhat different level:

-Orwell wrote all about politics. I understand him more than reading newspapers. [M/65/25].

The most frequently cited example of learning was in relation to social history, and in particular the understanding gained by reading works by the author Charles Dickens.

- I like Dickens; I think he really gives you a great understanding of what it was like to live in those times… you know social history. [F/65/16].

-David Copperfield is the best history lesson I've ever had! [F/55/17].

- I think you learn a lot of history. I've learnt a lot of history through reading. I've learnt more history since I've left school through reading than I ever learnt at school. [F/55/6].

For others, reading imaginative literature taught them about other cultures and customs,

-Have you read "Memoirs of a Geisha"? I didn't have a clue what a Geisha was before I read that. [F/22/20].

Similarly, imaginative literature was seen to trigger off an interest, which meant that readers were forced to look elsewhere to verify, or further the information that they had read in a novel.

-I like this book because it's like a lot of books that I've read in that they're almost like travel books in a way because you learn something about the country. The weather and the snow and everything else that you didn't know about, and it urges you to go to the atlas and have a look and to the encyclopaedia to find out a little bit of the history. So it's a good book in that it spurs you on to learn something else as well as being a good story. [F/45/5].

Several of the participants felt that learning from imaginative literature had such a great impact that they could actually claim a particular title as providing inspiration which had led to subsequent choices in life,

-I remember going back again and again to Jane Eyre. She was for me a new woman and showed me that women could be something. It deeply affected me, it triggered off an interest and later on I studied feminism at college. [F/45/15].

3.4.4 Reliability of instruction

The evidence demonstrated that although some respondents could pinpoint certain titles or authors as being instrumental to their learning, the more usual response was that they had learnt it or acquired it "somewhere" within their reading. As Goff points out, typically it may not be the conscious or deliberate aim of readers of fiction to acquire this knowledge, and much of it is gained by "serendipity"(1985).

Across the groups there was a general assumption that they could trust the information and facts that they read in novels. There was general agreement that most authors engaged in a great deal of research before writing their novels.
One participant stated,

-They do an awful lot of research, don't they? Because they get everything really spot on. [F/65/21].

A couple of the participants reinforced this by drawing on their own experiences in which they took information acquired in fiction and tested it out in real life situations. The first one described how he repaired his central heating system,

-I mean, I learnt as daft as it seems how to join metals and make them sturdy from that ... I mean it just came out of a passage of a book. [M/65/25].

The other member of the same group was forced to try out what he had read, when his car broke down. He stated,

-It broke down and they had to do some emergency repairs, you know, well there were that much detail, that when my car stopped on the way home from work, it just came to the fore front of my mind, you know you surprise yourself, and it worked, it really worked! *[M/65/25]*.

In both of these instances, the information provided seemed to be accurate in that it translated successfully to their situations.

However, in spite of their general assumption regarding the accuracy of the research undertaken by the author, all of the focus groups agreed that imaginative literature was not the first medium to which they would turn in order to acquire factual information. Nevertheless having said that, it is apparent that fictional works do contribute to the learning process and can provide us with a greater understanding of situations, events, or emotions than can be understood by facts alone. Rosenblatt illustrates this, when she asks, "Will the history of depression impress [the student] as much as will Steinbeck's 'The Grapes of Wrath'. [3]

3.5. Self development

The second way in which people felt that reading instructed them was in relation to their own personal development. Ian Hislop has described reading as "the best research for life".[4] In saying this, he is acknowledging the distinct way in which reading enables people greater understanding of their own lives and those of others. Reading is recognised as playing a distinctive role in personal development, that is

> "…One's identity, the distinctive way an individual perceives the self and the world, is reorganized as one confronts and weathers the critical issues proper to each stage of growth and learns through social interaction the distinctive roles that the culture makes available to the developing individual" (Appleyard 1990:10)

One of the respondents described this function in relation to her experience,

[3] Quoted by Taylor (1999:8)
[4] Quoted by Rommi Smith "Off the Shelf festival" October 1999.

-Through reading and poetry ... I make sense of my inner world. Actually reading helps me make sense of things. Often a book fits into an emotional development that's happening… So it means a growth, things in the arts and creative field are a matter of personal growth. [F/30/7].

Respondents also indicated that reading tastes change.

-I used to read romance and light fiction. But I don't anymore. I like more of a challenge, something to make sure my mind is still ticking over, you know. [F/45/17].

-It depends where I'm at in my life. Reading has meant many different things to me depending on what's happening, not necessarily in the subject matter of the literature, the type of play or type of book that I would choose. But more in how and when I read that and the reason why I read it. Sometimes I would read to stimulate me and keep me interested because it's going to be an active thing. Other times it's been a soothing relaxing thing. And that pattern has changed throughout my life. So really, I can give you a thirty-two year answer to that. [F/30/10].

These comments support the findings of *Reading the Situation* which argued that reading is not fixed, but in fact "reading habits change over time, depending on personal circumstances and tastes" (2000:151).

3.5.1.Personal Insight

On one level, personal development comes from the way in which individuals perceive themselves. Many writers, including Hatt (1976) and Appleyard (1990), suggest that a common motive of all readers is to read about other people's experiences that relate to them in some way, and through this have their own attitudes and beliefs affirmed. Similarly, McQuail (1983) includes this function as one of the main 'uses and gratifications' of the mass media. Many of the respondents recalled how they gained insight and reassurance by finding confirmation of their values within the narrative world.

-I love the way that authors can describe characters and situations so that you can really identify them. You can feel a real empathy for the character…[M/22/26].

Developing on from this, several respondents recognised that in certain instances the words on a page brought further insight by describing what they themselves had been struggling to articulate.

-Different books explained what I've never been able to put into words about how I feel about things sometimes. You think, ah! That's what it is! [F/30/7].

This comment aptly explains Alan Bennett's reflection that, "something in the book speaks to part of you that is just waiting to be spoken to." (in *Opening the Book* 1996:5).

A couple of respondents developed this further. They described how a particular book or author was able to provide critical support in a way in which friends and partners were unable to. An Arts and Cultural worker shared his own experience:

-An extreme example is Samuel Beckett, which stands out in my mind. I read it at quite a bad time when my father was dying and it really helped me deal with it, it was really supportive. It made me re-examine various thoughts that I had about life and really helped me deal with such a horrible thing as someone dying of cancer.

For these groups of readers, reading about other people's experiences was seen to ratify their own. Often, the readers gained confidence as they realised that they were not alone in their experience and that, in a sense, imaginative literature could instil a sense of belonging, wherein the reader was brought back into connection with others.

Similarly, relating to the characters within a text can bring personal insight with which the reader may not feel entirely comfortable. In this instance, the respondents felt that they benefited by gaining a new perspective of their situation.

*-I think you're sometimes looking for a part of you that you can relate to … something like "About a Boy", you read it and you think, **** that's me! He was pathetic; I didn't like him at all…[M/30/26].*

However, it was clear that the respondents felt that it is not always necessary for the reader to relate to the experience the character is going through in order to learn about his or her own situation. Some respondents felt that they learnt by reading about experiences which were not necessarily their own. Such experiences or emotions that they share with the narrative world, maybe relived in reality at a later date, but equally they may never be part of their real life experience.

-I don't think it's where the characters are, whether they're in a hotel or whatever, I think it's just basic human character. If you can identify with that character and it could be a middle-aged woman if it's written well. You could still understand how she's feeling, it's not necessarily the situation that you have to identify with, it is the actual personality and how they cope with the situation. [M/30/26].

3.5.2. Insight into the "other"

The second level that personal identity is determined is by the way in which individuals perceive the world. Many of the respondents described instances of how reading informed their understanding and appreciation of their local community and indeed, the world. The following excerpt is typical of many group discussions,

"Reading changes your mind about things, which is good".
"I think as well it makes you more tolerant about others…"
"You're more tolerant because you're more understanding".
"I think it makes you a better person. You can see things from more points of view". [10].

Most notably, the participants felt that reading improved their ability to relate to other people. This could be relating to those of the opposite gender. For instance, one male participant felt that reading women's literature enabled him to learn about women more fully,

-Reading women's authors has made a difference. You learn so much about life from a woman's point of view. It's amazing how just looking at life from a feminine point of view, under the skin; I find it very useful and informative in lots of areas. You realise, for instance, the area of how sex is portrayed in a book. In a male book you'll often find, still the very classic thing- a sexual scene will be portrayed and it will sort of be from the outside, but a very physical thing. And yet from a woman's point of view it's often coming from the inside and the person and the experience is not titillating in the way of a male … it's interesting that there's a very real difference in the way it's portrayed by male authors. [M/30/7].

Many participants believed that reading increased their understanding of people from other backgrounds and cultures.

-Like the Black American culture and someone like Maya Angelou and the experiences she relates to. People being in the gutter period of their life and how they moved on from there. [F/30/4].

Similarly reading about other cultures often gave readers an introduction to other belief systems and other people's spirituality. Repeatedly work by Toni Morrison was quoted to illustrate this point,

-Having read "Beloved", I saw things very differently. I think it opened my eyes to just how different our belief systems are. I was moved very moved, even blown away. It was fantastic. [F/22/26].

-Toni Morrison has taught me a lot. I've read all of her books. Not only does she portray fascinating stories which grab you, but I'm convinced that she tells the tale of the black struggle. Sometimes it makes me want to wince. You feel sort of ashamed. [F/45/10].

Not only does reading inform an individual's own personal development, it also influences their behaviour within the world in which they live. Ultimately, as recognised by Rosenblatt (1991) the understanding that reading provides permits the

person to see into areas of society which otherwise would be denied to them and subsequently they are more able to participate fully in a democratic society.

3.6 Location of reading in people's lives

As part of the research process, an examination was made of how crucial an activity reading imaginative literature was in people's lives and where the participants located reading within their own life experience.

3.6.1.Reading as bodily function

In describing the centrality of the reading experience to the reader, Alberto Manguel claims that reading is "associated with our other essential bodily functions" (1996:170). Many of the respondents reflected on reading in this way and used eating or food metaphors to aid them in their descriptions. For example, they were "*hungry for the latest book by …*", had a "*voracious appetite for reading.*" An arts and cultural worker used the following analogy to describe her own reading habit,

-Sometimes you're quite happy with a McDonald's and other times you want a three-course meal.

3.6.2. Exercise the imagination

According to the report, *Reading the Situation* 24% of adults read "as a chance to use the imagination" (2000:15). When talking about the nourishment on offer through imaginative literature, several participants developed the eating metaphor and it became food for thought or more precisely food for the imagination. Many of the respondents regarded the imagination as a life form which needed nourishment.

One participant of a reading group stated,

-I need fiction to feed my imagination. I love it when it triggers off entire new thought processes… [F/30/1].

Others felt that the imagination needed not only feeding but also exercising:

- The imagination needs to be exercised. [F/55/18].

And one respondent, a member of a writer's circle stated,

-I think the brain needs to breathe and one way it does this is through fiction and reading imaginative things. Why did the imagination come to design things? Why do we put spaceships on the moon? Because someone has written about things that are up there. Things that capture people's imagination. If we were just stuck with facts and figures then nobody would sit down and create. Unless we keep the imagination alive then nobody will create anything. [F/55/13].

According to all of these participants, reading imaginative literature is vital for keeping their own imagination alive, but also it contributes to creative output and problem solving within their real life experience.

3.6.3 Reading as identity

It was apparent that many respondents struggled in trying to separate their reading experience from who they were.

-I wouldn't be me if I didn't read! It's hard to think of yourself in that way. I've read all my life, I can't remember when I learnt, it's something I've always done. [F/45/18].

-I find if I can't read, if I'm away staying with people or if I've got guests staying with me, I start getting very short tempered and I start feeling quite uncomfortable and nasty. I have to read. [F/45/10].

-It's been the centre of my life all my life. I learnt to read at three and I lived in a remote part of the country and as an only child it was my companion and I've learnt so much. All my life I think I've learnt more from reading than I did from my formal education and still do. It governs who I am and what I am. [F/45/12].

In order to develop upon this, the interviews included a prompt adopted from Catherine Ross's research, "What would it be like if for one reason or another you were unable to read?" (1999:13). Most often, respondents began by relating this

question to visual impairment. Some members of the groups actually experienced visual impairment or had done at some point in their lives. They described using other formats, such as spoken word cassettes as a substitute for the book itself. Several felt this was a great alternative and were contented to use them. But others felt that it was not the same experience as being physically able to read.

-"It's not the same"
-"I know, if you get the wrong person reading you just want to switch off"
- A lady that I supply talking books to, said that it meant there were three people in the dialogue. Whereas normally there are only two: you and the author. Now all of a sudden you've got the speaker. She said for her it's a totally different experience and she would prefer to have that intimate dialogue. She took a long time to get used to the presence of the third person. [13].

For those who were answering hypothetically, they began to devise what they regarded as methods of coping if faced with the situation of not being able to read. One particular group described how they would resort to recreating their own reading experience.

"I can think possibly that I would construct my own fiction in my head"
"I was thinking that. In fact you would be driven to writing, I certainly would. If I couldn't read, I would write"
"I'm sorry that I haven't got a bigger internal anthology. My first wife had an enormous one, so it would be marvellous to draw on that. What I would do is try to recall books and stories…" [12].

Typically after trying to describe methods of filling the role of reading through other means, all the conversations turned to the description of loss. For instance, *"it would leave a huge gap in my life",* another member of the same group continued *"I'd imagine that I'd feel empty really".* Usually, this was followed by *"I can't imagine it",* or *"it'd be devastating".*

The extent of the loss was expressed very acutely, and was seen to relate to a loss of self or identity and very typically metaphors of death were used.

-Books have been central to my life ... if I was unable to read, it would be like dementia, I would be dying. [F/55/18].

- I can't imagine. I would feel like a very important part of me was dying. It's a frightening thought. [F/45/12].

The following statement was repeated several times within the various groups,

-Life wouldn't be worth living to be honest. [F/55/12].

One participant described it as being not only death, but also one of the cruellest deaths that she could imagine,

-It would be suicide, it would be like murder. [F/45/12].

The strength of feeling expressed by many of the respondents demonstrates how the reading of imaginative literature is regarded as being inextricably linked to their identity. Remove this activity from their lives and they are not only lost, but indeed they have to some extent died. As Ross states, "reading is interwoven into the texture of their lives, not separate from it"(1999:11).

In order to further illustrate this, an Arts and Cultural worker interviewed as part of this study recounted a conversation with a gentlemen in which he described how by adopting his late wife's reading habits, he was able to recreate her image in his mind. She stated,

-I will tell you about this elderly gentleman I met in ... Library last year. He was eighty-six years of age. He was a functioning, creative person. His wife had died a couple of years ago and he was alone and in a sense in a vacuum. He told me that he had two pleasures in life, reading and listening to cricket on the radio. Since his wife had died, he had adopted her reading habits and her literature. He said it helped bring her to life and kept her image alive to him…[5].

3.7 Reading is of no significance

As stated in the opening of this chapter, not all of the focus group participants were readers and for them reading of imaginative literature was not a significant part of their lifestyle. Notably, there were three groups of non-readers. Two comprised of members who chose not to read, and the third group comprised of adults who experienced difficulty in reading. Also, several of the other groups contained members who admitted to being non- readers.

Questioning non-readers within this area is complex and needs to be handled sensitively as it broadens into the debate of literacy in general. There has been much recent work carried out in this area, including Barton and Hamilton (1998), Hermes (1995), and Horsman (1990). It must be remembered that "literacy presents threat and desire in people's lives" (Barton & Hamilton 1998:18). The aim of the present research was not to provide a close examination of non-readers and therefore dwelling on this area within the focus group interview could have made people feel uncomfortable and could have risked alienating group members. Therefore, the following comments are taken from those who readily disclosed their reasons for not reading.

- ***Choose not to read.***

From those who choose not to read, three main reasons were given.

i. Reading had never been encouraged

The first came from the focus group which comprised the youngest members of the research sample. For them, reading had never been part of their lifestyles. During the course of the interview, it was clear that the reading habit had never been actively encouraged in the home or at school.

-I can't remember being read to when I was little. There was a library at school and we could go in it if we wanted, but we didn't. I just haven't got the concentration to sit there open a book and read it. I just haven't got it. [F/18/14].

When asked how they would relax, their response was unanimous,

-*Watch television*

One of the group members admitted that he had read "The Exorcist"
-I read it 'cos we just had the book at home. [M/18/14].

He saw the film afterwards, and asked which he preferred,
-The book actually. I thought it was quite good.

But asked whether this had sparked off an interest to read further,
-No, I've not read since then.

ii. Lost the habit

This differed from the other group who described themselves as choosing not to read. For them, the reading habit had been encouraged by adults within the family, but had dwindled in the teenage years due to examination pressures and had not yet been re-established. Also, the prescribed reading within the formal education system at GCSE level had been a bad experience which had contributed to their being put off reading.

-I used to have nightmares from books. We had to read one at school for GCSE about a nuclear fallout and that has traumatised me for years. It was awful … [F/22/20].

iii. Other interests

Non-readers included in the other focus groups tended to cite other interests which they felt provided the same sort of benefits they perceived reading gives to readers.

-I like to do cross stitch. I normally begin after I've washed up in an evening. I really enjoy it. [F/55/16].
-I enjoy getting out in the garden, and relaxing. [F/55/18].
-I watch television or occasionally I go to the cinema. [F/45/18].

Several read magazines in preference to reading a novel and often the "put downable" aspect of a magazine was felt to be preferable to a novel.

-I admit I don't read books. I read the newspaper, I'm interested in gardening and sort of answering quizzes and questions. I get a National Trust magazine and Saga magazine and they have some good articles in them. [F/45/18].

-I like word searches and quizzes and other women's magazines. They have some lovely short stories in them. Also they can be very factual, like Reader's Digest. [F/45/22].

❖ ***Experienced difficulties with reading***

The third group who were non-readers admitted that they experienced difficulties with reading. Although they were retired most of them were attending adult literacy classes to help with their reading and writing. This group differed from the other groups of non-readers in that they felt that they were missing out and as described by Horsman (1990), they felt that by acquiring literacy skills their lives would be altered. They perceived that the ability to read would give them a greater level of independence.

-I'm still not sure exactly how much my pension is, or how much my rent is. I have a friend read it to me, but I have to trust that he is telling me the truth. I only let a couple of people in to help me. You need to know them. [M/75/29].

-I rely on my family to help me in all of my letters and everything. My daughter is very good and she's always helped me since she was young. [F/65/29].

3.7. Summary

This chapter has provided a framework for addressing O'Rourke's statement, *"how little we know about the nature and significance of anybody's reading anything" (1993:3).* It has shown that reading imaginative literature is regarded as a special activity which serves to satisfy a wide variety of needs. The findings help to dispel the myth surrounding the stereotypical image of a reader as someone who is introverted and reluctant or unable to participate fully in society. There is overwhelming evidence that whether fleeting or long-lasting, through reading the reader's life is transformed for the better. Also, for those who regard themselves as readers, reading is not only deemed a special activity but a crucial one. Their

accounts reveal that the reading identity is not fixed but changes according to time and personal development. Indeed, reading forms and informs the developing self.

Although the majority of the respondents were readers, this chapter also includes contrasting accounts gathered during the research process from those who classed themselves as non-readers. Their responses reveal that reading is not, for varying reasons, significant in everybody's lifestyles. However, implicit within their responses is the acknowledgment that for those who choose to spend their time reading there are potential benefits.

Finally, this chapter has set the stage for the subsequent chapters. It is believed, that through gaining an understanding of the benefits imaginative literature offers the reader and indeed the non-reader, and also by having an awareness of the developmental nature of the reading experience, the issues raised during the course of this study concerning the value and impact of public library book reading can be understood and addressed.

Chapter four: The Role of the Public Library in the Reading Experience

4.1 Introduction

Having examined the significance of the reading experience, the focus moved to determine the role the public library plays within it. The focus groups were asked, "How, if at all, has using the public library influenced your reading experience?" The aim was to raise discussion to include both the positive and negative influences. Following on from that, the participants were asked, "How might libraries encourage reading amongst people who do not read at the moment?" Again, it was anticipated that this would provide useful data to elaborate on the borrower or potential borrower's expectations of the library service.

A number of themes emerged from the group discussions and these are considered under the following headings:

- Access
- The borrowing experience
- Range of stock
- Libraries as a place

4.2. Free Access

Typically the first remark in each group made reference to the public library's principle of equity of access. In their responses, the participants were viewing equity in its broader definition in terms of "neutrality and fairness between groups"(Carter et al, 1992:42). This was recognised as being critical in presenting everybody with an opportunity to participate in the reading experience.

-What I like is that it doesn't matter who you are, or what your background is, you are able to enjoy what the library has to offer. Everyone is treated the same. Everyone is given a chance. [M/55/13].

-I believe that the library offers choice and opportunity to those who would not otherwise get the opportunity (Arts and Cultural worker[5])

Such an opportunity was regarded as vital in the formation of the reader and in establishing the reading habit from a very early age.

-My mum used it as a free childminding facility and dumped us at the library at regular intervals. I read systematically from A-Z, I spent ages on Enid Blyton, and ended up at Noel Streatfield. Now I'm more particular and use book reviews. But my eyes still light up at the thought of getting my hands on all those books free. Who wouldn't like it? [F/45/12].

-I joined the library when I was eight years old. I used to spend all of Saturday mornings there choosing my three books. I loved it. It's a habit that has stayed with me. [F/55/6].

- I can't remember when I joined the library. My mum was keen for us to read and she used to tell us stories. It's always been part of my routine. [F/45/15].

-When I have the school groups in and do introductory tours the kids' faces seem to light up as soon as you say the words, "It's free!" (Library manager [11]).

Free access was seen as crucial in maintaining the reading habit. If they were forced to buy their books, many respondents felt that their reading would be limited. For some, borrowing books was the only way in which they could feed their habit as buying books was beyond their budget.

-It's too expensive to buy books; I can't afford to buy them. [F/65/23].

-I can't afford them; it's as simple as that. [F/55/17].

Others could not afford to buy at the rate at which they read, and consequently their reading experience would be greatly restricted.

-From a merely financial point of view, I couldn't possibly afford to buy all the books I want to read. [M/45/13].

-I like the fact that I can get a large number of books out in any one visit. I always take the maximum number. [F/55/27].

A stock manager added,

-It's the fact that it's free. If you just stood in the library and saw how many people came in, it was like panic buying before Christmas. People come in and they say that they want a good supply of books to tide them over the holiday. People really feel that they need something to read. [5].

However, within the discussions there were a number of constraints on effective access which were seen to impact on the reading experience. These include economic, physical, and location barriers.

- ***Economic Barrier***

Although, all of the groups without exception commented on the value of the free service, many also felt that the introduction of charges into any area of the service was a prohibitive factor. For instance, there was widespread agreement that fines imposed on books returned late was seen as having a negative impact. Some felt that this restricted their reading experience as the fear of returning books late and being charged meant that they felt reluctant to borrow.

-*Sometimes the fines nearly cost as much as the book.* [F/30/2].

-It's the cost when you're late, it really put me off. [M/30/07].

But for others, the cost of the fine was psychological rather than economic. Respondents felt that the introduction of fines meant that they were being punished by the service. Such a notion was viewed very negatively.

-I was always paying fines, and being told off. [F/45/7].

- I was always in trouble for being late. I was made to feel guilty. [F/30/10].

The attitude towards reservation charges varied. According to Evans (1999), users are reluctant to pay reservation charges for fiction titles whereas on the whole they are willing to pay to reserve non-fiction titles. For some of the respondents this reluctance was apparent.

-I begrudge the money reserving novels. I just choose from what's on the shelf on the day I go to the library. [F/45/24].

-I couldn't believe it, I wasn't asking for anything out of the ordinary. I thought it would be on the shelf. Why should I have to pay?[F/55/24].

However, others felt that reservation fees were worth paying if it secured them the particular title they were looking for, or ensured they received a new title earlier than they otherwise would do.

-I remember I paid 50p, and I was trying to find a book about a woman who used to sing on the docks in South Africa when the boats were coming in and going out. That's all I knew, but by golly they got it for me. [F/75/11].

-I usually pay to reserve new books by my favourite authors. I enjoy the expectation of knowing that I'll get my hands on it fairly quickly. I look forward to hearing from the library, to hear that it is now my turn. I don't mind paying at all. [F/45/18].

There were a few comments of criticism, made by a couple of participants who had either considered making a reservation or had in deed done so.

-I was told to reserve it, but I would be 35th in line. That's ridiculous. [F/55/24].

-It took four months for me to get it; I thought they'd forgotten me. [F/65/21].

Several of the library authorities included in the study offered concessionary rates in terms of reduced fines and reservation fees. Several group members, particularly those who were retired, were concerned that they were not being applied fairly and often they felt there was some confusion in their application.

-When I went in it was someone else and she said, " That will be a pound". I said, "No you don't charge me because of my age". And she said, "Yes we do, age has nothing to do with it." I've never had to pay before. [F/75/11].

- ***Physical Barrier***

Numerous commentators, including Linley and Usherwood (1998), have demonstrated that physical access is a crucial determining factor in the usage of the library. Within this study, it was shown to be of considerable significance in the reading experience.

Many of the participants in this research, repeatedly stressed inaccessibility as a factor which prevented them and others from using the library to develop their reading. Often, it was discussed in relation to physical access into the building. A couple of health professionals in one of the focus groups relayed the experiences of their clients in relation to local libraries.

-One lady on my caseload has four kids and two are in a double buggy. She finds it a real struggle to get up the ramp and through the library doors. She described it as an obstacle course. I keep on encouraging her, but sometimes just the thought of it is enough to put her off. [F/30/7].

The problem was seen to be most acute for those who experienced a physical disability. One respondent had recently undertaken a taster course in the enjoyment of literature. The course was designed for people with disabilities. She reflected on how they had enjoyed the course and it had re- awakened the love of literature that had lapsed because they were unable to access books. Of the eleven people on the course seven had experienced difficulties getting into libraries.

-So there's a huge potential for people for disabled people to get into libraries if they are accessible and that's one of the things I think if you are looking at libraries, is it wheelchair friendly and accessible? They can't see, they'd probably find it hard to hold books. [F/45/7].

As this comment reveals, as well as exploring issues concerning physical access, the availability of further support needs to be recognised.

In addition, respondents felt that reduced opening hours restricted their potential use of the library for their reading material. In line with the evidence gathered by Proctor, Lee and Reilly (1998), this was seen as a particular problem by those in full time work.

-I'm really not sure when it's open, but I think it is mainly when I'm working. [F/45/2].

-They've really reduced the hours. It's no good for me. [M/45/1].

-It seems to only open in the day, which is no good to me. I think it closes at three o'clock or something. [F/30/19].

Reduced opening hours was recognised as a problem across all the interview groups. However, increasing the opening hours was not always seen as the answer. For example, a library chair of committee felt that this was only part of the issue,

-In a way I think I could satisfy more people by opening the library longer. But would people use it. It's located in a park, in a very run-down area. To be honest it's not safe; it's very dark. People don't live in that area now, the community has moved. I don't think people would feel happy about walking there at night. Other issues would need addressing first. [5].

Some recent initiatives to extend the library beyond its four walls were regarded very positively, and to some extent were seen to reduce the impact of reduced opening hours. Also, they were seen as a valuable approach to attract a greater number of people to reading. An arts worker described her recent experience,

-I've taken books into factories and offices. Members of staff are able to choose in their lunch hour. For some, this service is in addition to them visiting their local library. For others, it has established them as library users. They are reading more than they otherwise would do. I've had really positive feedback. [3].

Similarly, focus group members welcomed this extension of the library service beyond the library building and they felt that it was something that the library should look to extend.

-I found out that I could get books at the health centre. That's great 'cos it's open five days a week from early morning 'til about six. I even joined the library there. The kids love it and also it helps when they go for health check-ups and injections. The health centre is more of a fun place for them now. [F/30/19].

Likewise, the housebound service was regarded as playing an invaluable role for those who were no longer physically able to visit the library.

-We're really lucky, we get our books changed regularly. They ask us if there is anything particular we want them to bring next time and they bring it. We have a brilliant service. [F/45/8].

-I wouldn't read very much if the library didn't bring the books to my home. I'd just sit here twiddling my thumbs all day. [F/75/8].

-I can't imagine what I'd do if the library didn't deliver my books. I probably wouldn't get the chance to read. [F/75/8].

A couple of the participants had only started using the library service as housebound users. They had seen the library delivering books to neighbours and had been introduced to the service that way. This had caused them to develop the reading habit in the latter stages of their life.

-We get them every couple of weeks. I didn't read much and then when my husband died, I was quite depressed. I'd never been in a library but Grace said why don't you read so and so. I'm not a great reader but I enjoy a novel once a fortnight, and I just like knowing that there's a new book there if I want it. They come every couple of weeks and it's a good service. [F/65/8].

However, although the housebound service was generally held in high esteem, there was some criticism levelled at the provision of this service. In particular it was felt that not enough was done to maintain contact with regular readers who stopped using the service. Once people are no longer physically able to access the service, there was a danger that their reading habit was jeopardised. Several respondents described how they had experienced a break in using the service.

-I didn't use it for a while. My neighbour told me she knew someone who had her books delivered by the library. She sorted it all out for me. [F/65/8].

-I probably didn't get books for a good year or so. Every so often my friend across the way used to pick me some up. But they are very heavy and she's not a reader herself. In the end the girl at the library asked her if she enjoyed them and she explained that they were for me. And that's how we then got it all arranged. [F/75/8].

People who regarded themselves as being previously regular users of the service made such comments. They felt that the housebound service is not sufficiently promoted, and often these respondents described how they became aware of its existence through other social service departments. It was apparent that the success or failure of keeping contact with such users often depended on the initiative of the library staff. In one of the authorities taking part in the present study, a member of staff's efforts to prevent people being neglected in this way was repeatedly acknowledged.

-Our local users get a really good service. If ... doesn't see someone in the library, she'll ring them and ask them how they are doing. If they are physically unable to

get in then she arranges for them to have an assessment and their books are delivered. (Library manager [9]).

However, one manager did admit that often the housebound service is not promoted for fear of creating a demand that the service cannot meet.

-It sounds bizarre, but if we push it we'd be stretched too far. I'm confident that we could double the number on our rounds easily. But it's the staffing and financial resources that stop us doing it. [11].

- ***Location***

Many of the respondents described how not only the free service had contributed to establishing the reading habit, but also the fact that the library was nearby.

- I joined the library when I was quite young. I used it an awful lot, most Saturdays, because it was only five minutes away. It was handy. [F/55/6].

-Well, I think with it being near, it's there for us and if it wasn't here you probably wouldn't read as much. [M/45/13].

Again, the location of the library meant that it was convenient and consequently enabled people to maintain their reading habit. The elderly members of the focus groups expressed this aspect most keenly.

-For many of us, we need our local libraries for physical reasons. As we've got older we're losing so much of the things that matter in life… we need the local ones. [F/55/23].

-It's difficult to catch a bus into town. The books are so heavy I can only manage two at a time. I come here about three times a week. If I had to do a trip into town I'd only get two books a week. [F/65/25].

Three of the authorities included in the research served large rural populations. Consequently, the importance of the provision of the mobile library service was

stressed repeatedly by focus groups in those areas. In addition, several groups from other authorities described it as a vital aspect of the service.

-The mobile van comes every three weeks; I don't know what we'd do otherwise. We can't get to the library. The books are too heavy to carry. [F/45/18].

-We're fairly isolated here. If I wanted to get myself and the kids to the library to be honest it would be a day out, what with the buses and what have you. By having our mobile library it means that we can just nip out and it takes just half an hour. [F/55/16].

*-When I lived in **** I relied on the mobile library. I didn't get in a library other than that for about three years. [F/45/12].*

Similarly all of the local politicians were in agreement that the mobile library service was a crucial aspect of the service and it helped to reduce difficulties relating to geographical access.

- We have a large number of static sites, but we also have thirteen mobile libraries which we need due to the rural population we are serving here. [2].

Generally, the data from the present study supports the findings of numerous commentators, including Linley and Ward (1977), Lord, P (1981), Proctor, Lee and Reilly (1998), who have examined the importance of library location in relation to library usage. Indeed, DCMS have included it in the Consultation Paper for Library Standards (2000).

4.3 The Borrowing Experience

When talking about the act of choosing a book, the respondents usually began by comparing the buying and borrowing experience. Many recent commentators have examined the relationship between the two experiences, and explored the situations in which people would choose one as opposed to the other (Sumsion 1992; England 1992; Book Marketing/Reading Partnership 2000; Bolam 2000; Mann 1971). The fact that material is freely available clearly influences the borrowing experience.

Reading the Situation, identified two of the most commonly given reasons for borrowing as opposed to buying books were that readers "can't afford to buy all the books [they] want to read" and also, they "don't have space for all books [they] want to read". (2000:119). The respondents included in the present research confirmed this finding. Typically, one stated:

-Quite simple, I can't afford all the books that I read. [F/65/25].

Others remarked:

-My house is full, the shelves are packed twofold and there is no more room. [F/45/8].

-I've got shelves in just about every room of the house, but we are struggling now. My husband has told me, no more ...[F/45/12].

For this group of people, the library fulfills an important function, that of supplying a large quantity of books that they can read and return with no problems of storage.

Several of the participants described how the ability to borrow encouraged them to take risks in their reading. One respondent commented:

-Imagine not being able to borrow from the library. If you bought a book and you didn't like it you'd be stuck with it. [F/55/12].

Others used the library to help them decide whether or not to purchase a title:

-Sometimes there are things that might interest you but you're not certain and you can just go in there and sit down and browse. With poetry it's never enough to read one poem once. If you want to know it you've got to look at it and read it over again. But I can fairly soon sort out whether it's a poem I want to live with and one which really interests me. And when I've filtered them by looking in the library I'll go away and perhaps buy the book that I really want. [F/45/12].

-I tend to use the library as a first sift through literature. I then buy them. [M/30/26].

-Sometimes I borrow from the library, and it makes such an impact on me that I can't bear to return it. I fear being bereft of that experience, so I have to go out and buy it. [F/30/7].

An independent bookseller felt that by referring his customers to the library for this "free trial", he was assisting them and ensuring good customer practice,

-If they are not sure I tell them to go to the library and try it out. If they enjoy it they usually come back and buy a copy. But it saves them money. [M/55/6].

Often members discussed how the library was their preferred place from which to obtain reading material. Comparing it to a bookshop, they felt that the library was less intimidating.

-I feel like I belong in a library, they are not as intimidating as a bookshop. [F/55/13].

-When I went in a bookshop, this guy turned to one of his assistants, he was the manager, and he said something about someone who had been stood there reading a book for a while. He said, "This is not a public library, they can't just come in and read a book." Now in a library you can sit all day. [M/45/13].

However, for the members of several groups borrowing was a distinctive action in its own right. Some acknowledged that on ecological grounds they felt good about borrowing, as it was a form of recycling.

-I feel that I'm doing my bit. You're recycling. Usually when you've read a novel you don't want to reread it, so it's a great system. You know, shared resources. [M/22/26].

A library manager recalled a comment she had received from a library user in relation to the borrowing experience.

-It's sounds strange, but to this user the fact that the book was borrowed prompted him to read. If he bought a book it could stay unread for several months. But because he knew that he had to return the book it made him read it. [5].

Others considered the notion of borrowing from a public library and examined what they regarded as its essence and what that contributed to the reading experience. The following is an extract from a group discussion.

The fact that there's such a wide stock and it's available, the effect that has on our reading experience is immense as in contrast to a bookshop, however big it is. That relationship of a book you can pay for is totally different to what we're describing which is to walk in, and select any book that they want. How that affects your reading experience is ...

However nice they are in the bookshops, you go into a bookshop, yes to browse to a certain extent, but they're a business, they obviously want you to buy something…

[The library] It's a very multi-dimensional cultural experience, as opposed to going into a bookshop and having a money transaction. That's a consumerist experience and as you've said you may take a risk of buying a book as opposed to going into the library. But, the availability of borrowing, it opens up a possibility from a very early age of the literary experience. [13].

Their discussion identifies going into a bookshop as a "consumerist experience" but the public library promotes "an idea of citizenship above that of the consumer" (Greenhalgh, et al.1995: 57). This difference can have an impact on an individual's reading experience. Several respondents felt that they had greater power as library borrowers, in the sense that their reading requirements were the most important factor to be considered. On the other hand:

-When I go in a bookshop I check to see what I can afford. That is a big part of my decision. In a library my decision for choosing to read or not read a book is fundamentally different. I dictate the choice, not my wallet. It is a much more satisfying experience. [F/30/17].

4.4 Range of stock

A further crucial element offered by the library service in relation to the reading experience was the range of the stock on offer to the reader. In the library:

-There's a wealth of books… bigger than any bookshop. [M/45/13].

-Nowhere else will you be able to access so many books. [F/45/5].

This range of material was seen to impact on the reading experience in many ways. First, for many it allowed them to experiment and take risks with their reading.

-Readers develop and it is economical to try out books in the library. They are not wasting their money. They are safe to try out new books or authors. (Library manager [1]).

- It broadens what you read, I've read new writers, I wouldn't have done if I had to pay everytime. [F/45/2].

A statement that confirms Mann's observation that:

> The great advantage of the library is the wide range of novels available for choosing and the fact that failure-choosing a novel that the reader does not enjoy costs nothing. (1991:15)

An Arts and Cultural worker responding to the present study argued that:

-Libraries are vital in ensuring that people experiment in their reading. I've run readers groups and people are adamant that they won't like something. You persuade them to read it and they love it. Choice and availability is vital, as otherwise people would get very bored. Readers change, so they need the range to assist them in their changes. [2].

Similarly, several respondents felt that through taking risks they had progressed as readers. Usually this progression was from popular fiction to what they regarded as a more challenging read.

-[Libraries] have got everything. If you want to try a bit of rubbish, you can try a bit of rubbish and then gradually you get onto some things that are really good books … [F/30/10].

-I remember being a girl and being allowed into the adults' section. I borrowed all the classics from the library. I still read them now. [F/65/9].

Recently, Michael Grade talked about his role as director general of the BBC, wherein he defined the role of a public servant:

> *"Public Service involves taking risks to make it relevant for people's lives. It should not be wall to wall instant gratification … there is the capacity to do much more than that!"*[5]

Recent research relating to fiction borrowing suggests that browsing plays a major part in the reader's selection of reading matter, also it is an activity readers find pleasurable (see Goodall: 1989; Jennings & Sear: 1986). One of the respondents in this study explained,

-I can spend hours just looking or browsing, I think you find the best book for you that way. [F/45/5].

Through browsing readers are able to satisfy the convenience factor attached to fiction selection, in that usually they want to be able to select something to take home with them that day (Lee: 1996). The range of stock available through the public library was seen to be crucial to facilitate this area of reader activity.

[5] Michael Grade's comment was made during an *Off the Shelf* literature event in Sheffield on Wednesday 20th October1999.

-There's also that lucky dip element of picking a book off the shelf and being absolutely enchanted with it. [F/65/12].

-I just go with an open mind and think ... it will just be a random selection. If I like the author then I'll follow it up. If I don't I'll take it back and I won't read any more. I've found many new authors in that way, people that I've become interested in. [F/65/25].

-What I do these days, I go along to the poetry shelves and see what modern poets there may be and just have a bit of a dip and then take one or two out. [M/55/12].

-There's a certain independence of wandering up and down the shelves, and wondering about looking at this, that or the other, and then making up your own mind. [F/55/19].

For others, the range of stock enabled them to secure a particular reading requirement. Several respondents described how at times, their reading needs were determined by their mood. This is illustrated by the following extract,

I don't understand how you get in that situation. I mean, I'm always in the situation where I have a queue of books in my study -a pile of books waiting to be read. I never get to the stage of saying, "What shall I read next?"

It depends on your mood, ...

I think mood is very important because I've always got a queue waiting but I always think it's a pity to waste a good book when you're not in the right frame of mind for it. So if there's nothing in my queue that suits my feelings at the time then I will go to the library and find something different that did. [12].

Often users described how they secured a particular title or pre-planned choice through the library stock. For the majority, the title would not be available directly from the shelf but they would reserve it. They drew great satisfaction in knowing that

the range of stock was such that they would be able to view the required reading material.

-Certain writers are hard to get hold of when new books are out, and then you can reserve them. [F/45/18].

-If I've read a review, I often bring my list in and check to see if it's here. If not, I reserve it. [F/45/17].

An added strength of the public library book stock is that it ensures continuing availability and extended choice over many years. Several respondents used the library to fulfill their reading requirement by obtaining out of print stock, which would otherwise be unavailable to them.

-I order books that are no longer available, out of print. The library is very useful for that. [M/65/27].

-I have particular areas of interest which invariably means locating books that are no longer in print. [M/55/13].

-My particular thing is English poetry and I'm really getting choosy. Some of it is very obscure, but because of the library I know I can get my hands on it. It's a real source of pleasure. [F/45/12].

At the other end of the spectrum, two of the focus groups were established writers groups and noticeably for them the opportunity to have sight of books written by new writers was very important. Also, they felt it was equally important for the writers to have an audience through the library. In this way libraries are seen to support creative output.

-But you can imagine the sort of wealth of being able to display their work and for people to buy in their work for us to experience. If there were no libraries writers

who barely exist now… would cease. Libraries are a way of getting their books into all corners of England. [F/55/13].

This has also been demonstrated by the success of the Library Association Booker Prize Display Competition which reflects the aim of the Booker Prize by bringing quality fiction to a wider audience. As the 1999 judges commented, library displays can provide an imaginative way of introducing readers to titles or authors they might not otherwise have chosen.

It was apparent that the range and condition of stock varied considerably throughout the authorities included in the project. On the whole, people were satisfied with the stock but there were a number of criticisms of library practice and policy.

♦ ***Stock Rotation***

A repeated complaint was that popular areas of stock were not rotated frequently enough. Often the comments referred to large print stock.

-I've read all the thrillers in this branch and they've been stuck on the shelves for ages. I keep telling them to get us some more. [F/65/22].

-I take ten books out a fortnight, so you can imagine there's not enough for me. [M/65/23].

♦ ***Accessing stock***

Also, although many authorities offered a broad range of stock, several respondents felt that accessing it posed difficulties. Earlier research, most notably that of Baker (1996), has demonstrated that computerised library catalogues are ill designed to the task of assisting readers in finding books. The findings of the present study support this view. Respondents found that:

-It's really difficult. It doesn't tell you what's in here – I get really confused. We used to have a card system and it was straightforward. [M/65/25].

-I can't understand it. [F/30/7].

-It's beyond me, it seems so complicated. I just check what's on the shelves. [F/55/6].

In addition, several comments revealed that the range of available stock lacked effective promotion and publicity. At the most basic level, several respondents were unaware of inter library loan facilities or reservation procedures. As one respondent observed:

- *I thought I could only pick off the shelf and our local catalogue. I've never heard of that before. [M/18/14].*

A finding that echoes the findings of Linley and Usherwood's (1998) social audit of public libraries.

♦ ***Equity of provision***

Within the discussion of stock provision, the notion of equity re-emerged but in a negative light. As has already been indicated, several respondents felt that there was inadequate stock in an appropriate format for users who were visually impaired.

- They can't see, they'd probably find it hard to hold books. [F/45/7].

In a different area, one respondent observed:

-My nephew went to the library, he's dyslexic. But he came away with nothing. They didn't seem to help him. [F/30/16].

In relation to dyslexia, one manager confirmed that currently it is a particular area of concern. He had struggled to locate appropriate stock for this group of users.

-We seem to be having increasing numbers of enquiries about stock for people with dyslexia. I don't think our usual suppliers are of much help. [11].

There was also some criticism of the literary and physical quality of the material on offer. It was felt that while the library stocked a wide range of popular material it failed to cater for those who sought a more challenging read or "aesthetic escape". For example, one group member stated:

-I'm reading "The Iliad" at the moment. I haven't checked but from what I've experienced before it's difficult to get this type of read directly off the library shelf. [M/30/7].

Due to the lack of investment by one of the authorities included in this research, the focus group members referred to the problems with the stock available to them.

-Some of these books are grubby and the covers are hanging off. But I looked in the books for sale and they looked better, certainly cleaner and I'm sure I'd never seen half of them on the shelves. [M/55/22].

When stock quality is allowed to deteriorate there is evidence that people can loose the library habit. One of the focus groups in the authority comprised twelve members, ten of whom had been regular users of the service. However, now only two use the library service. Their conversation focused on their disappointment with the service. They felt their authority compared unfavourably with other authorities, and restricted their reading experience.

-I used to use the library a lot. But I went four or five times and there were no books that I wanted, and they were all so tatty so I don't go anymore. You'll only go a few times and then if you continue to be disappointed you don't go back. [F/45/24].

-Yes, I stopped because the books were tatty and the shelves were half empty. I get by using and sharing books with friends. But it upsets me because my sister- in- law in London gets allsorts straight from her library. New shiny books you know all the latest ones. I think ...[authority] ... has gone right downhill. [F/55/24].

4.5.Library as a place

Numerous research reports, including the New Library: The People's Network, conclude that despite its other functions, book lending is still the most widely acknowledged role of the public library (1997). This view was confirmed across the focus groups. Libraries are seen as being synonymous with the reading experience. That experience was seen to encompass where and how a book was obtained. As respondents revealed:

-It's seeing all those shelves of fiction that excites us. [F/45/12].

-It [the library] tends to act as a stimulus. [F/55/13].

What was apparent in many of the responses was that the public library provides a visual stimulus to the reading experience. Readers' response begins before they have actually picked up a book. Several participants described how their journeys into other worlds began as soon as they entered through the library door.

-It was a magic world to go into the library, it still is. Those rows upon rows of books. [M/65/27].

Also, the visual impact of the library was seen to extend to seeing other readers in the library browsing along the shelves. Several noted how this induced a culture of reading.

-I use it for my children… it's really exciting for them to go and have an experience of a place where there's lots of books. They see other readers as well. I think it engenders reading into their culture. [F/30/7].

However, although the visual impact of the library encouraged readers it was also recognised that it could have an adverse effect. Repeatedly the image of libraries and reading were mentioned as reasons why people did not read and also did not use the library. Those who used the library felt that the stereotypical image of libraries was not accurate, but it was apparent that these negative images were powerful and could

inhibit people. One group who did not use the library and were not readers commented,

-No I don't use it and I don't know any of my friends that do. There's nothing for us in there. I can't think I'd ever use it. [F/18/14].

Two of the groups discussed the way in which society in general perceives reading as a low status activity or passive activity and suggested that the library often supports this image rather than challenging it. A discussion in one of the focus groups focused on how characters in soap operas are never shown reading.

-I don't think that reading is seen as something people do. I have never ever seen a [television] programme where people are reading a book. They're either having an affair or punching each other or if they're relaxing they're watching a video or television. If they have a magazine, then they flick through it and do not really read it. But I don't ever – and perhaps it's seen as a non-activity and then not visually exciting- but I don't think it's just that, I think it's just not seen as an occupation that the characters might have. People don't read…

You're right. What about Brookside! They have an actual story-line in it to encourage literacy because they had an adult who was unable to read and she was finally forced by happenings in her job to actually come clean about the fact that she could not read and took steps to remedy it. Yet they haven't had the sense to do it in depth and to put some sort of subliminal things in. [12].

A group member from another focus group felt that libraries were ideally situated to play an important role in changing how reading is perceived.

-The incentive should be that it is a pleasurable thing to do rather than it's all information coming at you; you need to alter the impression that the library is giving out. It's almost a sense of energies, a lifestyle thing… you don't get much of that in a library. [M/30/07].

Many of the groups felt one way in which the library could do this was by promoting its other services and using the library space for performances or art exhibitions, in order to get people into contact with books.

-In a sense there is a case for arranging for people to visit, even if it's not reading. Performance arts and art displays. It helps make that connection. [F/45/5].

-If they come in for videos or computers, then they'll see the books as well. They will probably at some point try them. [F/55/16].

∇ ***Intangible***

Having examined the visual impact of libraries, several respondents went on to discuss the intangible benefits provided by the library within the reading experience. In a sense, their explanations re-inforce what other commentators have termed as the "libraryness" factor (Greenhalgh et al.: 1995). One member of a focus group described how for him, the library brought the reading experience into being a total experience.

-Libraries were important as a child when one gets the habit, obviously at an early age. The public library was important, I don't think you can grasp how in the 1940's, how utterly dreary and bleak life was. There was nothing in the shops, there was no traffic, no people around, there was the blackout and it was a total blackout, so everything was cold and dark and there wasn't really enough to eat. I would go to this branch library which was a red brick slated roof, single storey piece of Shropshire. It looked a bit like a mortuary. Through these dark streets, inside to a sort of haven. It was warm, there were two burning cast iron stoves, there was a light at the end and it was quiet. So there were these conditions of comfort: warmth, light and quiet. And an eccentric librarian who looked like he'd been drawn out of "Through the Looking Glass". All of which added to an experience and I think it was and is for me a total experience. [M/65/27].

In his response, this respondent revealed a crucial aspect of the library experience and other participants within other groups added to the prescribed conditions of

comfort he mentions. For instance, several responses suggested that people need to feel safe and secure in the environment in which they select their books. Typically the library was compared to their home.

-I'm at home here; I'm welcome here. [M/45/13].

-It has such amenities and stock, I feel at home there. [F/65/21].

A sense of home or belonging was invoked in various ways. For some, it was simply the arrangement of the furniture.

-We can sit down and try a book out. [F/55/9].

-Everyone is welcome; you can spend the whole day in there. There's space for you to sit. [F/45/19].

Another comfort factor that encouraged the reading experience was the atmosphere found within the library.

-I remember the atmosphere in that library. I remember it being open on an evening in the autumn, it was very atmospheric. [M/45/13].

-You don't get that atmosphere anywhere else. [M/55/12].

However, several respondents offered an opposing view and felt that the library can appear to be intimidating to a non-user. A bad experience was seen to be enough to put people off ever returning. Two things were seen as crucial in eliminating the intimidation and ensuring the right first impression. First, was the attitude of staff.

-I forget now, but the first time through those doors and everyone is busy and knows what they're doing. [Library Assistant] came and chatted to us and showed us around, she was really friendly. [M/55/25].

Second, is the layout of the entrance into the library.

-I think the entrance is really off putting. Have you seen here. There are barriers and then notice boards and displays full of writing. If you're not a confident reader you're bombarded by words, it can be really frightening. [M/55/15].

Across the focus groups there was general agreement that as an institution it provided a second chance for those who for what ever reason were not suited to other formal institutions. Several described how educational systems had failed them but how the library service had filled the gap.

-I fully believe that the library was my saving grace ... I used to look forward to going to the library and delving amongst the books. [M/45/13].

-I learnt how to use the library at a very early age. I dropped out of school ... but I returned to education at a later date. The library was my support, it provided me with all the necessary books and research matter I needed. When I left school I still used the library and read an awful lot of books on everything. I think it helped me enormously. [M/45/13].

∇ ***Social Cohesion***

Linley and Usherwood (1998) argue that the library can bring social cohesion to a community. The present research indicates that obtaining books from the public library can satisfy an individual interest as well as a collective social purpose. One respondent stated,

-For me, when you imagine it [library] not being there, I think it takes away an aspect which makes a community a community. There's nowhere else we can go which is a public place for books and information like that and I feel we would have a much more fragmented community without a provision like that. Even if you're not using it on a daily basis I know I can go to a place where people have got books and kept them dry clean, and safe and I can go and use them when I want to ... [M/30/7].

Several respondents described how the library helps them to overcome social isolation. For instance, several described how when they move home, one of the first things they do is join the library and take home some books.

-When I moved here, on the second day I took the kids down to the library. The house was in chaos but it was important. I feel that the library orientates you in the community. It's the heart and once I joined I was able to settle. [F/30/5].

For another reader using the library invoked the feeling of citizenship. This particular woman had been medically retired and was struggling with coming to terms with being long term sick. Having been used to having a full and active life she felt that she had lost much of her purpose to life. Recently the housebound service had started delivering books to her. The difference this made to her was considerable.

-When I was well I used to use the library all the time. Now they bring the books to me at home …it's really helped as I feel that to some extent I am still functioning. I've still got something to offer and I feel like it's bought me back into society. [F/45/8].

Undoubtedly, the elderly members of focus groups most frequently cited this role of assisting those who would otherwise risk becoming socially excluded. Often they spoke about the library providing an element of routine in their lives,

-I come several times a week. I meet a couple of my friends. I know everyone here. It's a very important part of my life. [F/65/22].

I come a couple of times a week and spend quite a bit of time here. I sometimes drop in later just to read the paper as well. [M/65/23].

Also, because the library was part of their routine, it meant for some they had the re-assurance of knowing that if they did not go to the library that their absence would be noticed.

*-I had flu' at Christmas, and I didn't come down for two weeks. **** [Library staff] rang to make sure that I was alright. She always does that, she's really caring. [F/65/21].*

Also, for a housebound user, the library staff was often her only human contact during the week,

*-I look forward to **** coming and bringing my books. He's my only visitor on Wednesdays, we always have a bit of a chat. And I tease him a bit. [F/75/8].*

The library manager explained that for the housebound users reducing social isolation is a crucial element of their work. He described how they arranged coach trips for them, so they got to meet each other. The impact of this role was considerable. He stated,

-We tend to have about 40 of them on a coach and we take them out for an afternoon. There's help for those who have mobility problems. Normally we have afternoon tea out as well. It's free. There's always a lot of demand. [9].

The role of social cohesion cannot be over emphasised. During the course of the interviews, a member of the research team was present at one library when numerous garlands and wreaths of flowers arrived. A library manager explained,

-One of our old gentlemen died last week, he was well into his eighties. He has asked for the flowers from his funeral to be brought up to the library. He knows all his friends will see them here. Also, his son told me that the library kept him going in his retirement. [5].

∇ ***Library facilities***

Throughout the discussions, there was general agreement that libraries did not provide what people deemed to be standard facilities for their users and potential users. For instance several described how the lack of cloakrooms put people off coming in. This was mentioned frequently by those who had care of young children.

-We've got a lovely new library and it runs story times but there are no toilets. That has caused a tremendous problem for my daughter who'd like to take my granddaughter. She's said that there must be something in her daughter's brain that whenever she's there she's has a crisis about the loo… [F/55/12].

Also, a view echoed across most focus groups and particularly mentioned by Arts and Cultural workers, was that that coffee bars or the facility to get a drink should be available in all libraries.

-It's so much more pleasurable if you can get a drink in a coffee bar in the library. You can really take your time then. [F/45/5].

- *Libraries need to have coffee bars away from the shelves where people can test the books. Also, they could then chat to other readers. (Arts & Cultural worker [3]).*

It was apparent that the library building was viewed negatively in comparison to other providers of leisure pursuits. Although provision of these facilities is often beyond immediate control, it is must be addressed as it impacts on the reading experience.

4.6 Summary

Within this chapter, the discussion has determined what defines the uniqueness of the library experience. Undoubtedly, the positive factors far outweigh the negative, but the unique experience comprises both.

The evidence gathered reveals that the public library is seen to be of enormous significance within the reading experience. Despite its provision of other services, the responses given in this research reveals that the public library is still seen as being as synonymous with books and it is viewed as a natural place for readers and those who wish to develop as a reader. Also, the public library is revealed as the preferred provider or resource of imaginative literature. It is seen as offering the reader additional personal benefits or added value, which are not matched elsewhere, and can bring the reading experience into a *total* experience.

There was unanimity across the groups that free access to reading material is the greatest impact of the public library. This was seen as being crucial in initiating and maintaining an individual's reading experience. Also, the concept of borrowing was seen to offer a broad spectrum of advantages to the reader and to society in general, but most notably on an individual level it enabled one to exert greater personal power in his or her reading experience.

However, the discussion highlights real or perceived barriers which are seen to prevent the library achieving its potential, and frustrate the reader or potential reader. The evidence shows that these barriers can have a significant impact. For some, it meant that they were dissuaded from using the service, but for others the impact was seen to be much greater and could stop people from reading, or developing as a reader. All of the barriers need to be examined to ensure that the library's potential is realised.

Chapter five: Fiction promotion and reader development activities.

5.1 Introduction

Reading is still listed amongst the top three leisure activities pursued by adults in the UK (Kinnell & Shepherd 1998). However other research has demonstrated that readers who fail to develop do not receive the full benefits and enjoyment available through their reading (Horsman:1990). Continuing the theme from the last chapter, this section examines the public library's role in the reading experience via its work in reader development and fiction promotion.

Appendix 10 reveals the current level of reader development and fiction promotion activity in public libraries at November 1999. The data show (Appendix 10) that all library authorities are facilitating at least one reading promotion activity; more often than not they are involved in four or five and considering others. Almost 60% of the population are registered borrowers of the public library. Therefore, as commentators including Shapland (1998) and McKearney (1999) assert, libraries have a unique and unrivalled relationship with readers.

As part of the present research, focus group participants were asked to discuss the impact of promotion activities in relation to their own reading experience. They were asked:

- *Libraries already employ various methods to encourage the reading experience e.g. newsletters, reading groups, etc. In what ways is reader development promoted within your library service?*

And also,

- *What has been most useful to you as a reader?*

Their responses are discussed under the following headings:

- Librarian as intermediary
- Book Displays
- Effectiveness of promotional displays and book lists
- Literature Events
- The role of the library staff

- Reading groups
- Anonymity within the reading experience

5.2 The librarian as intermediary

It was apparent that the respondents saw librarians as playing a crucial intermediary role in their reading experience. Selecting a good read was recognised as a skill which needed nurturing. One group spoke about this in relation to a new reader

-I think that maybe what people find very difficult is that if they do get into books they don't know where the next one is when they put that one down. Maybe libraries can help with that. [F/45/10]

A member of the same group added,
-It takes years of practice to get the right book. If you are struggling as a reader, you will in all likelihood make bad choices when choosing what to read. [M/30/10].

Such views support Ross's findings that in reader development "there is a role for intermediaries to augment novices' knowledge so that their initial choices are successful."(1997:27). However, it was apparent that respondents turned to the library to develop not only novice readers but also established readers who sought new direction and challenges within their reading.

A member of a reading group stated,
-Sometimes it's good to be moved onto something completely new and fresh. I read an awful lot and I pretty much know what I like. But when you get that push in a new direction it's very stimulating. I find the library useful like that. [F/55/5].

A member of another group expected the library staff to assume this role in her own reading experience. She asserted,
-I seek help all the time. I like to know what's good or interesting. Saves time and makes sure it's a good experience. If everyone thinks this book is good, I want to be told and I want to read it! [F/45/19].

At the workshop discussion a library manager revealed how staff in her authority "smuggled" books to house-bound readers. These were in addition to their reading profiles:

-We have a profile of what they like, genres and authors. But we always give them another book which is something new which they wouldn't necessarily know about. It's fun, and they enjoy it … Often they will add the author or the type of the book to their profile as a result.

Similarly, an Arts and Cultural worker described her recent experience of working with library users during the National Year of Reading. She reflected on how increasingly readers sought assistance in their reading:

*I was a book doctor at *** central library for a three-week period and a common complaint was that there were all these books on the shelf but there wasn't anything to read. In order to understand this you have to go beyond what they are saying. Basically, if they were readers of thrillers then they had exhausted the stock or their favourite author. They didn't know where to go next. As a book doctor I encouraged them to try a similar author and also a different choice altogether, and the response was fantastic. First of all people were hesitant to come up to me. But by the third week people were making appointments with the library staff to see me. I then arranged a list of recommended reading for them … It was a great experience and libraries need to be proactive in this way. I did a similar type of promotion over the radio and one man had only ever read Derek Longden, and he liked that cosy read. I asked him if he'd read "Cider with Rosie" and he hadn't. He came back to me a couple of weeks later and said it was the best book he had ever read. He was really satisfied that he'd been awakened to the love of reading. A cliché I heard again and again was "I'd have never read that, but I'm so glad that I did."*

Having acknowledged that the librarian has a critical intermediary role to play within the reading experience, respondents went on to describe how this role was facilitated within their own experience.

5.3Book Displays

Across the focus groups, three forms of book display were most frequently cited in aiding the developing reader. These were:

i. new books displays or stands,
ii. the returns trolley, and
iii. front facing displays.

- ***New Books***

Within fifty percent of the focus groups new book displays were mentioned. For some, it was purely the case of having an opportunity to handle a new book which in itself added to the reading experience. As stated by one member,

-The first place I go to is the new books stand. I love the smell and the feel of a new book. [F/65/3].

For one member, the condition of the overall stock made her seek out the new book stands. She claimed:

-Often the books on the shelves are grubby, so it's great to get a new book where the cover is clean. [F/65/9].

Her remark supports previous work by Lee (1996) in which poor physical condition of stock was seen to influence a reader's choice.

For another group member, new stock enabled her to try new titles which she was not in a position to buy.

-I always check the new books; it gives me the chance to have something in hard back which I wouldn't afford to buy. [F/65/15].

Others developed this and explained how it enabled them to keep up to date with their reading, and also encouraged them to experiment with new authors and new titles.

-I like the new books or new editions section … I like to be up to date. If I go to the new books there's always something for me. The displays are useful and help to redirect or point you in a new direction in your reading. [F/45/15].

A member of the same group continued:
-By using the new books displays I've found new authors. I always go to my favourite ones, but yes, I've experimented. [M/45/15].

Several group members used reviews from newspapers to assist them in their reading, and consequently they sought out the new display stands to see if the reviewed titles were available at the library. For instance,

-Usually I've read the reviews in the Sunday papers, so if they've got them the books are more likely to be on the new books stands. [F/45/5].

- ***Returns Trolley***

Alongside the new display stands, the returns trolley was cited by an equal number of focus groups. It was seen as a convenient method of securing a "recommended read", its endorsement relying on the fact that it had been returned by a previous reader.

An extract from a group discussion aptly reflects other conversations.
A member began:
-I always take from the returns trolley; I always head there first. That's where you get the popular material.

Another member continued:
-I think well someone else has enjoyed it, so I'll try it.

A third member added:
-Yes, I do. It's by the door near the desk, so it's handy. I check it out when I'm returning my books. [23].

Their comments reveal two patterns of thought which seem to govern this activity. First it is seen as an easy method through which a reader secures what he/she deems

as a recommended read. Second, often return trolleys are located in a position which means that they are the first collections met by the library user on a visit to the library.

Commentators have repeatedly discussed the phenomenon of the returns trolley and have seen it as an indication of the fact that readers lack confidence in making their reading choices. For instance, Van Riel, as quoted in Kinnell & Shepherd (1998:134), argues that nothing is done for the majority of users who are not sure of what they want to read, and she states that 50% of issues come from the returns trolley. Similarly, Luckham claimed, "the last resort, for those apparently unable to find a suitable volume, was to return to the returned book shelves" (1971:68).

However, the data gathered in this study suggests that it is not a last resort, but actually a priority for many readers. An Arts and Cultural worker described an incident she had recently witnessed when a returns shelf had been relocated in the library.

-I was working down the road at a smaller library and there was some sort of discussion going on at the desk. What had happened was the library staff had moved the returns bay and it was now in a dark corner and not labelled. The locals weren't happy. It's the first time I've heard people complaining like that. They got quite insistent that they move it back. It'll be interesting to see what happens.[8].

Whilst the library may be experimenting with new methods of fiction promotion, it is apparent that returned books stands will still feature significantly within a reader's selection choice.

- ***Front facing displays.***

In a previous study, Spiller asked borrowers what helped them to make their selection when they were browsing. Twenty seven per cent said that they were attracted by cover design (1980:248-249). In the present study, cover design was also a factor which was singled out repeatedly as being important when selecting fiction.

As expressed by one member,

- Covers mean a lot to me. Some of the covers now are really beautiful, like this one covered in mountains and things like that. For a quick look, that doesn't look very much but when you look into it it's beautiful, and these people strolling there. Already your imagination is going and you're wondering who they are. [F/75/11].

A member of another group echoed this view:
-I look at the cover, and after a while I think you know which cover you like and which you don't. You don't even need to read the first page. I'm captured by the look. I've already started deciphering the story. [F/45/5].

Consequently, it was important for them that the books were arranged in such a way that the front covers were clearly visible. In their stated preference, the respondents to the present research reflected those discussed by Evans (1999) in that the majority wanted to see more front facing displays. The responses also tended to confirm Goodall's observation (1989) that users find smaller collections easier to browse through.

The same respondent continued,
-Simple displays where you can see the books is what I like.[F/45/5].

A member of another group re-iterated this point. She stated,
-I like to be able to see the front cover. I don't like to see rows and rows of book spines. Also as you get older it's difficult to pull them off the shelf. You're worried you may damage them. [F/75/21].

Her comment raises a concern mentioned by many of the older members included in the research. When the shelves are stacked tightly, they are often fearful that they will damage the spine of books when removing them off the shelf in their browsing. Their views suggest that they would restrict their selection to stock which they can handle with ease.

5.4 Effectiveness of promotional displays and book lists

In their discussions, none of the groups volunteered comments on book displays and dumpbins nor reading bookmarks without further prompting. After being asked

directly about them, it was interesting to notice that whilst most frequent library users recognised that libraries used book displays as a method of promoting specific areas of literature, very few could name the contents of any display that they had seen. Also, only a handful of respondents acknowledged ever using them when choosing books. One example of this was discussed in relation to a recent display used in a 'Branching Out' authority. This may suggest that the recent initiatives under the umbrella organisation are being noticed and are attracting the reader's attention.

-I think they've started doing some really eye-catching displays with a lot of the contemporary publishers. [F/30/10].

A common problem associated with displays was that the borrowers are not always sure whether the books included in the displays are available for loan. The following comment reflects the majority of views,

-They look lovely, but you never know whether you can choose from them or not, so I tend to have a quick glance and carry on to the shelves. [F/45/17].

Similarly, when prompted in relation to the use of book lists and posters listing specific author and books most acknowledged having seen them, but very few had used them. In most instances, they were cited as the promotional activity which most frustrated the reader.

One member commented:
-What really annoys me is when you see a list and you go and look for it and it's not even on the shelf. What's the point? [F/30/27]

Another member reflected on the quality of their production. She stated,
-I hate those lists. There's so much on them you can't even read them. I tend to lose them anyway. [F/30/10].

Such comments would seem to contradict the earlier findings of Spiller. In his research 73% of borrowers felt that booklists were useful (1996:257).

5.5 Literature Events

The results of the questionnaire (see appendix 10) revealed that 94% of library authorities are involved in various types of promotional events such as book weeks or literary festivals. The data gathered during the course of the interviews revealed that these events impacted on the reader and indeed non-reader in various ways.

Typically at least one member of each group had attended a one-off event organised by the library. These were regarded as very enjoyable experiences and for those who were readers were seen to add a further dimension to the reading experience. For instance,

-We have a yearly literature festival here, the programme is enormous. There's something for everyone, even my grandchildren go to things. It's a great chance to hear authors reciting their own work. Last year I went to loads of things. [F/65/16].

For a member of another group, an author event arranged by the library had enabled her to see one of her favourite authors. She stated,

-I saw Helen Dunmore recently. It was really interesting. She wasn't how I imagined her at all. [F/55/24].

An arts and cultural worker described how discussion with audiences at these one off author events had led his authority into further area of reader development activity. He said,

- We had a monthly literature event. We might have an author or poet, or just a local speaker. The response was tremendous, and within the audience you got the same core. After a couple of months people started talking to each other and it was book-related talk really. So it seemed like a very natural progression to set up a reading group out of this core. They were ripe for this to happen. It's been very enjoyable. [2].

As well as adding a further dimension to the reading experience and in some instances being the catalyst for further reader development activity, such events were seen as instrumental in attracting non-readers into the library and introducing them to

the reading experience. One participant described how her husband had become a library member after attending a local studies talk held in the library,

-My husband, who is not a reader at all, he's been going to one or two of the things they do at the library on history and he will go round and have a look. He will occasionally get a book out… If the talks weren't in the library I don't think he would though, but because they are there, he does. [F/55/16].

5.6 The role of the library staff

Within the existing literature there is a divergence of opinion as to the importance of personal recommendations made by library staff. (See Lee: 1996, and Reading the Situation 2000). Nevertheless, as demonstrated by Sumsion (in Reading the Future: 1992) recommendations can have a significant effect on issue figures. During the present research, regular library users felt recommendations made by library staff made a valuable contribution to their reading experience. The following are representative of the comments made to this effect:

-I like it here because … [Library staff] are like me. They recommend books to me. I like it when staff help me, they're the experts. They know what stock they've got. [F/65/23].

-Often what I like about libraries, I mean we've got to know a lot of them now who work here, and they come over and say, have you tried this one by such and such a body? I've picked up a lot. It was … who recommended that one. That was an outstanding book. [M/65/25].

-I like … Library, they know me in there and they'll tell me what to read next. They don't always get it right mind you. If they get it wrong I just tell them. But yes, I do like it. [F/45/5].

-Definitely, it's the personal service. I hate it at the main library; they don't know you so you don't get that help. [F/65/24].

For one user who relied on the housebound service to deliver books to her home, staff recommendations were seen as being particularly important,

-I don't get into the library, so I can't browse like I used to. I rely on the staff to recommend to me otherwise I'd be really limited. You don't always know what's coming out. [F/55/8].

A library stock manager described how he had observed users seeking out particular members of staff to obtain advice about reading,

-Readers are not at all into what particular badge a member of staff has on in that wherever I've worked I've tended to be the person that's selected stock. But there's always been certain customers who would not make a track towards me for readers' advice. Instead they would go to someone they feel in some way is the same as them and it might be to do with skin colour, it might be to do with age, it might be to do with sex or it might just be to do with something they've overheard that member of staff say to someone about a book which makes them think, ah, that person is on the same wavelength as me. [8].

During the workshop discussion, delegates reflected on how library staff are respected in their suggesting of titles. They felt that staff are perceived as having pure motives for promoting the title, as one manager put it "they have no axe to grind." One delegate added:

-People seek out advice from library staff as in a sense the only interest they have in promoting it is that it is a good read. They have no other vested interest and that's what people like.

The majority of respondents to this research had only praise for library staff. However, a couple described isolated incidences of a bad experience with a member of staff which had put them off using the service, and consequently impacted upon their reading experience.

-I won't go in when ... is there. She's dreadful, she makes me feel stupid. [F/75/11].

Another respondent recalled how the attitude of a member of staff when she was young, stopped her going to the library. Her response did not refer to the authority in which she now lived,

-I found my local librarian was a stern woman and I remember thinking, I won't go back there again because I was humiliated. You're not forced to go to the library so I stopped, so did my brother. But fortunately I already loved reading so as an adult I've gone back. I don't think my brother still goes to the library though. [F/30/27].

Their comments indicate that the potential damage such attitudes can cause is considerable. Management needs to ensure that staff fully appreciates the possible impact of their role on the library user.

An issue raised by just over twenty per cent of the focus groups was that they were often unsure whom to approach to seek assistance with their fiction reading enquiries. Goodhall recognises this as the "plight of the struggling fiction borrower who is most unlikely to approach staff for help"(1989:38). One member commented:

-Sometimes I'd really like a challenge or just a change, but I'm not sure who to ask. The librarians on the enquiry desk are taken up with finding facts. I don't think it's their role. [F/45/5].

Similarly a member of another group remarked:
-I really enjoyed it when we had that librarian talk to our group. She gave us a real taste for something new. But when I'm in the library I've never had that, there's no-one to ask. [F/55/19].

The evidence gathered in this study supports that of Blake (in England and Sumsion: 1995), that in many libraries there is only space and resource for one professional to advise readers. The general perception being that users could ask at the enquiry desk for non-fiction enquiries, but there was no such place for fiction enquiries. Their comments reveal the need to incorporate advice on fiction reading into work at the enquiry desk.

5.7 Reading groups

The results of the preliminary questionnaire distributed in November 1999 show that 63% of authorities had reading groups and a further 30% of library authorities were considering establishing them. This area of reader development activity is regarded as the most influential currently employed by the service. Library managers and users of the service share this view. Six of the groups included in this research were established reading groups, and several members of other focus groups were involved in reading groups elsewhere. The extent of library involvement and input varies considerably from authority to authority, and indeed from group to group (Scothern: 2000). Respondents to this study, felt that this form of reader development brought three main benefits to the reading experience.

First, it was seen to encourage reading and often drew people back to reading who, for whatever reason, had lost the habit. One female member stated:

-Joining this group has got me reading again, I think I was a lapsed reader. [F/45/5].

Another member of the same group confirmed this view and added,
-It's great, I was worried it might be like school, you know… but it's not at all. You can say what ever you want. [F/45/5].

Another of the groups discussed how for them it was instrumental in expanding their reading experience and encouraged their risk taking:

-It's broadened what I read. I would never have heard of half of these people, never mind read them. [M/65/27].

Another member developed this view:
-What I like is that I'm reading other types of books and authors I'd never have normally picked. It just makes you talk about reading and takes you out of a reading rut. It doesn't mean you'll always like the books. But on the whole I feel I've benefited from each of the books we've read this series. [F/30/27]

In addition, the social aspect of connecting readers together meant that the reading experience was transformed from being a solitary activity to being a shared one.

-You get straight into it, very stimulating, big arguments and everyone talks at once. I love it. [F/30/7]

A member of another group described how joining the reading group had widened her social circle and brought her into contact with people who she now shared other social activities with:
-I like the challenge of reading something I would never have picked. But I feel that now this group are my friends. We gather for other things too, like theatre trips. [F/55/16].

In order to demonstrate the impact of the library's role in this area of reader development activity, it is worth highlighting one of the reading groups participating in the present research. The group was in an elderly people's housing complex. It was not library run, but the library supported it by providing the books. The female facilitating the group was ninety-four years old and five other residents of the complex attended. The social contact was very important, but the members also valued the opportunity to direct each other's reading and share their reading experience. The following is an extract from their conversation with the researcher:

-That was one point that surprised me rather, the logistics of it. I thought that when I came in that we would all read the same book and then come back after a month. ... That was what I was expecting, that we would all go away and read the same book and all come back and give our views. But we don't do that.

-We all get involved. We all read a different book and just talk all afternoon.

-Dorothy has taught me so much; I never used to look at book covers before. But she's right you can tell so much about the mood of the book by looking at it.

-We all read a lot, it's important for us. It helps at night, just having a book next to you makes you feel safe. I like coming here and just chatting about it. I see what the others have enjoyed.

-But it makes such an interesting afternoon, you know. Each one has read one or two books and it's interesting to listen to what their ideas are. At the end of the session it gives you food for thought. You sit back and you think, well what's that meant to mean? Has that meant anything? You know.

-But we all have our likes and dislikes. There's only a few of us but we do enjoy it don't we? [11].

As well as benefiting the individual reader, several stock managers described the impact this type of work was having on the service. There was general agreement that reading groups helped to utilise the stock, raise the profile of the library and increase staff morale. A library stock manager had been instrumental in seeing one reading group multiply to fifteen groups over a period of about eighteen months. He spoke with great enthusiasm of the benefits he perceived this was bringing to the library staff.

-In terms of numbers and results from a relatively small input, I think reading groups are proving to be the most popular activity. It's really taken off. We've got about fifteen groups with ten to fifteen members in each. The staff involved are getting an enormous amount of satisfaction from the work with the groups. It's created a real buzz. [2].

Similarly, another manager reflected,
-Everyone is really enjoying it, and it's making us talk about books more. I think they see it as getting back to basics and they all seem to relish this area of work. [6].

Also, four of the authorities included in the research described how reading group activity had impacted on other areas of library activity. All four used the reading groups to collect recommendations and book reviews to share with other readers and potential readers.

-We've published this newspaper and as you can see it is made up of reader's comments. They come directly from the reading groups. It has been very popular and members like to see their comments in print. [1].

One authority was using one of their reading groups to inform their stock selection. The respondent felt that it was an area which could be very useful for minority groups.

-We've started involving them in our book selection. It's at an early stage but I think it has great potential. Already we've got books on the shelf which has been selected through our reading group. [8].

Van Riel and Fowler claim, "readers are the greatest resource libraries have" (1996:54). Accessing readers through reading groups seems to becoming increasingly popular practice which offers the service many benefits.

Although the library's role with reading groups is receiving wide recognition, the research revealed that some authorities were struggling with their formation. At the workshop, a delegate described how, in her authority, they were experiencing great difficulty in establishing as well as sustaining them. Scothern's recent research "What makes a successful public library reading group? How good practice can be created and sustained" found that staff training and sponsorship were key considerations in this process (2000).

5.8 Anonymity in reading development

In contrast to such public events as reading groups, several respondents appreciated the fact that the library enabled them to remain anonymous in their development of the reading experience.

For example, one member began,

-I feel that what's good about the library is that once you know the system, you can do your own research, and you can develop yourself. [F/45/15]

Within the same group, a member added:

-I want to be left to my own devices, and I like to select at my own pace and in my own way. [F/55/15].

Their comments reflect those of Jennings and Sear who suggest that "help from library staff is generally welcome only at one remove" (1986:38). For this group of users unobtrusive methods of promotion and development need to be available within the library.

Respondents made practical suggestions of how reader development programmes could be extended and improved to support the needs of this group of readers. A popular suggestion was that libraries should have regular induction programmes. They reflected on how users and potential users could then be introduced to all aspects of the service, and also introduced to imaginative literature.

-I would like regular inductions. I used the library for years and I had never heard of the reservation system, until I overheard someone at the issue desk enquiring. An induction would have ensured that I knew the entire system. It would attract new people and give those who already use the library an opportunity to learn about how to make full use of the library system. [F/45/5].

A suggestion repeated across several of the groups was that a comments book should be in place at every library. They felt that users could then recommend reading or make suggestions for stock purchases.
One respondent felt that she would like to get reading advice from other readers:
-I borrowed 'Captain Correlli' five times. The number of people who told me to read it. But I found it really hard going, and to be honest I felt like a bit of a failure. When I brought it back after the fourth time, I bumped into a friend and she said, "Oh you must read Captain Correlli". I admitted to her that I couldn't get on with it. She asked what page I was up to, and she said that's it, you need to read up to page whatever, you'll then get into it. I got it out once more, and she was right I loved it. There should have been a book on the counter, and I would have warned others. [F/55/5]

A member of another group mirrored the suggestion for a comments book, but her reason differed.

- I'd like a comment book in the library. It would really help. Also you'd know straight away that the library had that book in stock. It'd really help me in an easy way. [F/45/7].

During the course of their discussions, none of the focus groups mentioned the use of information technology. As shown by Walkey (2000), one of the greatest advantages offered through the internet is that the impersonal nature of web interaction is ideally suited to assist the reader who wishes to remain anonymous. At the beginning of this research, the integration of information technology into reader development activity was very small. For example, the questionnaire issued at the early stages of the current project revealed that less than 10% of library authorities had a fiction based discussion site for their users. However, a further 50% were considering introducing such a site into their service. Many managers recognised that the use of IT needed to be extended further in order to assist the reader.

However during the time of the research, the Branching Out's Book Forager system was just being launched[6]. Several of the library managers described how they felt this system was crucial in assisting those readers who did not want to seek help from library staff but still sought personal development. The following two comments made by managers aptly reflect this.

-I think forager will really help. People don't always like asking for help. It's good and it makes them feel in control. [10].

-We're not using IT enough. I'm looking forward to seeing more. I used forager last week, it really is an exciting development. [1].

Similarly, a local politician had used forager and recognised its dual role. She stated,

-Have you seen 'forager'? It will help borrowers to give their reading an extra push. Also, those who may not think IT is for them may be prompted to have a go. [2].

[6] Forager: http://www.branching-out.net/forager/

Her comment reflects the fact that IT based activities and more traditional reading activities need to be seen as complementary rather than competing (Kendall (1998) and Ormes & Criddle (1998)).

Walkey has examined the styles and implementation of fiction promotion and its potential as a reader development device (2000). She found that: "In comparison to parallel concerns such as commercial, independent and international sites, [public] libraries are not lacking in innovation, but are somewhat behind in terms of scope and technical proficiency" (2000:2). However, to date it is difficult to evaluate how useful it is as a reader development device.

5.9 Summary

This chapter has illuminated the impact of the library's reader development and fiction promotion activities with its readers. The critical point of this section is that library users expect librarians to act as intermediaries in their reading experience. Both the novice reader and also the more developed reader perceive this to be the case.

Although it is sometimes difficult to plot trends in this area of work in terms of success, what is apparent is that ease of selection is crucial in the selection of imaginative literature.

Also, a further important aspect revealed during the course of this chapter is that work with readers holds numerous benefits not only for the individual but also for the library service. For instance work with reading groups is benefiting the reader, the delivery of the library service and also the library staff involved. Also the data reveal that when consulted library users can offer constructive advice, and enjoy the opportunity to contribute to the design of better systems.

Chapter six: Managerial issues affecting impact

6.1 Introduction

It has been claimed, "the needs of readers are being seen as one of libraries' managerial priorities" (McKearney 1999:106). Within this, questions about library stock and library staff need to be examined. The book stock has been described as "the lifeblood of the public library service and its management is the heart which derives its effective deployment and use" (British National Bibliography Research Fund Report 90, 1998:4). Within the same report, the management of stock is defined as:

> A continuous process covering the range of interdependent activities required to make these materials an effective part of the process required to deliver the public library service (1998:3).

In this chapter, the data gathered during the course of this research are examined in relation to the interdependent activities that make up this continuous stock management process. Factors, which have been identified as hindering or helping the impact of the library's book stock, are identified and issues relating to them discussed under the following headings:

- Stock Selection and Management
- Evaluation
- Reader Development and Fiction Promotion
- Staff ~ recruitment and competency

It should be noted that these four themes are used in a loose and general sense, so as to help draw out particular findings, not to impose an artificial structure on the data gathered.

6.2 Stock Selection and Management

The Audit Commission described stock management and selection policies as essential tools of management (1997). The initial questionnaire issued in the early stages of the research showed that 68% of local authorities had a stock management

and selection policy and a further 31% were in the process of producing one. (Please refer to appendix 10). In particular, a large number of the new unitary authorities were still at the stage of writing a policy.

Delegates at the research workshop felt that creating a policy took a great deal of time, but the benefits of having such a policy in place made the production worthwhile. The main benefits identified by respondents were:

> *-It helps to provide a network across the service and assists with continuity of service*
> *-Written policies provide extra support to staff and assist practice, and are of particular value to new professionals*
> *-They are needed by individual operational managers*
> *-They provide a constant approach for dealing with complaints relating to stock*

Of those authorities that had a written stock management and selection policy, 57% forwarded a copy to the research team. The content and comprehensiveness of these policies varied considerably. For instance, one authority had several chapters dedicated to adult fiction selection, whereas another authority had just five lines.[7]

Spink reminds us that, "Book selection involves decision making. No one can opt out. Books on the shelves of any library reveal something of the ideas or lack of ideas behind the selection." (1997:36). As part of the research process, stock managers were asked to describe the philosophy which determined stock selection, and the means employed to decide selection. Some past research has suggested that a philosophy behind stock management policies has been lacking (Cole & Usherwood: 1996). However, findings from the current project demonstrated that the majority of the documents written in the past twelve months now include an introductory section outlining the philosophy which governs the policy document. Typically this contains the aims and objectives of the particular authority. Stock managers confirmed:

[7] Many of the policy documents were not dated which restricted their use for comparative analysis.

-We try and take it from the top actually, so the initial statements refer to all the things we have to comply with, in terms of public library acts, library association standards, disability discrimination or whatever and we've taken obligations on to do certain things. We work down progressively from there through the categories. [7].

-Its aims in being drawn up were to ensure Best Practice in stock selection. [8].

Stock managers confirmed that the policies were used as a practical tool to govern their selection practice. Where there was no policy in place, then professional judgement was employed to determine stock selection. As Damiani (1999) shows, librarians often talk about having a "feel" or "instinct" for what to select. For example one manager stated,

-We're in the process of writing a new one [policy]. At the moment we have a feel for what is popular and develop on from that. The librarians employ selection knowledge for branches for which they are responsible. As it is a professional task, I encourage them to question themselves as to why they are buying but also staff are encouraged to take a few risks. [3].

Other authorities relied on statistical data collated from previous years' issues to determine purchasing levels for the current year,

-What we have done this year is we've got a lot of figures from our computer systems from last year which is across all the areas of stock, but obviously our main interest is fiction. For each library we have the total stock ... stock on issue on a certain day which is the same day across the whole bands. So we have all this information which we are just in the process of collecting together, and what our intention is, is to actually pull this together and see where the major areas of need are for the rest of the year. [5].

- ***User Demand***

The evidence from the present project suggests that user demand has an important influence on stock selection.

-Budget allowing, we are happy to buy or satisfy user requests. We like readers to be able to get the type of books that they want to read. [12].

However, although this was often the practice several managers recognised the limitations of demand led selection. In the words of one respondent:

-User demand should only be used to a certain extent. There are lots of reasons why we should give them what they want. But I believe we have a role to influence our users, and I believe that we can create demand by having a few surprises on the shelf. [10].

Another described what had happened in practice:

-What we have done, because our bookfund is small, is that we'll buy the widest range of fiction possible and reduce the numbers of popular titles which issue well. So we no longer buy a copy of Catherine Cookson for every branch library. So the maximum number we buy is fifteen and we've got thirty outlets. This is so we are in a position to buy the alternative books that perhaps we wouldn't have bought. We've waiting lists for the popular titles but people understand why we've done it. The other area we are developing is books in translation. [1].

Throughout the history of the public library there has been tension relating to how the service should respond to user demand particularly with reference to fiction selection. Commentators have asked repeatedly,

> Basically do you give the public what they want or do you concentrate on materials considered good? (Usherwood 1996: 127)

An extract from a recent article in *The Bookseller* by Carnegie Gold Medallist Aidan Chambers, develops this point. He argues that:

> …browsing the stacks was only worthwhile because the librarians who stocked them believed their job was to make available a collection which was as representative as possible of all that was written in our

language. They did not think they should provide only what their borrowers said they wanted. (14/07/2000:12).

Evaluation techniques which are discussed later in this section, clearly impact on this area of debate.

♦ ***Methods of selection***

As part of the research process, stock managers were asked to rank different methods of selection, (e.g. approval services, CD Rom, Internet etc,) in order of greatest influence on their stock selection practice. The responses varied considerably, and no pattern emerged as to how or when authorities used these approaches. On the whole, there was general agreement that all methods employed worked efficiently and stock arrived from suppliers within a satisfactory length of time. An area in which dissatisfaction was expressed related to new titles. All managers felt that more should be done to get titles onto the shelves at the same time as they arrive at the bookshop. Current initiatives being piloted by *Branching Out* and the publishing companies may help rectify this problem.

A further area of concern expressed by twenty-five per cent of the managers was that traditional methods of stock selection were not providing a full range of available material. They argued that:

-We need to get a more representative sample of what is out there. We shouldn't be just taking books which are sent on an approvals trolley. Bookshops such as Waterstones have so many more titles than we have. We need the same diversity. [10].

-I'm not sure that we are getting everything. We should be trendsetters and not followers. I think we need to examine more carefully the stock we are being offered in the first place. [8].

Such comments reflect Van Riel who describes the library service as offering "passive provision" as opposed to "leadership and development" (1993:82).

Noticeably many of the authorities were experimenting with supplier selection. None had handed over full responsibility to the supplier, but were trying out specific areas of stock. This was particularly the case for best sellers and recognised popular material. It was observed that:

-We're always going to have the Trollope's, Cookson's etc. It's just a case of negotiating a number. It is not a professional task; at that level a monkey could do it. [10].

-The suppliers have arranged to send us a certain amount of popular material; we know we need them, no point wasting our time. [11].

-We've sent them a profile and they are matching it to stock. It's early days but it seems to be working well. [4].

-We've been piloting a new method of selecting stock. We send a list of detailed criteria of selection to the book suppliers and then they do the selecting. It seems more successful than using the librarians. Librarians perhaps have more success in selecting non-fiction. [7].

One manager was concerned by this shift in practice, and expressed reluctance to handing over full responsibility to library suppliers.

-I think we still need the opportunity to get your hands on the books. That's the only way you can really tell. [6].

During 1999, Liverpool Libraries and Information services piloted supplier selection across all twenty-four of its libraries. The aims of the project were to:

- Improve the quality of the stock;
- Increase the number of titles available
- Enable rotation of all stock;
- Reduce stock duplication;
- Increase issues per head of population;
- Increase visitors;

- Enable librarians to under-take reader-based book promotions and marketing of the service; and
- Reduce the cost of selection

Their conclusion after the period of the initial pilot was that "supplier selection has been a positive experience from the library's point of view, and that it is achieving the aims and objectives we set" (*The Bookseller* 2:6:2000). This reported success raises questions regarding the role of librarians in stock selection. For instance should they not have a part to play in helping the reader, as well as "the library" to have a positive experience?

♦ ***Consultation***

Under *Best Value,* library authorities should be seeking consultation particularly in relation to the services that they provide. Consequently, the other stakeholder groups involved in this research were asked whether or not they had been involved in the stock selection process.

The majority of the focus group participants had not been consulted in relation to stock selection and expressed no desire to be involved in the process. They regarded the reservation system as an opportunity to influence selection but beyond that saw it as the responsibility of the library staff. However, two groups, a reading group and a library friends group, had been involved more directly in the process and found it a beneficial experience. One of the groups went on a trip to a supplier. They found:

-It was really interesting. We were able to see what went on, and we were able to choose some books. The books didn't come direct to our library but they went in the system somewhere. [23].

The other group was consulted when there was money remaining in the budget to be spent before the end of the financial year,

-We were asked what we'd like to see them buy. They gave us these lists and we were able to say "yes" or "no". I think we should be asked. [25].

Perhaps the most surprising responses came from the arts and cultural workers who had worked alongside librarians in promoting fiction and reader development activities in libraries. When asked what they knew about the stock management and selection policy, the typical answer was,

-*Nothing!*

-*Nothing, I wasn't involved in that way.*

However, two readers in residence had seen their library's policy document and had been involved in fiction selection. They found it useful and they felt that through accessing it, they were better able to promote the available stock.

-*As part of our remit we have literary performances once a month, mainly in the city but also going out into the country. We have writers come in and recommend to the library what they should buy to support these programmes. Also, we have events, for example, a display of romantic fiction on St.Valentine's Day, and then we use the books available on the shelves, maybe advising on new titles. [3].*

When the chairs of the library committees were asked what they knew about their library's stock management and selection policy, the responses once more varied considerably.

One member had not heard of the existence of a policy,

-*Nothing. I've not heard of it under that name. We're a new authority, librarians do bring papers to committee but so far nothing that comes under the name of stock management policy. [6].*

However, the more typical response was,

-*I don't have an intimate knowledge. The policy is designed by librarians; we are more overseers of the service. We do not have a hands on role, we are not involved in the nitty gritty. Anything that was controversial would be brought to our attention*

at committee meetings. Other than that we rely 99.9% on the chief librarian and her team. [5].

One member had a greater awareness and, through involving herself in practice, had seen the entire process,

-I've been included on a visit to a supplier Holt Jackson, and I've seen how the library staff goes about selecting stock and they are very thorough and keen to do a good job. Also, we have regular readers' surveys and they are brought to the attention of the committee, so we are aware of whether or not the library is providing the people of ... [Authority] ... with the right stock. [2].

6.3 Evaluation of the success or otherwise of fiction selection

In *Beyond Book Issues*, Matarosso argues that libraries "can no longer be constrained by excessively narrow performance indicators- classically expressed as the number of book issues- but must renegotiate a wider contract with the community which reflects and legitimises all the things that people use libraries for and look to them to provide" (1998:1). As part of the present research, stock managers were asked in what ways they evaluated the success or otherwise of their fiction selection. There was general recognition that,

-It is crucial that the library can evaluate this, particularly when you think of Best Value. [7].

But beyond that, all of the managers felt that they were not doing enough to evaluate the success of their stock selection. Emphasis had been placed on implementation as opposed to evaluation. All of the authorities used the PLUS survey as a way of monitoring the success of their stock, and also a couple of the authorities had undertaken their own user surveys. However, the findings of this research support one of the key findings of the *National Year of Reading Review* in that librarians fully recognised the importance of evaluation but were struggling to "… arrive at impact and achievement targets to see how well libraries are doing in their promotional work" (2000:23).

At present, there was general agreement that the number of issues was still the main method through which the success or failure of stock selection was measured. All managers recognised the inadequacies of this practice. Whilst statistics are readily available, their value in terms of evaluation of the library service are limited and based on numerous and perhaps erroneous assumptions.

- To be honest we don't measure the success or anything else, other than looking at the number of times the book has gone out. [7].

-We use issues, also we look at the condition of the book- if it is tatty we assume that it has been popular, although I know that that may not have been the case. [6].

In addition to issues, the majority of stock managers monitor the number of reservations as a further method of evaluating the success of their selection practices,

-Reserving of stock is in itself a measure. [8].

Undoubtedly, such evaluation methods can clearly influence the selection of stock and result in authorities buying what has been described as "issue fodder"(Kinnell & Shepherd 1998: 34). By placing the focus on books and the reservation system the evaluation is inward and on the book stock itself, rather than outward and on the reader.

One manager felt that evaluation should not proceed beyond the point of issue,

-We ignore reading in the equation altogether. It stops at the point of issue. How can we know what happens with the book? [11].

However, his comment was contrary to the other managers included in this study who disputed the issue driven approach to evaluation.

-It is very difficult, as after all, how do you measure satisfaction? If one book has been issued twelve times and another fifty, I cannot say that fifty times makes it more successful. The twelve issues are no less meritorious. We do not deal with a

homogenous population but minorities, all who need serving. It's hard to measure enjoyment. For instance down the road, authority xxx, have a policy which strictly examines issues. That's easy but it means that borrowers don't get the surprises on the shelf; no risks are taken with selection. You do not create or sustain an interest that way. We cannot be issue driven, after all I argue that users of the service are not dropping, but issues are! [10].

Evidence from the policy documents suggests that several authorities use their complaints procedures as a measure of their success in fiction selection. However, several of the managers interviewed felt that this was self-limiting because borrowers were often reluctant to express their dissatisfaction.

-People are very supportive of the library. It's one of the things that cause us a problem as managers because so many people will not complain about the library because they are afraid it will be seen as criticising the library and its staff. But you genuinely want to ascertain what people think about their library and all they'll say is that 'it is lovely', 'it's fine' because they don't want to criticise the local staff and they're afraid that any criticism will be taken as, "Oh well! We'll close that library". [5].

During the course of the interviews, a couple of the managers mentioned other approaches which their authorities were considering adopting in order to assist evaluation procedures.

-We're thinking of introducing the mystery shopper technique. We're only in the planning stages at the moment and haven't come up with the fine details. [6].

-With our new upgrade, we will be able to get more information regarding what is going on out there. It will help us with our profiling, and we will be better able to target our customers. [3].

But again, this latter initiative is dealing with statistics that focus on the stock rather than on the reader.

In order to gain fresh insight into this aspect, the arts and cultural workers and the elected members were asked how the library could evaluate the success of its fiction selection. Again both groups mentioned book issues but several participants progressed to discuss qualitative measures.

An Arts and Cultural worker stated,

-Perhaps the library should have informal coffee mornings, almost quasi-focus groups which would allow for two-way feed back. Also, they should program the library system to monitor their success by incorporating categories for a more challenging read. For example, Seamus Heaney should be higher up the list than Catherine Cookson. After a promotion they should see whether Seamus Heaney has gone out more, did it move from the library shelves more quickly after the promotion? Also feedback from reading groups would be helpful, but remember you only get a certain demographic mix at such groups. [3].

Another felt that observational techniques should be employed,

-By seeing how vibrant the library is, do the borrowers stop other people in the library and tell them about their latest read? [8].

An elected member recognised that evaluation must include non-users comments,

-You need to do surveys, but not in the library. Find out what the non-users think. [2].

This final comment is crucial and draws on the guidelines of *Best Value* published by the Library Association. Library authorities should be performing satisfaction surveys which include users and non-users of the service combining qualitative and quantitative techniques. In all of the authorities included in the research, there was little evidence to suggest that evaluation incorporated opinions of non-users of the service. As stated in the *Best Value* guidelines: "User satisfaction surveys by definition exclude those who do not use the service- the very people who may be least satisfied" (2000:15).

6.4 Reader Development and Fiction Promotion

The data show that, when asked how they would rate reader development in relation to other service priorities, most managers classed reader development as 'essential' or 'very important'; only one classed it as 'important'. This view was supported in the workshop discussion in that delegates felt it should be regarded as core to service activity and be the basis of all other activity. However, when asked whether it was the responsibility of the public library to influence the reading experience of readers, responses were varied.

Some were emphatic that in their experience, influencing readers was a crucial aspect of the service, and their discussions revealed that it was something expected by the library user.

-*Yes most definitely, I think it is what people want. [9].*

-*Very much so. At present, 50% of issues go from return ledges, which shows that users lack confidence to choose material for themselves. [10].*

-*I think increasingly it is … Once upon a time librarians used to be people that didn't necessarily know something, but knew where to find it and we suspect that it's changing now and that people really do want advice from somewhere. That's true of quite a few areas. Like the legal area and people don't just want a book on this type of law, they want some sort of guidance as to the interpretation of it. I think the same applies, the similar sort of parable in the fiction area, where increasingly now librarians are getting involved in promotions where they are personally recommending books again. In a sense it's a getting back to basics. [7].*

However, a couple of others offered opposing viewpoints.
-*Not really, we're there to provide information. We shouldn't intervene but we should help when asked. [11].*

Another stated,

-I think we should develop reading but not influence reading. To me influence suggests setting standards and I don't think that we should make value judgements. [6].

At the workshop, it was suggested that this uncertainty lay partly with the fact that for many professionals the term *Reader Development* is shrouded in mystery, and many are still unsure of what it means. As far as the project team can ascertain, the most widely accepted definition is taken from the *Reading Partnership Advocacy Pack.* The definition is as follows:

> Many public libraries intervene directly, and very creatively, to expand the reading horizons of their users. They also try to connect readers to each other in order to share reading experiences. This work is known in libraries as Reader Development.
>
> Reader Development focuses on the reading experience, how people use books and where books fit into their lives supplementing or supplanting traditional promotional strategies focusing on individual books or writers.
>
> It aims to build and develop the audience for imaginative literature, combining library workers' love of books and promotional skills with their traditional place at the heart of the community. The reader-centred approach is also being widely adopted by booksellers, publishers and regional arts boards as a key tool. (1999).

The data suggests that this definition is not fully understood by all members of the profession. Comments from respondents reveal a real uncertainty as to the role of the library in reader development. Most modern librarians are comfortable with providing information but within some authorities the role of providing and recommending imaginative literature is still resisted. As has been discussed in the earlier chapter, in order to be responsive to the needs of its users the library should seek to influence the reading experience of users. It is a characteristic of the service that the public expect the library to provide.

❖ ***Reader Development Activity***

The initial questionnaire asked library authorities to confirm the fiction promotion and reader development activities with which they were involved. The graph included in appendix 10 shows the current level of activity and considered activity. Noticeably, all library authorities are involved with at least one activity, and typically they are involved in four or five areas.

There was general consensus that the most successful of these was the establishment of reading groups.

-It's getting better, there have been big strides in this area within the last three years. Our monthly literature series saw reading groups as the natural way forward. They are really popular. [3].

Often the popularity of reading groups is posing organisational problems,

-We have a maximum of twelve in each group; we really try to limit it to that number. But more and more keep turning up. So we are regularly splitting the groups up. It's a great problem to have! [4].

Many felt that the next step in reader development lay with developing IT services as a reader development tool.

*-We've been awarded *** money. So we're setting up an interactive site, you know where borrowers can leave their comments. [3].*

-I think we need to exploit IT even further in the future. For instance, we could tie IT in with virtual reader development in the future. [10].

As indicated earlier Walkey (2000) has discussed such ideas further in a recent piece of research.

Although the majority of the managers reported on the successes in their authorities, and the growing importance of reader development work, there were some who expressed concern and frustration. Thirty-three percent of the managers felt that within their authority reader development was not regarded as an interdependent activity within stock management. Indeed it was often seen as being on the periphery.

- I think it is important to the authority, but not much is being done about it. [7].

-I think we pay lip service to it, more than actually getting to grips with it. I think we are just nibbling at it at the minute. [10].

-It's piecemeal, and it doesn't continue, doesn't lead to anything. [7].

A major factor was the lack of a consistent reader development plan or policy.

-We lack a coherent plan or strategy in this regard. [6].

-We don't have anything laid down; we're operating in the dark really. It's knee jerk. [10].

Evidence from the sixty-eight stock management and selection policies received as part of the project, seems to support this as only six contained reader development strategies or frameworks. When development was referred to in policy documents, it was usually in terms of *stock* development as opposed to *reader* development.

A couple of the managers who were endeavouring to write such a framework were finding it difficult, and felt that there was a lack of professional guidance in this area. One stated,

-I asked ... [library manager] ... if he knew anyone that had written a reader development policy or strategy yet and he said he didn't actually. I think people are at the same stage as me and saying, well we ought to put down exactly what our aims are in reader development. I could start writing one from scratch but what's the point in re-inventing the wheel. People are very insular; they go away and do it. I think

people are scared actually about doing this. They're scared about putting together something as radical as a reader development policy as somebody is going to pick holes in it and say oh, you can't do that. And nobody wants to be held up to ridicule for all the things you've omitted. [7].

As part of the workshop discussion, delegates were asked whether there should be different strategies within policies for serving core-users of the service and the reader who wants to develop further. There was general agreement that it was restrictive to use such labels and also it raised the question of how you would classify users or non-users in this way. As the findings show, reading habits alter and a reader's identity is not fixed. A reader development strategy was regarded as being an essential element in stock management and selection, and it should incorporate a plan to respond to all readers and potential readers.

A further issue seen to restrict the impact of reader development was the lack of specified budget. This was discussed in terms of actual activity,

-It's difficult as it's one more thing to take from the book fund –where else can the money come from? [12].

Also, fifty per cent of the mangers reflected on how reader development posts were often externally funded and in most instances were for a fixed period of time. This was seen to promote the attitude that reader development lay outside everyday library activities. And also, once the funding ceases so does the area of reader development activity.

-Because they're not regular library staff, they and their work are treated differently. Staff are busy and don't want to take on any more. So it's left up to ... once she's gone, I'm not sure what will happen. [9].

At present, all of the managers confirmed that reader development was not included in their performance indicators. However, most felt that performance indicators may not actually help this area of work, and were too crude a measure for reader development.

At the workshop discussion, it was generally felt that qualitative evaluation is better than quantitative performance indicators when looking at reader development.

As a consequence of the lack of measured performance or evaluation, several managers were concerned that their work with readers was not receiving the recognition it deserved.

- We're involved and doing some really interesting projects but we are not monitoring or recording it. [3].

❖ ***Fiction Promotion***

The BNB Research Fund Report "Public Library Stock Management", stated that there needs to be a shift in emphasis, "from selection and acquisition to promotion and rotation … because of the declining resources available to public libraries" (1998:iii). Within the majority of the stock management and selection policies, reference was made to the importance of promoting stock. The following extract taken from one of the policies is seen as being representative,

> "… Staff place a great emphasis on the promotion of library stock. Activities will be undertaken to promote all areas of stock from time to time, and will be aimed at users and non-users."

Using a Likert scale managers were asked whether it was preferable for librarians to spend less time in selection and more time in promotion. The respondents were unanimous in placing an emphasis on. One manager added,

-W*e are lacking a materials budget at the moment, so trying to promote the stock we already have is very important … I think all the libraries are doing them to a greater or lesser extent. Sometimes they are very basic displays, other times much more elaborate. We also have a magazine which comes out monthly which gives reviews about books by other readers. [5].*

Across the interview groups and within the workshop discussion, it was widely agreed that the extensive stock held by the public library service is one of its greatest

strengths. Consequently it was felt that the service should be looking to new ways to promote this, rather than being too concerned with the provision of new books which bookshops are already promoting. However, as has been shown by the findings presented in chapter 5, users of the service are attracted to new books. On the contrary it was stated by several delegates at the workshop that,

-*All books which are unread are new to the reader.*

Library managers agreed that the effectiveness of promotional activities varied considerably, and all recognised that promotion in itself meant more than simply having a display of books. As one of them commented,

-*The library needs to be pro-active. Display stands in themselves are not enough. For example, a display showing Romance for St.Valentine's Day with a table of books is not enough. Yes, people will be attracted to front covers but they need to be encouraged to take the risk and try one of those books. [3].*

How stock is arranged is crucial within the concept of promotion. Accessibility is still a significant problem for users and potential users of the service. Many managers recognised that the current systems in place are not responsive to people's needs. It was generally felt that, as expressed by a delegate at the workshop,

-*Libraries need to concentrate on marketing and not classification.*

Although, the achievements of promotional activities has been well documented, (for example, Phelan1993), managers suggested that some staff resist this aspect of the stock management process. They cited the following reasons:

-*They are scared that they will create a demand that they can't match. They think it'll end up putting people off using the service. Queues put people off so why go and generate a demand you know you can't meet. [10].*

-What about that lovely library reason? If you promote a book only one person can borrow it at any time therefore all the people who can't borrow it will be dissatisfied. [9].

-

6.5 Staff ~ Recruitment and Competency

Staff have been identified as key to the success of the reading experience. However, it was apparent that together with the lack of structured reader development policies, staff recruitment and competency was a major issue facing managers. Van Riel raises the concern,

> -In response to queries, library staff will confidently recommend books on do-it-yourself or photography or travel. Asked for "a good read" they hesitate and tend to fall back on their personal tastes. Is this a professional response? (1993:81).

Her concern can be linked to a phrase repeated within many of the stock management policies:

"These guidelines are subject to professional judgement."

However the data present a mixed picture as to the extent to which staff are prepared, or able, to make such judgements. The profession needs to determine which skills are required if the term "professional judgement" is to have any real meaning in this context. It was in this area where the greatest misconception was observed between policy makers, users of the service, and library managers. Politicians and members of focus groups assumed that all library staff at all levels were readers. This, as the research demonstrates is not the case.

By using a Likert scale, stock managers were asked whether they thought all professional librarians should have knowledge of reading. All of the managers indicated that they either "*agreed strongly*" with this, or at least "*agreed*" with this statement. They all confirmed that with the present high status given to reading and literacy skills it was more important than ever. There was a general consensus that it should be a pre-requisite in recruitment. Several stated that *knowledge of books* or

love of books was included within job specifications in their authorities and that at interviews candidates were being asked about their own reading experience. One manager confirmed that they not only asked about reading but also expected the potential member of staff to demonstrate promotional skills,

-In our last interviews, we introduced the question: "What book have you read recently that you feel we should read. How would you go about convincing us to read it?" [1].

However, all of the managers acknowledged that this practice had only recently come back into fashion. In the recent past book knowledge had not been regarded as a necessary skill and other service priorities had meant that evidence of book knowledge had been relegated in favour of other skills that were seen as being more relevant.

-They weren't interested in books. The recruitment procedure changed. Books weren't mentioned as far as I remember. [7].

-The staff on the reference side of things seem very unaware of the benefits of reading. It has been lost sight of in our efforts to get on line. [8].

-IT development put reading on a back burner. IT skills were seen as more relevant for the library of the 21st century. [12].

This trend in recruitment policies has been well documented by a number of commentators, including Van Riel (1993) and McKee (1992.) McKee for example described how librarians had "abdicated" their role and the library service "no longer promote[s] the ability of librarians to bring books and readers together" (in *Reading the Future* 1992:38). Throughout the research process, all of the professional members of staff expressed an enormous amount of enthusiasm to resume this role but felt that past practices were hindering them. Twenty-five per cent spoke about colleagues who had been appointed with no interest in reading.

-We had a wonderful comment the other day from one of our young librarians, I actually cringed. We were talking about reading and one of them said, "How on earth do you find time to read, I'd rather take the dog for a walk!" [7].

-It's difficult as several of our staff are quite open about the fact that they just don't enjoy reading and don't read. [5].

In addition and, endorsing research performed by Kinnell & Shepherd (1998), the organisation and structure of the library service is seen to hinder the effectiveness of the library staff in developing the reading experience of the user. Structures are in place which suggest that reading and books are an aspect of the service but not central to it. Many authorities had adopted teams of specialists to select stock rather than including all professional members of staff. Whilst this approach was seen to assist with stock selection, it was also thought to have significant drawbacks. In the words of one of the managers who headed a team of stock selectors,

-Whilst we have a co-ordinated and unified selection; we do not have a co-ordinated and uniform promotion. Our users do not get a seamless service across all our libraries. [7]

Similarly the introduction of fiction specialists was seen to send out conflicting messages to members of staff. Results of the initial questionnaire revealed that 46% of authorities have a member of staff who specialises in fiction promotion and or reader development. On the whole, there was general agreement that this type of position was valuable in raising the profile of reading and for co-ordination of activity. It was also thought to benefit authorities submitting bids to funding bodies. However, reiterating previous concerns, many of the posts were for fixed periods of time, externally funded and were filled by non-librarians. This could be seen to infer that their activity was not central to the service.

-They tend to be a fixed term post, and staff treat them almost as an extravagance. It makes it seem like it's not a central activity. I'd rather spend money on training staff. [10].

Also there was a danger that these posts could be confused with the *Readers Advisers* posts which were in place in the past. When asked whether they would like to see the introduction of (or re-introduction) of such a post, there was general agreement that it would be a retrograde step and would again make reader development seem like a specialist activity rather than a core activity.

-I think it shouldn't be one post; such knowledge should be spread across the board. It's not good for there to be one person, it should be all our responsibility. [1].

Most library users do not distinguish between professional and para-professional staff, and alongside professional staff, the para-professionals can play a crucial role in reader development and stock management. Therefore, managers were asked whether advising readers in their choice of books should be included in the job description of all front line staff. Most "*agreed*" or "*strongly agreed*" with this statement but there was disagreement as to whether or not it could be included in job descriptions.

-I think so, but it is something that human resources do not like tying down in a job specification, as it is hard to tie down. [7].

-I don't think they could specify it, as it would mean a higher pay scale. It could be named as a desirable quality of the applicant but not essential. [9].

-Assisting readers in choosing material is already in the job specifications of all library assistants. We see it as a very important role and they should be able to answer borrower questions regarding books and stock. [1].

At the other end of the spectrum, one manager felt that it is not necessary to be a reader to promote reading. He stated,

-If you go in a travel agent, the staff will not have visited all of the countries that they have on offer. I don't think it is important for staff to be readers. What I'm more interested in is whether or not they are welcoming to the users and friendly. You know, demonstrate good customer care skills. [11].

Whilst no-one would dispute that good customer care skills are essential in the public library, his comment suggests that book knowledge and reading skills are not a necessary component of these skills.

During the interviews, managers were asked whether or not reader development often relies on the personal enthusiasm of the member of staff. There was a difference of opinion, in that those authorities with a strategic reader development framework "disagreed", whereas those without "agreed".

Leading on from this, they were asked if staff are reluctant to promote titles. The responses were mixed.

-I think this is variable; some people are better than others. Some borrowers never ask library staff. [7].

-I think over the years, the library has replaced reading in its list of priorities. I think people just need a push in the right way; it's down to confidence. [1].

Their responses would suggest that any reluctance on the part of staff stems from a lack of confidence. As indicated earlier, staff are still unsure what reader development and fiction promotion entails. This is certainly the case with services to adults as demonstrated by the *Review of the National Year of Reading.* Staff are confident in developing reading amongst children but this is not always the case with adults. One manager observed,

-They seem to feel that promoting to children's okay and they're comfortable with that. But they think that for adults you need to be a real expert because an adult might ask you an absolute pearler of a question. But it doesn't tend to be the case and adults I feel are guided as easily as children because they don't seem to attach a blame culture to the librarian that might recommend a fiction book and might get it wrong. The blame culture is within the profession. The librarians somehow feel that they can't possibly make a mistake and it's so easy to make a mistake [with a topic] as subjective as what's a good fiction read. [9].

All of the organizations taking part in this research recognise that there is a training need and several authorities were seeking outside support from organisations such as *Opening the Book*, *Launchpad*, and *Reading Partnership*. Those authorities included in the research who were involved in *Branching Out* repeatedly stressed the importance of their work with the project and the impact it was having on their staff.

The subject of training included a discussion of the formal taught courses available at degree or postgraduate level to professional staff, and at NVQ level for para-professionals. The managers involved in the interview process of the research and those who attended the workshop felt that new professionals were leaving library school with inappropriate skills. Other research has shown that there is a perceived mis-match between the skills needed by employers and the curriculum being taught by Departments of Library and Information Studies (Comedia: 1993; Aslib: 1995; Usherwood et al.: 1999). At the current time, of the institutions offering degrees and postgraduate qualifications in librarianship few offer specialised training in fiction. The University of Sheffield and the University of Central England piloted Arts Council funded modules on fiction promotion and these have been subsequently absorbed into their curricula. Delegates at the workshop felt that similar courses should be extended across other institutions. Also they felt that the content of these courses needed to be re-examined. For instance, they felt that an element of the course should include managing and organising a reading promotion event. Several mentioned the MA in Reader Development which has been introduced by the University of Central England. Whilst they felt that this course offered specialist training, they felt that in order to keep fiction promotion and reader development as a core role of the librarian it was imperative for all library schools to include it within their curriculum.

Similarly, managers felt that para-professionals needed to be involved in training. As well as in-house training, several managers mentioned the NVQ schemes as a way of developing library assistants. Managers felt that these schemes needed to be examined to determine what they currently offer in relation to reader development and stock promotion.

6.6 Summary

Evidence gathered during the course of this study would seem to raise doubt over the general applicability of McKearney's claim that "the needs of readers are being seen as one of libraries' managerial priorities" (1999:106). In many of the authorities included in this research this does appear to be the case, but it is not in all.

Examining the stock selection and management process suggested that all of the activities need to be seen as interdependent. It is clear that action or inaction in any one area will affect other links in the chain and ultimately impact on the reader's reading experience.

At the current time, when authorities are involved in the production of stock management and selection policies, the evidence would seem to suggest that there is greater attention being made to determine a philosophy to govern such a document. However, stock selection practice does not always mirror the philosophy stated in stock selection policies. Respondents in the majority of authorities admitted that, in practice, user demand is still dominating selection practice.

In determining the success of fiction selection, the number of book issues is still seen to dominate techniques of evaluation. The value of qualitative techniques is becoming increasingly recognised but there is little evidence of their introduction. Non-users are being overlooked in evaluation procedures altogether.

In many cases it is widely recognised that reader development and fiction promotion activities should be central to, and govern all service activity. However, for various operational and organisational reasons it was acknowledged that this is not happening in practice. In addition the impact of reader development activity is not being monitored and the current focus appears to be on implementation as opposed to evaluation.

Managers need to determine what skills are needed for stock management and reader development. It is now once more accepted that staff need to be more active in promotion. However, for many this means acquiring new skills, and also raises the question of whether library staff should themselves be readers. As a result of some

managerial practices in the recent past many current staff lack confidence in their ability to develop readers. Professionals responding to the present study feel that DLIS and NVQ curriculum need to include reader development and fiction promotion.

Chapter seven: Persuading policy makers of the value of the public provision of reading

7.1 Introduction

McKearney has stated that the library profession has " not developed ways of demonstrating the impact of its work with readers [its] impact on individual lives and, on community life and on national priorities" (1998). In other words, librarians describe library activities but fail to demonstrate their impact in a way that will persuade politicians and policy makers.

The present research sought to discover the kind of evidence that policy makers require if they, and their political colleagues, are to be convinced of the importance of reading and the value of the public provision of imaginative literature. Elected members with responsibility for library services were asked, "When planning your local budget for the provision of services, how would you persuade your political colleagues of the importance of the library's provision of imaginative literature to your community?" Most respondents maintained that:

-*They don't need persuading, we have protected and will continue to protect our libraries ...[5].*

However it was acknowledged that;
... There is a pressure on resources, and we face questions like libraries or abuse survivor's organisations – believe you me, it's not at all easy. It's tough decisions that have to be made. ... But we want to maintain all our community libraries and make them individual to meet the needs of its community. We were looking for savings recently, and someone suggested cutting the book fund but it was very quickly knocked back. But that won't always be the case. It can't always continue and I can see a day will come when we will have to close libraries and it is a day I do not want to see.[3].

Indeed recent evidence (Proctor, Lee & Reilly 1998) suggests that libraries have been closed and it was not so long ago that a leading politician asked, "what purpose does

reading serve and why should it be provided free of charge to the user?" (Sproat 1993). A question that was repeated in a less dramatic form by the Audit Commission in its 1997 report *Due for Renewal?*

Like the Audit Commission the politicians interviewed for this study placed a heavy reliance on quantitative data. Typically this was provided from a computer system.

-{The} Quarterly operations report of the library service gives a snapshot of users and activities at any one particular moment in time. We can get an accurate picture of the proportion of the population who are users, the issue type, number of issues and what type of stock- we can really have our finger on the pulse. We need this to support our investment decisions. [9].

-We've also had two new libraries in the past couple of years and we can use them for comparison purposes. The new libraries have different profile use relating to age and stock. We can take lessons from them, get new ideas and tips for improvements to the service on offer elsewhere in the borough. [5].

A minority of elected members made reference to qualitative techniques that provided feedback from the electorate. These included the PLUS survey, other locally managed surveys, and their personal observation of the service:

- We look at the PLUS surveys, comments and requests. Members use the libraries and can see for themselves. We like to see the library being innovative and employing varying forms to encourage the library user. In response to user surveys we have altered the loan period from 4 weeks to 3 weeks, that way they can borrow more books. [2].

- Regular user surveys, and comments from users and non-users. [10].

However, that having been said, the evidence clearly suggests that qualitative data do not carry as much influence as quantitative data. Most politicians have not gone beyond book issues and still like what they regard as hard facts. By this they mean quantitative measures. At the same time, and confirming McKearney's observation,

there is still an uncertainty amongst some professionals about how to demonstrate the value of the library's work with adult readers. One stock manager admitted:
-I don't know, we never seem to emphasise reading. Politicians are interested in IT. They like hard facts … we also stress the library as a safe environment as it is a corporate objective – safety in the community. But we never focus on reading as such. At the launch of Bookstart, I spoke to politicians and parents on the value of getting children hooked on books from an early age and how it helps them in education. But we've never mentioned it at other times.

It is important to make library activities and work with readers high profile at "library committees". The politicians interviewed in this and other studies (Usherwood 1993) rely heavily on the advice of the chief librarian and her management team. And it is important that they " keep talking about books …"[8].

It has been recommended (Nicholson 1987) that there is a need to make arguments about the public library "political". This idea was developed at the workshop when delegates suggested that it was imperative to capitalise on some current government strategies such as life long learning and social inclusion. Links between the public provision of reading material and the government's concern for literacy were also thought to be important. For example some members of the current government have mentioned the importance of reported links between low literacy levels and crime and other anti-social activity. The Moser report (1999) identified that literacy has an impact on a number of levels; those of the individual, the family, the community and society, and the economy. Participants in the present study reflected on the individual and social impact of the public library reading experience. Typically their responses included concerns about literacy, the role of fiction and the library's social responsibility.

All of the stakeholder groups were asked how they would explain the value of the public library and book reading to their local councillor. Their answers reflected the broad themes identified by Comedia in their work on the social impact of the arts (Matarasso 1998: iv/v).

These are:

- personal development;
- social cohesion;
- community empowerment;
- local culture and identity;
- imagination and creativity;
- health and well-being;

In addition our data reveal a further dimension in terms of an economic impact.

7.2 Personal development

In most instances within this sub-theme, respondents focussed on the importance of literacy in general and its transforming nature. One comment aptly reflects many in this area:

-I'd make them [politicians] realise how important it is for people to read. [F/65/21].

At the workshop, participants focused on what they perceived as the uniqueness of the reading experience. A phrase which emerged during the course of the discussion was that it was "*a life skill that enhances life chances*." The great majority of participants saw the development of literacy skills as a shared responsibility. This reflects Wolfendale's claim that "literacy goals are a collective societal responsibility" (1997:74)

The public library was viewed as an integral part of this collective. It was seen as having a particular importance for children. It was argued that reading was a skill which needed nurturing from a very early age in order for it to become life enhancing. Focus group members suggested that the library *helps children get the reading habit if they haven't had the opportunities at home. [F/30/17]*

A further respondent stated,

-I think that children that grow up in homes where there aren't any books just don't realise that they'd like it. The library gives them that opportunity. If it wasn't there

they might go through their whole life without realising that they like it and it would cut off a huge resource. [F/30/7].

Similarly, a stock manager reflected on how the library service had a responsibility to provide a constant source of reading material to assist the developing child.

-I believe in the Jesuit approach. We need to develop the child from a very early age and ensure we provide a link for their reading. By the time the child is seven his future path is partly in place. We can make it fun, take them out of their world environment and show them other possibilities. As librarians we can never underestimate the effect of work with children. [10.]

Once the reading habit is formed, it was felt that there were many ways in which it benefited a person. On one level, it was recognised that it bolstered self-confidence which transferred to other areas of people's lives. For example,

- I believe that it has helped me enormously on a personal level. I can make choices, choose my next book, and get a good read. [F/45/13].

A member of another group echoed this response,

- I can see a whole row of books and when I pick them off the shelf and check it out I know whether or not I like it. I feel that for me, using the library has boosted my confidence. [F/65/25].

On many occasions, respondents reflected on how using the library as a child for pleasure reading assisted in their educational development. Those members of focus groups who had returned to education as mature students particularly mentioned this aspect. A member of a writers' group stated:

-I hated school, and I left with nothing. But that didn't mean I wasn't interested. I came back to education in my late twenties. Mum had always taken me to the library to choose my books as a kid, so I knew what was there. So my use of the library has altered from fiction reading to an education role. [M/45/15].

Another participant described how library reading gave her an "enquiring mind":

-I've always been a strong reader and have had my nose in a book ever since I can remember. I used to go to the library every Saturday and get my books. I left school when I was quite young, you did then. I was one of five girls; we were expected to be wives and mothers really. But I think reading gave me an enquiring mind. I read when the kids were little. When they were older I went to the local college. I used the local library, and they were really good they used to get nearly all the course books for me. I'm now working in a management position. [F/45/19].

Just as reading can help in personal development so the lack of reading opportunities and the inability to read can cause individual a great deal of personal unhappiness, stress and loss of self esteem (Hannon 1995, Kassam 1999). A respondent in the present study who experienced difficulty with reading reflected on how this had affected his life. He stated:

-I'm still not sure exactly how much my pension is, or how much my rent is. I have a friend read it to me, but I have to trust that he is telling me the truth. I only let a couple of people in to help me. You need to know them. [M/75/29].

7.3 Social cohesion

When discussing the reading experience and the library, the majority of groups recognised that library use was a shared activity which brought an aspect of connectivity to society. Libraries were described as having a major role to play in ensuring a socially inclusive society. One respondent made mention of the fact that:

-The library is the first place you can join as a child. You have your own card with your own name on and in a sense you exercise control over it. Through reading, and using your library you're in. [F/30/19].

The public library service ensures that everyone can participate in reading and draw on the benefits it has to offer. In this way it was seen by respondents to help overcome barriers that could otherwise exclude people. It helped remove the

economic barrier. Respondents recognised that many depend on free access to books and are not in a position to buy them. For instance, one stated,

-If there were no libraries, it would be awful. It would exclude an awful lot of people…You'd end up with a strata at the top that could do it, could afford to go to a bookshop or use the Internet to order books or whatever. [M/45/13].

A member of another group supported this view,
-And it doesn't matter who you are, what you are, where you come from, how much money you've got. It's there for us to use. If we want to use it, there's a wealth of information and books in there for us. [M/55/24].

Likewise, an Arts and Cultural worker drew on her experience of working in libraries and stated,
-We must remember that not everyone has the ability to buy books and there must always be the ability to borrow books. When I went into libraries, there were thousands of people I saw who just could not have bought books; they just did not have the resources. [3].

Various studies have shown that there is a direct correlation between literacy attainment and poverty (for example Dombey 1997). Respondents to the present study argued that free access benefited the individual, and in turn society, by breaking cycles of inequality. One focus group member commented that there was a political argument:
-In terms of the labour party and equal opportunities and equality. It's a way of breaking down that cycle in terms of mothers that want their children to be able to do better. [F/30/07].

A member of another group echoed this comment:
-Often people can't buy books but they could access them from the library, and I think that if they don't have that access then that will lead to another generation of children who aren't going to get that opportunity. [M/45/15].

Such comments, on the intergenerational effect of poor basic skills, reflect the findings of the Moser report that "when parents have trouble with reading and writing or numeracy, it is more likely that their children will start with a similar disadvantage at school" (1999:23).

Also, all of the groups recognised that the library plays an important role in bringing social cohesion to members of the population who would risk becoming marginalized or isolated. This was particularly mentioned in relation to three groups. First the elderly members of the community for whom the library often plays a dual role:

-*I think a lot of people, particularly the older people who use it two or three times a week. It's not just the fact that they get a book it's also a social reason. [F/55/16]*.

Focus group members who were retired recognised the importance of this dual role the library plays and stated,

-*I think here they've turned everything over to the young people and I don't begrudge them. But there are very few places for you, as you get older. But libraries are here and they are for us. We can spend all day in them, it doesn't matter. If they get rid of our libraries, then I think they're going too far. [F/65/25]*.

A member of the same group continued,
-I*f you want to go in at half past nine in the morning and wander from department to department, spend not a penny and walk out at the end of the day having sussed out what you like and what you don't like you can. That's why the library has to be there*. [M/65/25].

In addition non-users of the service also felt that the library had a significant role to play for older members of the community. For instance,

- *My gran uses this library a lot. She gets her romances, whatever ... she'd really miss it if it wasn't here. [F/18/14]*.

Another group of the population who were recognised as being at risk of becoming marginalized are the housebound community. The work of the library with this group of society was seen as crucial. Two housebound participants responding to the present research stated:

-I wouldn't read very much if the library didn't bring the books to my home. I'd just sit here twiddling my thumbs all day. [F/75/8].

Another housebound respondent described her own experience of becoming housebound in her late forties due to a medical condition:
--*When I was well I used to use the library all the time. Now they bring the books to me at home ...it's really helped as I feel that to some extent I am still functioning. I've still got something to offer and I feel like it's bought me back into society. [F/45/8].*

Also, a further activity of work with this group meant that they had the opportunity to meet up with each other and they were released from their isolation. A stock manager commented,

-We have regular coach trips for our housebound users. We take them out for an afternoon. We have all the equipment and can manage wheelchairs. We usually end up somewhere having afternoon tea. The comments you get are staggering. You forget that if you're housebound you can't meet up with people even if you live in the same block of flats. So trips out give neighbours the chance to meet up and chat. [8].

Another group who felt that they were at risk of becoming isolated were those who lived in rural locations. For them, the existence of the mobile library meant that they were able to develop their reading experience. A mother with young children stated,

-We rely on the mobile library here. It's vital, we've no local bookshops. We can swap books between ourselves but that's not the same thing. I like the children to see for themselves. [F/30/17].

Another member of the same group added:

-We use the mobile, I've relied on it since we moved here. On rare occasions I go to the main one in town. But on the whole I use this one. [F/55/17].

The findings would seem to reflect those of Linley and Usherwood (1998) in that the library is recognised as being critical in supporting specific groups within the population who are at greatest risk of becoming isolated.

7.4 Community empowerment

Overlapping with the last two sub-themes, are the concepts of community and community empowerment. An arts and cultural worker spoke of this in terms of democracy:

- … *I believe that fiction is democratising and leads to a democratic society. Information is power, and I believe all reading is information and consequently democracy is available. [3].*

Thus the public provision of reading means individuals are better able to assume their role and responsibility in society. The library's role in enabling democratic participation has been highlighted in other research, including Comedia (1993).

Other respondents developed the notion of social inclusion, and saw the library as being at the heart of community and a place which instils community values, and indeed defines a community. A member from a rural community commented,

-I think it would damage the community [if the library was not there]. In the village where I use the library that's where we all pick up village news, you always meet up with a couple of people, exchange news, have a chat about things, exchange plants, I've seen people planning PTA meetings etc., that sort of thing. I think if our library closed it would be dreadful not just for the village but also for the huge catchment area of farming land and hills around. [F/45/10].

A member of another focus group developed this point:

-For me when you imagine it not being there, I think it takes away an aspect which makes a community a community. There's nowhere else we can go which is a public

space for information like that and I feel that we'd have a much more fragmented community without a provision like that. [M/30/07]

Developing this view, one member repeated her earlier comment that when she moved, it was a priority for her to seek out the library as a way of orientating herself in her new community. She described,

-When I moved here, on the second day I took the kids down to the library. The house was in chaos but it was important. I feel that the library orientates you in the community. It's the heart and once I joined I was able to settle. [F/30/5].

7.5 Local culture and Identity

Matarasso claims "libraries, rooted as they are in neighbourhoods of all kinds are focal points and natural guardians of local identity and culture" (1998: 34). A member of a focus group reflected how this identification with the local community meant that people saw the written word as a fundamental aspect of their environment and cultural identity.

-I think the fact that we have this great network of public libraries, which is subsidised, is sending out a strong message that as a culture we value the written word. It's a keystone of our development as social and responsible people and that we want to stimulate individuals to take as much as that as we can in our own personal development and also just in building the edifices of our civilisation. That includes a whole range of visual arts and all things that libraries do, but the written word is an absolute fundamental part of that. [M/30/10].

7.6 Imagination and creativity

Several groups, notably writers and creative groups, spoke of the contribution imaginative literature plays in developing an individual's imagination and how this affects the society in which they live. Respondents argued the importance of imagination to the life experience. Many felt that local politicians should be aware of this:

-I don't think we should have to explain it to local councillors the importance of the imagination. ...Unless they're doing factual research, people will be using libraries as my mum does. My mum and many people like her use the library for stories and a story is the fabric of our lives. So unless you can cut off the importance of the imagination in people's lives, unless you say we don't need imagination, if you can say that and you can also say that the children don't need fiction, especially primary school children, I think the thing you'd have to say to them is can you justify that children don't need fiction? [M/45/13].

An Arts and Cultural worker saw developing the imagination as integral to personal welfare. She said,
-I think that is just as important, it's the feeding of the soul or it's a feeding of your mind, or it's a feeding of your senses and spirit that is every bit as important, well maybe not every bit as important, but is as important I think as having the roof over your head and other services ... it's all part of individual growth or well-being and I think it's really important. I think if you gave people ... if everybody has a house to live in, everybody had something to eat, but you didn't have all those other aspects, it would be a really poor society in a lot of other ways. [2].

It was felt that the imagination was fundamental to a developing society. Reading was described as a way of feeding the imagination and helping it to flourish. It was argued that:

If we were just stuck with figures and facts all the time then there would be nobody who would suddenly sit down and create. ... So before we have the rulers and the pencils and the rubbers and crayons, we've got to have the stuff to use those things with. Haven't we? It comes from imagination, it comes through fiction. [F/45/13].

This progression was seen to include the evolvement of language and the means through which individuals communicate with each other. In the words of one respondent:

-Lack of libraries would impact on the use of language because one of the things reading does is improve vocabulary or introduce you to new concepts. If a lot of

people were not reading because they physically could not manage to get books, it would over a period of time impact on the use of language, the creativity in the use of language. A lot of poets need language to actually be able to do their business, if you see what I mean. You sort of almost pick up new language by reading, you're not consciously doing it but all the time you're looking you're unconsciously doing it. [M/30/10].

7.7 Health and well-being

Many of those responding to the present study developed ideas about individual well-being and discussed the potential release offered through reading, and the benefits this offered the reader. In chapter three such perceived health benefits are discussed more fully. However, several group members felt that politicians needed to understand this benefit and not underestimate the effect reading can have on an individual's health and well being.

-I think you could stretch a point and say that books and reading affect the mind and that might ease the stress on the working person. [F/45/19].

Others reflected on reading as a holistic experience. One comment, which reflects those made across several groups was,

-My quality of life would be diminished. That's what I'd tell them [politicians]. [F/55/24].

She continued,

Probably for me, I would emphasise… but I mean I think to be honest probably more important to me is the enriching of your life outside it, you know the arts and libraries come into this and literature comes into this. It can tremendously influence our lives and enrich the quality of our lives.

An important aspect related to heath and well being, was the social and caring role assumed by library staff. An elderly member of a group mentioned this,

*-I had flu' at Christmas, and I didn't come down for two weeks. **** [Library staff] rang to make sure that I was alright. She always does that, she's really caring.* [F/65/21].

7.8 Economic Impact

An arts and cultural worker argued that, as part of the act of political persuasion professionals should:

- stress the economic value of libraries. Often mentioning lost souls falls on deaf ears but demonstrating that libraries help with the local economy is when the ears become open. If we hold a literary event, we allow the public to hear, discuss a writer's work. On the day we will also have copies of the book available for buying. The session brings about an enormous amount of trade on a single day. One author sold over £3000 in one day. Here there is direct evidence of the economic contribution, which we all too often forget to mention. [2].

His contribution demonstrated a clear impact on the local economy after the library hosted a literary event. Others argued that the public provision of reading should be seen as an investment. Through breaking the cycle of disadvantage it was felt that the library was an investment in people's future that saved expenditure for other governmental departments. Two respondents related this to the issue of crime.

- I think it stops people getting into trouble, and saves us money. [M/45/1].

- Libraries are keeping a few young people out of mischief, giving them other choices. [F/65/3].

Their comments also make some of the same connections as suggested by the work of Moser (1999).

In addition, respondents across the groups argued that through improved literacy skills, people are better equipped to take up employment in an ever-evolving workplace. For instance,

-I think the public libraries are an investment in the future. [F/55/6].

Another added,

-It could save money… people going and getting a better education and jobs through being library members. [F/45/5].

Such comments reflect the findings of the recent OECD study (1997). This estimates that poor basic skills of employees cost the British economy in excess of £4.8 million a year, through poor quality control, lost orders, bad communication, and the need to recruit externally when poor skills among staff limit internal promotion.

Members of most of the groups taking part in the present study commented on how the public library directly influences the economic market through its purchase of book stock. A member of a writers' group stated,

-Think of all the writers… Writers love to sell their books and writers have to have an impetus to write. Most of us write… unfortunately for money. [F/55/13].

Similarly, another member of the group added,
-Libraries have to buy their books from somewhere; it would be disastrous for booksellers without them. [M/55/13].

In another group, a bookseller spoke of his reliance on the library service.
-I'm a bookseller, I need libraries and they need the likes of my company. It's two way -we'd be sunk without each other. [M/55/6].

Such comments reflect the findings of an earlier study (Prichard and Usherwood 1989) on the impact of public library expenditure on the private sector. More recently other studies have started to explore how libraries may influence local and national economies. (For example Proctor et al.1997; Sumsion 2000).

Despite the strength of the arguments put by respondents there was concern expressed across the groups that the value of the written word was often underestimated and undervalued. Some respondents felt that reading had been displaced in society and the library needed to be seen to redress the balance. A member of a reader's group voiced this concern:

-The existence of the library is, as far as a councillor is concerned, a civic status. Everybody's got to have one to show that they are a proper borough. But really it is the civilisation. There is a bit of a danger in libraries closing. Where you enter a library and the first thing you see are videos and music cassettes and so on. I read a novel a while back where a character after some years walked into the library and said, I thought that they had books in this library. [M/65/27].

Again, other focus group members expressed their concern at the lack of an adequate budget for books and spoke of the ever-increasing presence of income generation services within libraries. One said,

-You should walk into the library and see books. We're all thinking about the image more ... it appears that the reason d'être of being in a library is not the printed word. [M/65/25].

Another stated:
-It bothers me that it is the book element which always gets squeezed because it's not flavour of the month with the government. And I think really that they're so blinded by IT because actually they don't personally understand anything about it themselves. It's very useful and it's got a great future in the right areas but it's just not the answer to everything. [F/45/12].

It may be that this view is over pessimistic. In 2000 the DCMS changed the terms of the Wolfson awards to place the emphasis on reader development rather than ICT. In addition, during the research period, the Draft Public Library Standards were published and this was seen to be impacting on some local authorities. Two of the library authorities included within the present research have had their budget increased due to the publication of the standards. It could just be that fear of government intervention is the motivating factor behind these instances.

7.9 Summary

This chapter has shown what focus group members felt was the kind of evidence required by policy makers as evidence of the value of reading. The data show that respondents recognise reading as a key skill which can improve life chances. In addition, the free access provided by the library service is deemed critical if its potential is to be realised. The profession was advised to argue along political lines and respondents linked reading to the achievement of some key initiatives on the government agenda. For example, respondents argued that using the library to obtain imaginative literature contributes to social cohesion and community empowerment. Moreover, it was felt that having a public institution providing books free at the point of use, re-inforces the value society places on the written word. It was argued that without free access to imaginative literature individuals and society would be less developed. In addition, creativity would be restricted. The data demonstrate the health benefits, particularly emotional and psychological release, available through reading. Increased literacy skills were seen to bring economic benefit to individuals and society as a whole.

However despite the weight of this evidence it is still a fact of library life that policy makers still place a greater reliance on quantitative as opposed to qualitative data**.** The evaluation of value and impact is still in its infancy and there is a tendency to rely to a great extent on numbers. For example, counting the number of books issued, or the number of people from a particular community, or background, who use, or do not use a service. Such data are, of course, important. They are, if nothing else, an indicator of an authority's commitment. However such figures tend only to deal with inputs and outputs, and there is a danger that politicians will only measure what is measurable, and thus miss what is important about the library service. In evaluating the value of imaginative literature, people's experience of using the service, and their perceptions of it, should be used to evaluate outcomes. Such qualitative outcome indicators are often a more meaningful way of evaluating a service and its achievements.

In the words of the great social reformer, R.H. Tawney (1975:219), "Arithmetic has its uses, but neither the injuries inflicted by inequality nor the benefits conferred by diminishing it can be reliably explained by sums in long division. In reality, the

consequences of social expenditure depend, not merely on its amount, but on the character of the evils removed and the opportunities opened by it." The research discussed in this report indicates that by providing imaginative literature libraries provide such opportunities, and enrich the lives of many people

Today many practitioners and a few politicians recognize that we need rather more sophisticated approaches to assessing the value of public libraries than simply counting book issues. It has been argued elsewhere that the social audit approach used in the present research reveals individual and community experiences in using library services. As has been demonstrated such statements of experience put flesh on the dry bones of statistical measures. Researchers in the social sciences often talk of the importance of looking at data and telling a story. Our respondents in have provided us with many stories and some of these have been included in this report.
There are some small indications that policy makers may be more willing to use qualitative data in making political judgements. The social audit approach is being recommended by the UK Consultancy, Information Management Associates, in their project to produce guidance materials to help managers deal with "Best Value and Better performance in libraries" (Streatfield et al. 2000). In addition, the social audit of Newcastle and Somerset libraries received a brief mention in the recent Select Committee Report on Libraries (House of Commons 2000). Such techniques will require further promotion if the profession are to make explicit to policy makers the value and impact of libraries in providing access to imaginative literature and promoting reading.

Chapter 8. Conclusions

The data presented in this report demonstrates the immensely positive influence which imaginative literature offers an individual and, in turn, society. The traditional function of the library in providing such literature is shown to be its most widely acknowledged and valued role. In particular, it was seen as enabling all individuals the opportunity to experience, develop and maintain a reading experience. Also, the respondents saw using the public library to develop the reading experience as adding further to that experience.

In short, the content of this report illuminates the effects of imaginative literature and explains why the public library is the preferred provider of such material. The combined methodologies of social audit techniques, uses and gratifications' and reader-response approach make the value and impact visible. This framework has enabled the project team to address the objectives of the research and has provided valuable data which can be used to assist the design of better systems.

As the evidence shows, in order to determine and demonstrate the contribution that library access to imaginative literature makes to the reader and potential reader, it is important to gain an understanding of how people use imaginative literature within their lives. When people talk about *escaping* or *learning*, their definitions vary and the understanding of such terms can be different for each reader. Also, as the respondents revealed reading and having access to imaginative literature is not a luxury but a necessity. This report explains to the profession the transforming nature of reading and also the transforming nature of the reader.

Having examined the impact of reading, respondents described the role and significance of the public library within the reading experience. A focus group participant reflected that,

-*It [the library] tends to act as a stimulus. [*F/55/13].

Undoubtedly the greatest stimulus was that the service provided free access to reading material which gave everyone the opportunity to participate in the reading experience. The concept of borrowing was seen to be advantageous in that it enabled risk taking and sustains the reading habit. Also, respondents felt that they were able to exert greater personal power in their reading experience. As voiced by one respondent,

-*When I go in a bookshop I check to see what I can afford. That is a big part of my decision. In a library my decision for choosing to read or not read a book is fundamentally different. I dictate the choice, not my wallet. It is a much more satisfying experience.* [F/30/17].

On the other hand some respondents cited several factors which prevented people from using the library. On one level these concerned the library itself and related to economic, physical, and location barriers, both real and perceived, which frustrated the user and potential user. Other factors related to the stock in that its physical and literary quality could deter people from using the service.

The success of reader development and fiction promotion activities was seen to vary. Personal preferences with regard to such activities in a sense determine their success on an individual basis. However, the findings of this research show that users expect library staff to act as intermediaries in developing their reading experience.

Across the focus groups there has been general agreement of the role and importance of the library in the reading experience. However, as was borne out in chapter six, there are significant professional differences in both attitude and practice to not only the provision of imaginative literature but also, with regard to the library's role in the reading experience. In the words of a member of the steering group for the present project,

"Some things you think are standard, and you assume that everybody views it in a certain way."

The data show that this is not always the case.

It is apparent that if the library service is to realize its potential, then management need to make a commitment to their role. Stock management and selection needs to be viewed as a continuous process and every aspect included in this process needs to be re-examined. Two particular areas of concern, highlighted in the report, are evaluation procedures, and staff skills and knowledge. In most authorities, evaluation is still restricted to counting the number of book issues, and there is little evidence of attempts to consider the impact of those "issues" on individuals or groups in the community. In other words, the service still tends to measure what is measurable and consequently miss what is important. The data gathered in this research show that book issues provide a very limited understanding of the value of the public provision of reading, or of the benefits of work with their readers. The second topic highlighted within the report is the competency of staff. Managers need to determine whether librarians, and indeed all library staff, need to be readers.

Finally, this project has sought to determine the kind of evidence that is required to persuade policy makers of the value of the public provision of reading. All the elected members taking part in this research maintained that:

-They don't need persuading, we have protected and continued to protect our libraries. [5].

In most instances the responses were developed by reference being made to quantitative data. Currently, it is apparent that qualitative data does not carry as much influence as quantitative data, but there are small indications that policy makers are increasingly being more willing to use qualitative data in making political judgements. However, it is equally apparent that many professionals are uncertain of how to use qualitative data to support their statistical evidence. Indeed very few authorities are submitting qualitative data to their policy makers to demonstrate the value of the service.

The respondents to this study were convinced of the library's role in the realisation of political objectives and often drew on their own experiences to demonstrate this. Qualitative techniques have been used to reveal the full picture of the value and impact of libraries in providing access to imaginative literature and promoting

reading. The methodological framework used within this research makes plain why the profession needs rather more sophisticated approaches to assessing the value and impact of public library book reading other than relying on book issues. It is our hope that this report goes some way to providing the much-needed ***facts about fiction*** desired by our predecessor of nearly two thirds of a century ago

Bibliography and References

Adam Smith Institute. (1986). *Ex Libris*. London: The Adam Smith Institute.

Alsop, D. & Walsh, C. (1999). *The Practice of Reading*. London: MacMillan Press Ltd.

Appleyard, J.A. (1990). *Becoming a Reader~ The experience of a reader from Childhood to Adulthood.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Aslib(1995). *Review of the public library service in England and Wales for the Department of National Heritage.* London: Aslib publishing.

Atkinson, F. (1922). *Fiction librarianship.* London: Bingley.

Audit Commission. (1997). *Due for Renewal: a report on the library service*. London: Audit Commission.

Baker, S.L. (1993). *The responsive public library collection: how to develop and market it.* Englewood: Libraries Unlimited.

Barton, D. & Hamilton, M. (1998). *Local Literacies - Reading and writing in one community*. London: Routledge.

Bayley, J (1999). "Other worlds to inhabit". In: Salwak, D. (ed), *A Passion for Books*, pp.21-32. London: MacMillan Press.

Bennett, A. (1995). *Readers and Reading*. London: Longman.

Best Value: La Publishing 2000

Biber, D. (1998). *Variation across speech and writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bolam,F. (2000). *Buy, Borrow, or Beg? An investigation into how fiction readers get their books.* MA, University of Sheffield.

Book Marketing. (1996). *Heavy book borrowers: a report of the leisure habits of key library users*. London: Book Marketing.

Book Marketing Ltd & The Reading Partnership (2000). *Reading the Situation ~ Book reading, buying & borrowing habits in Britain.* London: Book Marketing Ltd. (Library and Information Commission Report no. 34).

British National Bibliography Research Fund Report. (1998). *Public library stock management. Report number 90.* Leeds: NAG.

Brown, R. (1976). *Children and Television*. London: Collier MacMillan.

Brown, R. (1988). *Group Processes- Dynamics within & between groups*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Bryman, A (1989). *Research methods and organization studies.* London, Unwin.

Butler, D. (1995). *Babies need Books.* Third Edition. UK: Penguin

Capital Planning Information. (1987). *Trends in Public Library Selection Policies.* British National Bibliography Research Fund Report 29.

Carter, N., Klein, R. & Day, P. (1992). How organisations measure success: the use of performance measures in government. London: Routledge.

Chambers, A. "Save us from populist tyrants". The Bookseller 14/07/2000:p.12.

Chambers & Stoll. (1996). *Book Selection in Public Libraries*. London: The British Library Board. (British National Bibliography Research Fund Report No. 80).

Cole, N. & Usherwood, B (1996). Library Stock Management: policies, statements, and philosophies. Public Library Journal 11(5).

Comedia. (1993). *Borrowed Time? The future of public libraries in the UK*. London: Comedia and Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.

Corbin, J. & Strauss, A. (eds) (1997). *Grounded Theory in Practice*. London: Sage.

Damiani, M. (1999) *Public Libraries stock management policies (formal and informal) and patterns of choice in stock selection occurring in work situations.* MA, University of Sheffield.

Davis, P. (1992) *The experience of reading*. London, Redbridge.

Denzin, N. K. (1978). *The research act: A theoretical introduction to sociological methods* (2nd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill

Dombey, H. (1994) *First steps together: home-school early literacy in European contexts.* Stoke-on-Trent, Trentham Books.

Eco, U. (1984). *The Role of the Reader- Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts.* USA: Indiana University Press.

England, L. (1992). *Borrowing Books: readership and library usage in Great Britain*. London: Book Marketing. (British National Bibliography research fund report 59).

England, L. & Sumsion, J (1995). *Perspectives of public library use: a compendium of survey information*. Loughborough: Library and Information Statistics Unit; London: Book Marketing.

Evans, K. (1999) *Why/how do people choose the fiction they borrow from Sheffield public libraries - both personal reasons (e.g. personal taste and interests, age, social*

background, for choice and library aspects/actions which may influence/direct choice (selection policies, physical layout and arrangement, promotion guidance etc)? MA, University of Sheffield.

Fink, A. (1998). *Conducting research literature reviews: from paper to the Internet.* London: Sage.

Fish, S. (1980). *Is there a text in this class? The Authority of Interpretative Communities.* London: Harvard University Press.

Gerrig, R.J. (1993). *Experiencing Narrative Worlds.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Gibbons, F. (1999). "*A revealing turn-up for the books*", The Guardian. (15/11/99) p.5.

Goff, M. (1985). "Promoting the Reading Habit. " in *Back to Books*, editor P.Mann, Loughborough University, Department of Library & Information studies, report number 44, pp.1 – 12. Loughborough University Press.

Goodall, D. (1989). *Browsing in Public Libraries.* Library & Information Statistics Unit Department of Library & Information Studies Loughborough University of Technology.

Gray, A. (1992). *Video playtime: the gendering of a leisure technology*. London: Routledge.

Greenhalgh, L. (1993). *The public library as a place.* (Comedia Working Paper no. 2) London: Comedia.

Greenhalgh, L. and Worpole, K with Landry, C. (1995). *Libraries in a world of cultural change*. London: UCL Press.

Hamshere, S.J. (1990)*"Exploration and Escape": The needs fulfilled by borrowing books from a public library*. MA, University of Sheffield.

Hannon, P. (1995) *Literacy, home and school: research and practice in teaching literacy*. London, Falmer.

Hatt, F. (1976). *The Reading Process: A framework for analysis and description.* London: Clive Bingley.

Heeks, P. (1989). *Public libraries and the arts: an evolving partnership*. London: The Library Association with the support of the Arts.

Hermes, J. (1995). *Reading women's magazines: an analysis of everyday media use.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Hoggart, R. (1957). *The uses of literacy: aspects of working-class life with special reference to publications and entertainments*. London: Chatto & Windus.

Horsman, J. (1990). *Something in my mind besides the everyday: women and literacy.* Toronto: Women's Press.

Jennings, B & Sear, L (1986) "How readers select fiction: a survey in Kent" Public Library Journal **1**(4) pp.43-47.

Kinnell, M. & Shepherd, J. (1998). *Promoting reading to adults in UK public libraries*. British Library Research & Innovation Report 72. UK: British Library Board 1998.

Kinnell, M. (1991). *Managing fiction in public libraries*. London: LA publishing.

Krashen, S.D. (1993). *The power of reading: Insights from the research*. Englewood: Libraries Unlimited.

Kruegar, R.A. (1994). Focus Groups - *A practical guide for applied research.* Second Edition. USA: Sage Publications.

Landry, C. (1993). *Fundamental dilemmas for public libraries.* (Comedia Working Paper no. 4). London: Comedia.

Lee, H. (1996)*"Her and her Books"; a study of female experiences of reading.* MA, University of Sheffield.

Library and Information Commission. (1997). *New library: the people's network*. UK: LIC.

Linley, R. & Usherwood, B (1998). *New Measures for the New Library: A Social Audit.* British Library Research & Innovation Report 89. CEPLIS (University of Sheffield).

Lockhart, D.C. (ed) (1984). *Making effective use of mailed questionnaires*. London: Jossey-Bass.

Luckman, B. (1971) The Library in Society. Library Association research publication No.4. London: Library Association Publishing.

McClellan, A.W. (1977). "Reading: the other side of the equation." *Journal of Librarianship* 9 (1), 38-48.

McClellan, A.W. (1981). "The reading dimension in effectiveness and service." *Library Review* (Summer), 77-84.

McKearney, M. (1990). *Well Worth Reading*. Winchester: Well Worth Reading.

McKearney, M. (1999). "*Spreading the word*". Public Library Journal **14** (4) pp106-107.

McKee, B. (1992). "How does literature fit into Libraries' overall objectives?" In Van Riel, R (Ed). *Reading the Future: A place for literature in public libraries.* London: The Arts Council of Great Britain and Library Association Publishing.

McQuail, D. (1969). *Mass Communication Theory: An Introduction*. London: Sage.

Manguel, A. (1996). *A History of Reading*. London: Flamingo.

Manguel, A. (1998). *Into the looking glass wood.* Canada: Alfred A. Knopf.

Mann. P.H. (1971). Books, Buyers and Borrowers. London: Andre Deutsch.

Mann, P.H. (1991). "Fiction Readers: what people want to read." In Kinnell, M. (Ed). *Managing Fiction in Libraries.* London: Library Association Publishing.

Mann, P. (1982). *From Author to Reader. A social study of books*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Mann, P.H. & Burgoyne, J. (1969). *Books and Reading*. London: Andre Deutsch.

Mason, J. (1996). *Qualitative researching.* London: Sage.

Mataraaso, F. (1988). *Learning Development: An Introduction to the Social Impact of Libraries.* London: Comedia.

Moore, N (2000). *How to do research: the complete guide to designing and managing research projects. 3rd edition*. London: Library Association.

Morris, A., Hawkins, M and Sumsion, J. (2001) *The economic value of public libraries.* LIC Libraries and Information Commission Research report 89

Moser, C. (1999). *A Fresh Start: Improving Literacy and Numeracy*. Sudbury: DfEE.

Naylor, C. " Liverpool scores with supplier selection". The Bookseller 02/06/2000: p: 28&29.

Nell, V. (1988). *Lost in a book - The psychology of reading for pleasure.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Nicholson, V. (1987). *The Political Dimension*. In: Coleman, P.M. Libraries and the Arts in action or inaction. Proceedings of the Sheffield Conference 1985. Sheffield City Libraries 90-95.

"Novel Remedy" for Illness (2000). BBC/Homepage/WorldService/Education http:new.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/newsid-837000/837148.stm. Site accessed 17 July 2000.

OECD (1997). Literacy Skills for the knowledge society: Further Results from the International Adult Literacy Survey. Paris Cedex: OECD, Human Resources Development Canada and Statistics Canada.

Office of Arts and Libraries. (1990). *Keys to Success: Performance Indicators for Libraries.* London: HMSO.

Ormes, S. & Criddle, S (1998). "Putting imagination on line", Library Association Record. **100**(9) pp.478-479.

O'Rourke, R. (1993). Unpopular Readers: the case for genre fiction. (Comedia working papers no. 7). London: Comedia.

Phelan, K. (1993). Libraries & Reading Promotion Schemes. (Comedia working papers no. 5). London: Comedia.

Pritchard, N. and Usherwood, B (1989) Publicly-funded libraries expenditure in the private sector. A study of Yorkshire and Humberside libraries. Yorkshire and Humberside Branch of the Library Association.

Proctor, R. Lee, H. Reilly, R. (1998). Access to public libraries: the impact of opening hours reductions and closures 1986-1997. British Library Research and Innovation Centre.

Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964. London: H.M.S.O.

Pybus, R. L. (1998). *The management of books in public libraries.* West Ashton: The Pybus Partnership.

Radway, J.A. (1983). *Women Read the Romance: The Interaction of Text and Context.* Feminist Studies **9**, 1 (Spring 1983).

Reuben, J. & Spiller, D. (1999). *Paperbacks in Public Libraries. Loughborough: Library & Information Statistics Unit.*

Rosenblatt, L.M. (1991). *The Experience of Reading*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.

Ross, C. (1999). *Finding without seeking: The information encounter in the context of reading for pleasure.* Submitted to: Information Processing and Management.

Sabine, G. A. & Sabine, P. (1983). *Books that made the difference: what people told us.* Hamden, Conneticut: Library Professional Publications.

Salwak, D. (1999). *A Passion for Books*. London: MacMillan Press Limited.

Scothern, C. (2000). Reader Development: What makes a successful Reading Group. How good practice and development can be created and sustained. MA, University of Sheffield.

Sear, L & Jennings, B. (1991) "Organising fiction for use." In Kinnell, M. (ed) Managing Fiction in public libraries. Pp101-119. Loughborough: Library Association.

Singleton, J. (1999). The value of popular fiction: the experiences of crime fiction readers in Warringon Public Library. MA, University of Sheffield.

Smith, H.S.A. (1938). "*Wanted: facts about fiction.*" Library Association Record, **4**(1) pp.164-166.

Spenceley, N. (1980). *The readership of Literary Fiction: A survey of library users in the Sheffield Area.* MA, University of Sheffield.

Spiller, D. (1980). *Book selection: an introduction to principles and practice.* Third Edition. London: Clive Bingley.

Spink, J. (1989) *Children as readers: a study*. London, Bingley.

Sproat, I. (1993). *Paper to public library authorities conference, Torquay.* Reported in the *LA Record,* November**,** pp.596-597.

Stainer, C. (1997). *Towards a philosophy of stock management: entertainment, "high seriousness" and the public library.* MA, University of Sheffield.

Strauss, A. L. & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory.* Second edition. London: SAGE.

Streatfield, D., Markless, S. Cookman, N. Herbert, D., McCulloch, S. & Swan, R.(2000). *Better value and better performances in libraries.* Information Management Associates for the Library & Information Commission.

Sumsion, J (1992). "Who reads what in libraries", In Van Riel, R (Ed). *Reading the Future: A place for literature in public libraries.* London: The Arts Council of Great Britain and Library Association Publishing.

Tawney, R. H. (1975) *Equality*. 4th ed. London, Unwin Books.

Taylor, C. (1999). *"How was it for you?"~ An investigation into the experience of reading imaginative literature, and the benefits that this may have for its readers.* MA, University of Sheffield.

Usherwood, B. (1989). *The public library as public knowledge*. London: Library Association.

Usherwood, B. (1993) *Public library politics.* London, Library Association.

Usherwood, B (1996). *Rediscovering public library management.* London: Library Association.

Usherwood, B., Proctor, R., Bower, G., Coe, C. & Stevens, T (1999). *Retain, Recruit & Lead.* Centre for the Public Library and Information in Society. University of Sheffield for Resource. Library and Information Commission Research Report 106

Van Riel, R. (ed) (1992.) *Reading the Future: a place for literature in public libraries.* London: Arts Council: Library Association Publishing.

Van Riel, R. (1993). The case for fiction. *Public Library Journal* **8**(3) pp.81-84.

Van Riel, R. & Fowler, O. (1996). *Opening the Book.* England: Bradford Libraries

Walkey, E. (2000). *Reader Development; The role of the web page in reader development and fiction promotion.* MA, University of Sheffield.

Ward, Martin L. (1977). Re*aders and library users: a study of reading habits and public library use.* London: Library Association.

West, W.J. (1991). *The Strange Rise of Semi-Literate England - the dissolution of the libraries.* Great Britain: Billing & Sons Ltd.

Willig, C.J. (1990). *Children's concepts and the primary curriculum*. London: Paul Chapman.

Wolfendale, S. (1997) *Meeting special needs in early years.* London, David Fulton.

Worpole, K. (1993). *The public library & the bookshop.* (Comedia Working Paper no. 3). London: Comedia.

Zadek, S. (1998). *Making values count: contemporary experience in social and ethical accountability.* London: Certified Accountants Educational Trust. (ACCA research report No. 57).

Appendix 1:

Members of Steering Group

Pat Beech **Central Services Librarian**: **Shropshire Community and Information Service**

Michael Curtis Consultant:

Debbie Hicks The Reading Partnership

Grace Kempster Head of Library, Information, Heritage & Cultural Services. Essex County Council

Miranda McKearney The Reading Partnership

Martin Molloy Director of Libraries & Heritage. Derbyshire County Council

Jane Stubbs Service Opportunities Manager, Leeds Library & Information Services

Appendix 2:

Student Dissertations

(NB. These are not published, but may be borrowed from the University of Sheffield)

Damiani, M. (1999). ***Public Libraries stock management policies (formal and informal) and patterns of choice in stock selection occurring in work situations.*** MA, University of Sheffield.

Evans, K. *(1999).**Why/how do people choose the fiction they borrow from Sheffield public libraries - both personal reasons (e.g. personal taste and interests, age, social background, for choice and library aspects/actions which may influence/direct choice (selection policies, physical layout and arrangement, promotion guidance etc.)?*** MA, University of Sheffield.

Hamshere, S.J. (1990). ***"Exploration and Escape": The needs fulfilled by borrowing books from a public library.*** MA, University of Sheffield.

Lee, H. (1996). ***"Her and her Books"; a study of female experiences of reading.*** MA, University of Sheffield.

Li, M.(1999). ***The role of promotional activities & measures in improving access to materials and services in public libraries.*** MA, University of Sheffield.

Singleton, J. (1999). ***The Value of Popular Fiction: the experience of crime fiction readers in Warrington Public library.*** MA, University of Sheffield.

Spenceley, N. (1980). ***The Readership of Literary Fiction: A survey of library users in the Sheffield Area.*** MA, University of Sheffield.

Stainer, C. (1997). ***Towards a philosophy of stock management: entertainment, "high seriousness" and the public library.*** MA, University of Sheffield.

Taylor, C. (1999).***"How was it for you?"~ An investigation into the experience of reading imaginative literature, and the benefits that this may have for its readers.*** MA, University of Sheffield.

Ton, N. (1997). ***The currency of fiction in public libraries : the impact of funding reductions.*** MA, University of Sheffield.

Year 2000 students:

Davis, C (2000). ***Five Years on. Evaluation of the Broxtowe Bookstart Programme (Nottingham)***

Scothern, C. (2000). ***Reader Development: What makes a successful Reading Group. How good practice and development can be created and sustained.***

Walkey, E. (2000). ***Reader Development: The role of the web page in reader development and fiction promotion.***

Appendix 3:

Questionnaire issued in November 1999

UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD
DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION STUDIES
POSTAL ADDRESS: Western Bank, Sheffield S10 2TN
LOCATION: Regent Court, 211 Portobello Street, Sheffield S1 4DP
TEL. 0114-2222679 FAX. 0114-2780300
E-Mail: j.toyne@sheffield.ac.uk

3 November 1999

Dear Sir/Madam

Checking the Books: The Value and Impact of Public Library Book Reading.

The Arts and Humanities Research Board has provided funds to enable this department to examine the value and impact of public library book reading. The aim of the research is to make explicit to policy makers and practitioners the value of public libraries in providing access to imaginative literature and promoting reading. As part of the research, we will investigate and identify the library's role in developing and promoting reading through:

* the choice and selection of reading material;
* direct intervention to give individuals the best possible reading experience
* promotional activities, and partnerships with literary and community organizations.

To this end, we are beginning the research by contacting all of the library authorities in the UK. We hope that you or one of your colleagues will be able to complete the enclosed questionnaire and also provide us with any relevant documentation in relation to your own stock management including selection policies. It would assist us greatly if you were able to respond to this request by 17th November 1999. If you require any help or further information, please do not hesitate in contacting me, or the project head Professor Bob Usherwood, on the above phone number.

As always we are aware of the demands for information that are placed upon you but I hope that you will agree that this research is particularly valuable at this moment in time and that we can therefore count on your co-operation.

Yours sincerely,

J.M.Toyne
Research Associate.

Confidential

The Value and Impact of Public Library Book Reading.

Name and address of library authority:	For Project Use: Date Received:
Respondent's name: Position: Telephone number:	Documents received:

Question 1.
Does your service provide or is it considering to provide the following?

	Currently provide	Considering	Not considering
Booklists/ Newsletters			
Reader in Residence			
Writer in Residence			
Book/ Reading discussion groups			
Reading Chains			
Reader to Reader Reviews			
Promotional Events. Eg. Book Weeks			
Book displays/ dumpbins			
Reading events with authors			
Web-based fiction discussions			
Other: (Please State)			

Question 2.
Do you have a written stock management and selection policy?
Yes/Considering/Not considering

If yes, could you please send a copy with your completed questionnaire. Postal expenses can be re-imbursed where required.

Question 3.
Do you have a member of staff who specialises in fiction development/ reader advice?

Yes/Considering/Not considering

Question 4.
A member of staff from a number of authorities will be invited to take part in a follow-up interview. If you are willing to take part in the second stage of this project, please indicate by ticking the box:
Yes ☐ No ☐

Signed:_____Date:_____

Please return this questionnaire and any documentation to:
Jackie Toyne
Department of Information Studies
University of Sheffield
Regent Court
211 Portobello Street
Sheffield S1 4DP

to arrive by 17th November 1999. Thank you for your help and cooperation

Appendix 4:

Local Authorities selected for further Data Collection

Key: B=Booklists/Newsletters; RiR= Reader in Residence; WiR=Writer in residence; RG= Book/Reading Groups; RC= Reading Chains; RR= Reader to Reader Reviews; PE= Promotional Events.(eg. Book Weeks); BD= Book Displays/ Dump Bins; AE= Author Events; WB= Web-based fiction discussions.
SMP= Stock Management Policy.

County Councils:

- ***[1]South Midlands ~ Hung***

i)Currently provide: B/RG/PE/BD/AE ~ Considering: RiR/WiR
ii)SMP "Yes, second edition being revised"
iii) *Branching Out* authority.
iv) Specialist member of staff who specialises in fiction development/fiction advice in post

- ***[2]North Midlands ~ Labour***

i)Currently provide: B/RiR/RG/RC/RR/PE/BD/AE ~ Considering: WiR/WB ~ Other: *Millennium Literature Festival*
ii)SMP written 26 March 1999(draft).(Page covers display/promotion - spending on fiction clearly laid down)
iii) *Branching Out* authority.
iv) Specialist member of staff who specialises in fiction development/fiction advice in post

- ***[3]East Midlands ~ Conservative***

i)Currently provide: B/RiR/WiR/RG/RC/PE/BD/AE/WB
ii)SMP " Yes, currently being revised and updated."
iii) Specialist member of staff who specialises in fiction development/fiction advice in post

Metropolitan Borough Councils:

- ***[4]North West England ~ Labour***

i)Currently provide: B/RG/RR/PE/BD/AE/WB ~ Considering: RiR/WiR
ii)SMP "not as a single document but we have elements of such a policy within our library plan and elsewhere."
iii) *Branching Out* authority.
iv) Specialist member of staff who specialises in fiction development/fiction advice in post

- ***[5]Central England ~ Libdem***

i)Currently provide: B/RG/RR/PE/BD/AE ~ Considering: RiR/WB
ii)SMP "In preparation."

Unitary Authorities:

- ***[6]South East England ~ Conservative***

i)Currently provide: B/PE/BD ~ Considering: RG/AE ~ Other: *Adult Literacy Bookstart*
ii)SMP written(date not given). Includes section on fiction "standards of provision" and "standard criteria for resource assessment."
iii) Specialist member of staff who specialises in fiction development/fiction advice in post

- ***[7]North East England ~ Labour***

i)Currently provide: B/PE/BD/AE ~ Considering: RiR/WiR/RG/RC/RR/WB # Other: *Hosting a writer's circle.*
ii)SMP written (date not given). Includes section on fiction and responsibility of library in fiction provision.

London Boroughs:

- ***[8] A Conservative Borough***

i)Currently provide: B/PE/BD/AE ~ Considering: RG/RR
ii) SMP enclosed "but currently being updated."
iii) Specialist member of staff who specialises in fiction development/fiction advice in post

- ***[9]A Labour Borough***

i)Currently provide: RG/RR/PE/BD/AE ~ Considering: B/WB ~ Other: *Literature Development Worker (promoting both reading and writing).*
ii) SMP- "most relevant aspect of stock management documentation enclosed." Based on the reading partnership advocacy pack. Very unusual layout, large amount of emphasis on reader development.
iii) Specialist member of staff who specialises in fiction development/fiction advice in post.

- **[10]Scottish Unitary:** ***Central Scotland ~ Labour***

i)Currently provide: RG/PE/BD/AE ~ Considering: B/WiR/RR/WB
ii) Considering SMP.

- **[11]Welsh Unitary:** ***South West ~ Labour***

i)Currently provide: RG/PE/BD/AE ~ Considering: B
ii)SMP written July 1999. Eight page document, page on fiction provision and range of stock (to include Welsh language).
iii) Specialist member of staff who specialises in fiction development/fiction advice in post.

- **[12]Northern Ireland:** ***Ulster Unionist Party***

i)Currently provide: RG/PE/BD/AE/WB ~ Considering: B/RR
ii)SMP written August 1996. Five page document of which, 1/2 page dedicated to fiction selection.

Appendix 5:

Schedule of questions for focus groups.

Introductory question:
Could each of you in turn introduce yourself.

Question 1.
What contribution if any has reading imaginative literature made to your life?

NB. If there are non-readers in the group, need to ask *why?*

Prompts:

- *Think back to some books that you have read. What kind of experience did you get from them?*
- *Is there a particular book which has altered your attitude or set of beliefs? If so, in what ways?*
- *What would it be like if for one reason or another you were unable to read?*

Question 2.
How, if at all, has using the public library influenced your reading experience?

Prompts:

- *Is it always a positive experience?*
- *How do you select your library books?*
- *Do you think that that the public library encourages you to take risks with your reading which perhaps you wouldn't do if you were buying a book?*
- *How do you rate the fiction stock held by your library?*
- *Consider the range of stock, and the availability of out of print books.*
- *Suppose the particular title you wanted was not available on the library shelf. A] How would you feel? B] What would you do about it?*
- *Would you like the opportunity to be involved in the selection of imaginative literature for your library.*
- *Libraries already employ various methods to encourage the reading experience e.g. newsletters, reading groups, etc. In what ways is reader development promoted within your library service?*
- *What has been the most useful to you as a reader?*

Question 3:
How might libraries encourage reading amongst people who do not read at the moment?

Prompts:

- *What prevents people from reading?*
- *What prevents people using libraries?*
- *What can be done by the library service to change this?*

Question 4:
<u>If you had your local councillor in front of you, drawing on your own experience how would you explain the value of public library book reading?</u>

Prompts:

- *What would it be like if for one reason or another you were unable to use the public library?*
- *What do you consider to be the library's responsibility in your reading experience?*

Final Question:

A brief summary of what has been discussed will be given by the interviewer, using key words and phrases extracted from the debate to ensure a true essence of the discussion has been captured.
<u>Have we missed anything, has anyone anything to add?</u>

(All participants were asked to provide the following information:)

In order to compare your responses with those of other groups and to help us with our final analysis, we would be grateful if you could provide the following details:
Your name:_____

Age group (please indicate): 18-21
22-29
30-44
45-54
55-64
65-74
75-over

How would you describe your occupation:
Looking after someoneSeeking work
Part-time paid employmentRetired
Full-time paid employmentAt college/university
Self-employedOther
Voluntary work

Appendix 6:

Schedule of questions for Managers of Stock Management and Selection Policy

Introduction:

1. Tell me about your stock management policy?
1a).For those authorities with a written SMP ~ What is the philosophy behind the stock selection criteria stated in your SMP?
1b).For those authorities considering or without a written SMP~ What are the general criteria you are using currently for the selection of fiction?

2. Is it the responsibility of the public library to influence the reading experience of users?
_____

3. What part can the library play?
_____

4. Can you put the following methods in order of greatest influence in your stock selection practice?
Internet
CD Rom
Approval services
Borrower requests
Other (please state.....)
(Or scale:

1. Most popular method of selection
2. Very regularly
3. Frequently used
4. Rarely
5. Not at all

5. What are the major difficulties you face in selecting and obtaining fiction titles?
_____

6. Are all members of staff involved in fiction stock selection? Yes/No
*Why is this the case?*_____

7. To what extent should user demand be used to determine stock selection? (On a scale of 1-5)
1.All requests budget allowing should be bought
2.Over 75% of requests should be bought
3.Equally - 50/50
4.Less than 25% even if budget allowing
5.Not at all.
*Would you like to expand on this?*_____

8. How do you evaluate the success or otherwise of your authority's fiction selection?

---

9. What, in your opinion, does reading imaginative literature contribute to the life of your library users?

---

10. Have you undertaken any user studies into any of the following?
How readers choose their books
Evaluation of methods of reading promotion for adults
Book selection in relation to reader promotion
Other relevant user studies? (Please state)
We would be grateful to have a copy of any such research.

11. How would you rate reader development in your service priorities?
Essential
Very important
Important
Not particularly important
A waste of resources.
Would you like to expand on this?

12. Does reader development feature in any performance indicators you may use? Yes/No
If yes, what are the indicators you use?

---

13. What percentage of your budget is attributed to reader development?

Is this a specified budget? Yes/No
If No, please give details .....

14. In what ways is reader development promoted by your service?

---

15. What has been the most successful reader development promotion employed by your service?

I am going to read five statements. Please choose for each of them the response which is nearest to your own opinion. After each one there will be an opportunity to explain and make further comments, if you wish.

16. Staff are often reluctant to promote titles
Agree Strongly
Agree
No opinion
Disagree
Disagree strongly

Why do you feel this is?

17. Reader development too often relies on the personal enthusiasm of an individual member of staff
Agree Strongly
Agree
No opinion
Disagree
Disagree strongly
What is your experience of this?

18. All professional librarians should have a knowledge of reading
Agree Strongly
Agree
No opinion
Disagree
Disagree strongly
Would you like to expand on this?

19. Advising readers in their choice of books should be included in job descriptions of all front line staff
Agree Strongly
Agree
No opinion
Disagree
Disagree strongly
Why?

20. All library authority's should include at least one *Readers Advisors* post
Agree Strongly
Agree
No opinion
Disagree
Disagree strongly
What makes you think this?

21. It would be preferable for librarians to spend less time in selection and more in fiction promotion and reader development Agree StronglyAgree
No opinion
Disagree
Disagree strongly
Would you like to expand on this?

22. In what ways, if any, is your library service encouraging and developing reading amongst people who do not read at the moment?

_____

23. What more do you think libraries can do in regard to this?

_____

24. How do you explain the value of public library book reading to politicians and policy makers?

---

25. Have you prepared any committee papers on reading or reader development?
Yes/No
If yes, could we please have a copy.

26. Finally, do you think that we have missed anything, is there anything that you would like to add?

Appendix 7:

Schedule of questions for people working in arts & cultural industries

Introduction:

1. Could you introduce yourself. Please say something about the nature of your work and whether or not, you have been involved in fiction promotion or reader development.

_____

2. What do you know about the public library's stock management policy?

_____

3. Have you ever been consulted to make a contribution?

_____

4. Would you like such an opportunity?

_____

5. Is it the responsibilty of the public library to influence the reading of users?

_____

6. What part can the library play?

_____

7. In your opinion, what does reading imaginative literature contribute to the life of library users? _____

8. How can the public library evaluate the success of its fiction selection?

_____

9. How would you rate reader development provided by the public library service?
Essential
Very important
Important
Not particularly important
A waste of resources.
Would you like to expand on this?

10. In what ways is reader development promoted by your local public library service?

_____

I am going to read three statements. Using the words on the card, please choose for each of them the response which is nearest to your own opinion. After each one there will be an opportunity to explain and make further comments, if you wish.

11. Reader development too often relies on the personal enthusiasm of an individual member of staff
Agree Strongly
Agree
No opinion
Disagree
Disagree strongly
What is your experience of this?

12. All library staff should have a knowledge of reading
Agree Strongly
Agree
No opinion
Disagree
Disagree strongly
Would you like to expand on this?

13. Advising readers in their choice of books should be included in job descriptions of all front line library staff
Agree Strongly
Agree
No opinion
Disagree
Disagree strongly
What makes you believe this?

14. Readers Advisors posts should be introduced into all library authorities
Agree Strongly
Agree
No opinion
Disagree
Disagree strongly
Why?

15. In what ways is your local library service encouraging and developing reading amongst people who do not read at the moment?
_____

16. What more do you think libraries can do in regard to this?
_____

17. In what ways would you like to see the library and your organization working together in reader development?

_____

18. In your experience, what factors determine the success or failure of such partnerships?

_____

19. Do you include reading and reader development in the cultural plans you submit to DCMS?/

_____

20. How do you explain the value of public library book reading to politicians and policy makers?

_____

21. Finally, do you think that we have missed anything, is there anything that you would like to add?

_____

Appendix 8:

Schedule of questions for Library Chair of Committee

Introduction:
Briefly introduce myself and outline the nature of the research.

1. What do you know about the public library's stock management policy?

---

2. What contribution, if any, do your committee make to this?

---

3. Is it the responsibility of the public library to influence the reading experience of users?

---

4. What part can the library play?

---

5. In your opinion, what does the reading of imaginative literature contribute to the life of library users?

---

6. How can the public library evaluate the success of its fiction selection?

---

7. How would you rate reader development in relation to other priorities, including access to IT, in your service?
Essential
Very important
Important
Not particularly important
A waste of resources.
Would you like to expand on this?

8. In what ways is reader development promoted by your local service?

I am going to read three statements. Please choose for each of them the response which is nearest to your own opinion. After each one there will be an opportunity to explain and make further comments, if you wish.

9. All library staff should have a knowledge of reading
Agree Strongly
Agree
No opinion
Disagree
Disagree strongly
Would you like to expand on this?

10. Advising readers in their choice of books should be included in job descriptions of all front line staff
Agree Strongly
Agree
No opinion
Disagree
Disagree strongly
What makes you believe this?

11. In what ways is your library service encouraging and developing reading amongst people who do not read at the moment?

---

12. What more do you think libraries can do in regard to this?

---

13. What evidence do you require to evaluate the value and impact of public library book reading?

---

14. When planning your local budget for the provision of all services, how would you persuade your political colleagues of the importance of the library's provision of imaginative literature to your community?

---

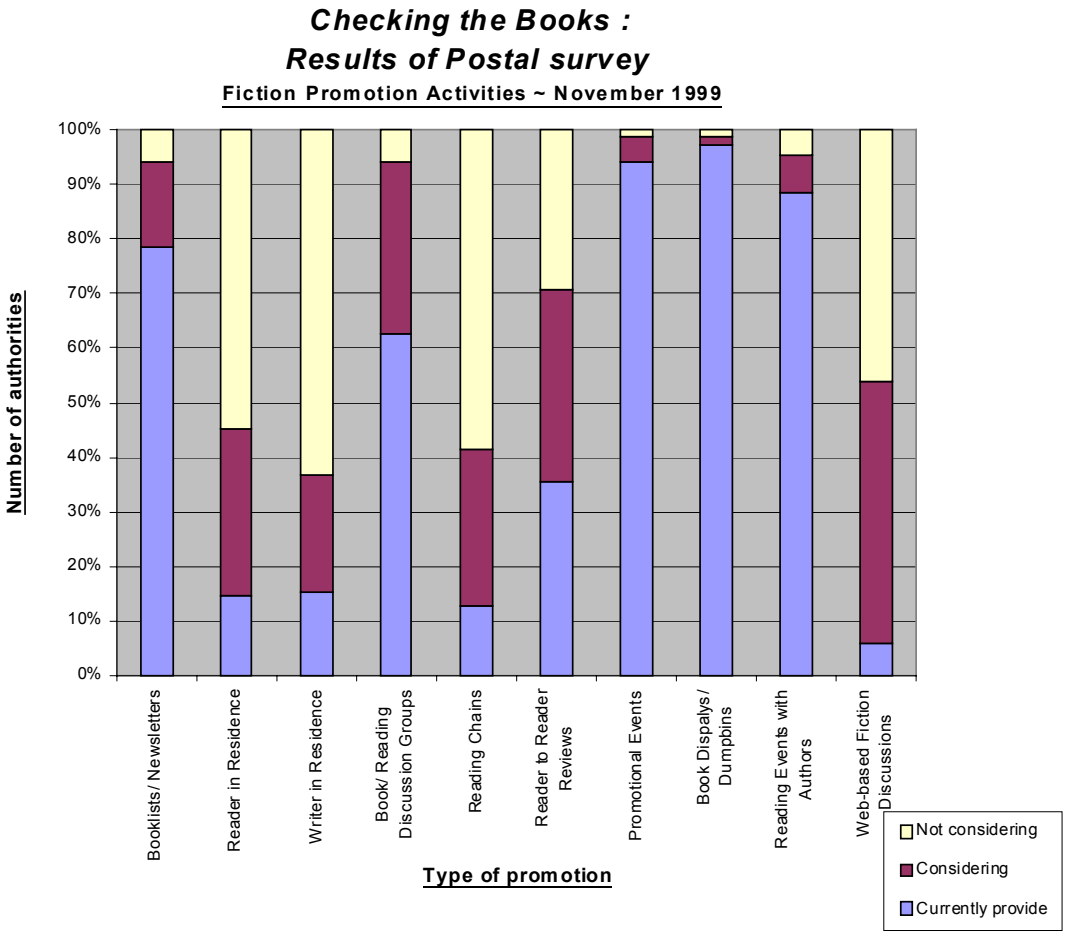
15. Finally, do you think that we have missed anything, is there anything that you would like to add?

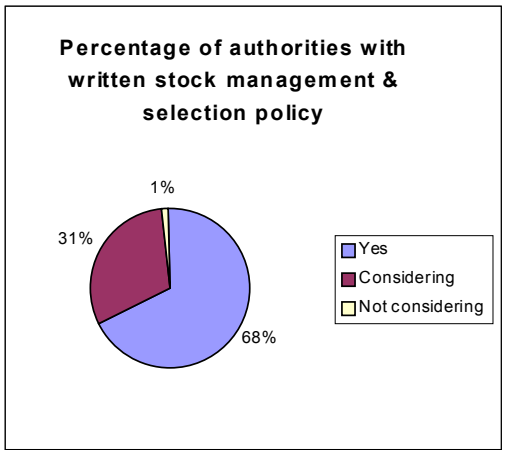
Appendix 9:

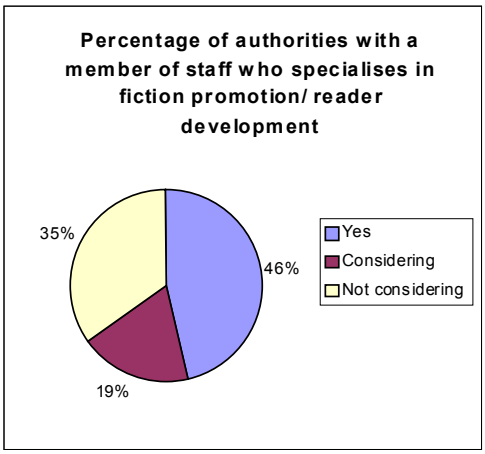
List of focus group participants

Authority 1	*C2M Group-millennium group [1]* *Weight Watchers [2]* *Art Group [3]* *Library ~ Reading Group[4]*
Authority 2	*Community Library Reading Group[5]* *Baptist Church Housegroup[6]* *New Life Church Cell Group[7]*
Authority 3	*Housebound Users[8]* *Pensioner's Group[9]*
Authority 4	*Lunchtime Reading Group for Council Employees[10]* *Reading Group in Old people's complex[11]*
Authority 5	*Literary Society[12]*
Authority 6	*Writers Circle[13]* *IT in the Community ~ New Deal[14]*
Authority 7	*Writers Group[15]* *Group from Townswomen's Guild [16]* *3 x Women's Institute Groups [17,18,19]* *Comprehensive school former pupils [20]* *(Ex- Pupils 1992)*
Authority 8	*2 x Library Coffee Morning groups[21,22]* *Library Action Group[23]* *WEA Autobiography Writers Workshop[24]* *Library Reading Group[25]* *MA Librarianship Students [26]*
Authority 9	*Library Reading Group[27].* *2 x groups from Afro-Caribbean community group[28,29].*

Appendix 10:


Checking the Books :
Results of Postal survey
Fiction Promotion Activities ~ November 1999
Number of authorities
100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
Booklists/ Newsletters
Reader in Residence
Writer in Residence
Book/ Reading Discussion Groups
Reading Chains
Reader to Reader Reviews
Promotional Events
Book Dispalys/ Dumpbins
Reading Events with Authors
Web-based Fiction Discussions
Type of promotion
Not considering
Considering
Currently provide


Percentage of authorities with written stock management & selection policy
1%
31%
68%
Yes
Considering
Not considering


Percentage of authorities with a member of staff who specialises in fiction promotion/ reader development
35%
46%
19%
Yes
Considering
Not considering