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Stock Quality Health Check:

An evaluation

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1. Introduction

In December 2005, the Centre for the Public Library and Information in Society (CPLIS) was invited by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) to carry out an evaluation of the ***Stock Quality Health Check***, its use and impact, value and potential role in public library performance measurement. Fieldwork for the project was carried out between February and March 2006. This report presents the research team's findings and recommendations.

2. Background

In its report ***Building Better Library Services*** (2002), the Audit Commission identified issues facing library authorities in relation to book stock. It recommended that library services should direct their resources to providing the books and information services that people want and need.

The *Public Libraries Stock Quality Health Check* (adult fiction and poetry) (now referred to in the public library community as SQHC) is a practical tool to help deliver these objectives. The Audit Commission worked in partnership with the Arts Council of England and the Department of Culture Media and Sport (DCMS), the Museums Libraries and Archives Council (MLA), and the Society of Chief Librarians (SCL) to develop the concept of the tool. A contract was awarded to **Opening the Book** (an independent reading promotion agency) to develop SQHC and run the project for three years (2004-2006), after pilot testing prior to this.

What is the Stock Quality Health Check?

SQHC: a working definition
The rationale and background to SQHC is set out in an Audit Commission Briefing Paper (May 2004).

> ► *Most libraries purchase books as they are published, using information from suppliers. Some have clear policies while others work more from instinct. [….] Budgets often control how much of a specific format is purchased and totals can be easily tracked. Different staff may select fiction and non-fiction, which means that the overall balance between the two can be managed. [….] But at a more detailed level, are you aware of the balance between the two different types of books in your collection? [….] Do you have books that cater for all? These are some of the questions that the Stock Quality Health Check will help to answer. Reading audiences? Do you stock key classics and are you keeping up-to-date with changes in reading habits and preferences? Do you have books which appeal to different age groups and to both men and women?*

The Arts Council perspective
The Arts Council, one of the 'founding partners' of the SQHC, placed its emphasis (Audit Commission Briefing Paper paragraph 6) on the importance of diversity and independent presses to give readers as broad a cultural experience as possible through literature.

Book selection: which communities?
The Audit Commission's Briefing Paper also offers (paragraph 5) a short definition of the SQHC:

> ►*The Library Stock Quality Health Check provides an important self-assessment toolkit to enable libraries to assess the relevance, depth and range of stock they hold in relation to the profile of the communities they serve.*

Opening the Book has emphasised in discussions with the Steering Group and the researchers that 'communities they serve' includes communities with different reading preferences as much as different income/social class/educational experience. It points out that, for example, SQHC checks for balance between four generations of light women's fiction*: Period Saga; Saga/Romance; Young Saga/romance*; and *Chick lit.* This is not correlated to *social class* or *geography* but it does represent a range of *reading audiences*.

SQHC: a diverging view of its aim?
We feel it is important at the outset to note these perspectives on the part of the different project partners, of what SQHC is trying to measure. If there is or has been a difference of emphasis, this has inevitably filtered into the public library community, the perception of what SQHC seeks to achieve and by extension to the complexities of the evaluation process.

Public library policy: the wider policy context
The work by Opening the Book to develop the SQHC and the use of the tool by library authorities during 2004-5, has coincided with a number of related policy initiatives and consultations at national level.

These initiatives relate to:

- **Performance measurement and stock procurement in public libraries** (including CPA (Comprehensive Performance Assessment), Framework for the Future, Public Library standards, the PKF report and subsequent work by MLA with PwC, developing model(s) for a national model for stock procurement).

- **Reader development and stock selection** (work conducted by Opening the Book on a number of reader-centred initiatives, for example Branching Out: 1998 onwards).

SQHC has thus been introduced against an evolving backdrop of new initiatives and potential policy changes, shifts from localised to national procurement models: a context in which it is difficult to identify if some changes (eg in staff attitudes to new genres of book selection) can be attributed *uniquely* to SQHC.

3. SQHC evaluation: aims and objectives

The principal ***aim*** of this project, as identified in the project brief provided by MLA, is to evaluate:

- ► the overall use and impact of the SQHC
- ► its value and suitability as a management/performance measurement tool
- ► to assess its future value, role and potential for development

The ***objectives*** of the Evaluation are:

(1) **To investigate the use of SQHC**, including:

- who has used the SQHC and why
- how the results have been used and to what effect
- reasons for non-participation amongst non-users
- SQHC reputation and perceived value amongst users and non-users
- the future value of SQHC as a performance measure

(2) **To identify SQHC outcomes and impact**, including:

- the impact on professional attitudes and practices within the Public Library Service (users and non-users)
- whether or not there has been a demonstrable improvement in performance (to both staff and library users), and can a causal relationship be established
- whether or not user expectations have been met/exceeded
- has sufficient help and support been made available

(3) **To investigate the future value, role and development of SQHC**, including:

- user/non-user perceptions of the validity of SQHC as a performance measure
- the potential for SQHC to be developed as a sustainable performance measure
- the application of SQHC to other stock categories
- ways in which the SQHC can be improved

(4) **To evaluate the SQHC website,** looking at:

- website accessibility and navigation
- content analysis: volume, quality and appropriateness
- user value and impact
- strengths
- areas for development and improvement

4. Methodology

An entirely qualitative approach was deemed the most appropriate research method. Given the short time-scale for completion of the evaluation, we undertook **telephone interviews** with a representative sample of SQHC users and non-users. The evaluation aims and objectives are too complex for a questionnaire/survey approach; the semi-structured interview method provides the opportunity to engage respondents in discussion, and encourage a more dynamic and thorough data collection exercise.

The researchers were given access to user/non-user data by Opening the Book, which allowed us to draw up the cohort to form the focus of this study. All interviews were tape recorded and fully transcribed for data analysis

A **stratified sample** of both SQHC users and non-users was prepared using key variables such as region, Public Library Authority size and structure and library user demographics. Interviews were semi-structured, with prepared questions tailored according to evaluation aims and objectives as specified above.

The research instruments for SQHC users and non-users are set out in **Appendices I and II.**

The original MLA brief recommended that *'there should also be follow up discussions/meetings to identify common issues'*. The researchers judged that the telephone interviews, and the qualitative transcripts which have been collated and analysed from them, offer effective identification of common issues and recurring themes. Furthermore, the very limited timeframe for this project did not allow for further fieldwork to be carried out.

Further details on sampling are set out in **Appendix III.**

5. The use of the Stock Quality Health Check

Opening the Book provided the researchers with data on library authorities that had completed the SQHC in 2004 and 2005. The table below shows data for users/non-users in 2005.
We interviewed in February/March 2006 when library authorities had just received their results for 2005, but it should be noted that many of the senior librarians interviewed had been too busy to analyse their SQHC results in detail.

(Several respondents indicated their responses related to their perception/understanding of SQHC in 2004 rather than 2005).

Several library authorities that Opening the Book had listed as non-users had in fact completed the SQHC: some had done so 'internally' but not had the time or inclination to submit electronically to Opening the Book *and* one authority's results had been 'mislaid' and did not appear on SQHC results.

Table 1. Analysis by region

Region	Total	Users	Non-users
EAST	11	8	3
EAST MIDLANDS	8	2	6
LONDON	33	15	18
NORTH EAST	11	6	5
NORTH WEST	23	19	4
SOUTH EAST	18	13	5
SOUTH WEST	16	12	4
WEST MIDLANDS	14	7	7
YORKSHIRE	15	13	2

With hindsight, the timing of the interviews of 2005 users should have been carried out later in 2006, when more authorities had had time to process, digest and understand their own results and the policy implications for their own service. But this research project's timescale was dictated by MLA/Steering Group's schedule which required evaluation in early 2006.

6. Survey findings

6.1 Completing the Stock Quality Health Check

We asked library authorities who completed the SQHC; how easy it was to complete; how long it took and asked for suggested improvements?

In most authorities the toolkit was completed at librarian level. The librarians found it easier to complete it themselves rather than delegate to more junior or support level staff. They also felt that they knew their catalogues (and library management systems) well, and/or that completion of the toolkit offered an opportunity to sit down and examine their stock holdings.

> ►*It's fairly straightforward; it's slightly long-winded for us because we share a catalogue and stock records with XX County Council [….] so you have to check each one to make sure there is some of our stock against it.* (Stock Manager, Unitary)

> ►*In fact the impression I had was that it was much easier to complete this year….due to the explanation that came with the guidance notes.* (Stock and Development Manager, London Borough)

Completion of the SQHC took approximately 1 day (as per time estimated by Opening the Book). A few reported 2.5 – 4 hours, a response which the researchers would query.

> ► *It's easy to use but use but it's very time-consuming.* (Stock development Librarian, London Borough)

> ► *It's easy enough to do; was standard title checking really; it was roughly what was quoted; she [the librarian] took it home to do.* (Resources and Technical services Librarian, Unitary)

> ► *It was definitely clearer than last year's (2004) in the way it was formatted, and the instructions given this year (2005) were much more clear.* (Catalogue librarian, Unitary)

Most authorities were quite happy with the process and could not see how it could be automated but they liked the idea of an automated SQL that could 'automatically' interrogate a library management system. However, most recognised that given the plethora of different catalogues and/or library management systems in use, the completion of SQHC was likely to be a manual process in the foreseeable future.

> ►*If our library system had been able to do it automatically that would have been brilliant.* (Stock Development Librarian, London Borough)

> ►*It's a shame you can't lift the data from the library management system. If it was put in SQL to pull information out so we can query against the system rather than looking.* (Resources and Technical Services Librarian, Unitary).

6.2 Value and potential of the Stock Quality Health Check

How have the results been used?

Much of the use of SQHC has been at a general level, raising awareness about stock issues and looking (perhaps for the first time) at genres/sub-genres.

> ►*It's very interesting …what it does is it challenges your assumptions about what you are doing.* (Stock manager, Unitary*)*

> ► *I think it is quite useful because it gives us an idea that we are working in the right direction.* (Bibliographical Services Librarian, County Council)

> ►*It was certainly used internally in discussion about monitoring our stock, and also it fed into my purchase plans.* (Adult Stock manager, Unitary)

> ►*The expectation is that all staff at all levels are stock aware and this will be useful in raising their awareness.* (Library Development Advisor, London Borough)

Evidence of the use of SQHC in staff training/awareness: underpinning the broadest definition of what a public library should be offering and helping senior managers to broaden the scope of stock selection.

The SQHC has been used more with senior staff, but it has also had an application with more junior staff in an 'educative' role, for example in demonstrating why public libraries should not merely stock 'popular' titles. The SQHC is a 'national standard' to support library staff who choose to be more innovative in stock selection:

> ► *they [branch level staff] tend to very much come from the position that the only thing that matters is that we get the popular stuff….it's harder to convince them that we need to include the other range of stuff for the minority of the public. Particularly if the staff feel rightly or wrongly that we don't get people like that coming in. It does enable me to have a discussion with them about this.* (Adult Stock Manager, Unitary)

Feedback from library staff

Where SQHC has been used to stimulate discussion at stock selection panels, not all the feedback has been positive:

> ►*My team feel that we're looking at some of the titles laughing and thinking, well we wouldn't want that or we've had it, or we don't have the storage space to keep some of the stuff ..I don't think it's very useful at all*. (Senior Librarian, Unitary)

We found little evidence of use of SQHC data results in any 'intensive way: and certainly not as we understand Opening the Book envisages that librarians will 'engage with the toolkit.' Our understanding is that public librarians are overwhelmed by new initiatives and it is difficult to identify the value of SQHC, despite initial enthusiasm for the concept:

> ►*I thought the principle was excellent because we measure just about everything that moves in the library world but we didn't seem to have any system of assessing something like this which is the quality of stock, that all authorities could use.* (Assistant Librarian, County Council)

Yet if libraries have understood the 'concept' behind SQHC, they are cautious of its current format and the way it has been developed:

> ►*In principle I think it's fantastic and I'm all for it...but I think in doing something like this one has placed a huge reliance on the quality of that list and the person or people drawing up that list. In other words you have to have confidence that it is a good list to aspire to.* (Assistant Librarian, County Council)

SQHC as a potential performance measure

> ►*…it's very useful especially when they look at the different titles ….I think they were surprised because it [SQHC results] were different in individual libraries. …because the result is a whole authority tool they would not be the same as those of an individual library looking at it*. (Head of Planning and Performance, Met Borough)

It is not clear the extent to which SQHC results have been used 'intensively' ie to what extent they have engaged with the process and the planning behind it. Certain respondents expressed doubt that the list is representative of all areas of stock:

> ►*My concern and that from other senior staff is that it is only a snapshot of one of particular areas of stock that you are looking at. (*Principal Librarian, Unitary)

> ►*In London, there are far more requests for hard-hitting fiction….because the health check looks at the country as a whole, …there are some similarities obviously but if you look at the Public Lending Right, the actual lists there of the most popular authors and books are significantly different in London than they are outside. London* (Stock Development Librarian, London Borough)

> ►*When we do a stock check everyone is involved, and we take recommendations from all members of staff whether it's the cleaner or the Head of Library Services…So in some senses we just use it [the SQHC] as a check to see that we are doing well. But we don't think it's entirely appropriate for our authority.* (Resources and Technical Services Librarian, Unitary)

There are doubts as to the rationale and thinking behind the SQHC, its processes and the underlying philosophy about which communities public libraries are trying to serve:

> ►*So for the SQHC to judge us on specific titles …it's inappropriate in terms of our methods of serving our population*. (Resources and Technical Services Librarian, Unitary)

> ►*there are certain other management tools that we are looking at that contradict the health check. Things like usage of the data to analyse the stock selection, by increasing titles by authors rather than looking at a range of authors, so there might be some conflict with that in the future.* (Stock Manager, Metropolitan Borough)

The responses showed a recurrent theme of the SQHC not meeting local needs:

> ►*this is the problem it's a national standard so it needs to fit all sizes, but we're in a unitary authority in an industrial area….with nearly 30% of the adult working population who haven't got their basic literacy skills.* (Principal Librarian, Unitary)

> ►*it does help us to manage our stock…and that can only be a good thing but last year one of our senior managers said to me that we could have gone out and bought lots of the titles that were on the list that we didn't have, which would in theory have improved our score. But that wouldn't necessarily have met the local needs we have in XX. I think other authorities have done just that but obviously we felt we didn't want to do that.* (Catalogue Librarian, Unitary)

6.3 Stock Quality Health Check: Outcomes and impact

Did SQHC fulfil library authorities' expectations?

> ►*Our expectations were that we were trying to get a decent score.* (Principal Librarian, County Council)

A number of respondents stated that they were enthused at the outset by the idea of SQHC, and had been very keen to participate in a new initiative:

> ►*I thought it was a very good way of being able to measure something that probably doesn't get a lot of close looking at*. (Stock and Development Manager, London Borough)

> ►*I thought the principle was excellent because we measure just about everything that moves in the library world.* (Assistant Librarian, County Council)

Other respondents even felt that participation in the process had improved staff attitudes towards library functions, and had even increased the status of fiction selection staff within the overall service:

> ►*As far as attitudes go it [SQHC] actually indicated in a lot of the work that we were always doing…the strengths we had and ones that proved to be and the weaknesses again that were proved to be. It reinforced the ideas that we were on the right lines and staff felt quite good about that.* (Stock Development Librarian, London Borough)

> ►*I think it's given staff a fair feeling of worth; people assume that choosing fiction is an easy thing to do but in actual fact it's one of the hardest.* (Stock and Development Manager, London Borough)

More negative responses were based on, for example, a concern that in order to reach the top score:

> ►*we would have to bias against our own population; in terms of outcomes we couldn't use it as something to serve our population as we are always doing this as effectively as we can.* (Resources and Technical Services Librarian, Unitary)

Other respondents felt that participating in the SQHC was conflicting with their own locally developed policy:

> ►*It's affecting our weeding policy because we've always tried to weed as best we can to make sure we've got good quality authors and stock, and I think the difficulty with this is it's a no win situation and you're never quite sure whether you're going to get it right or not.* (Principal Librarian, County Council)

> ►*It seems to me to have quite a lot of titles that are older, we may have had them in 1999/2000 but that doesn't mean we're going to have them now for instance, but I suppose it is dangerous that they are coming to the conclusion that we are not buying the stuff. One of the standards that I have here is that with fiction, if nobody borrows it in six months it goes; we don't keep dead wood here at all. That's a local standard that we have.* (Stock Manager, Unitary)

Gradual acceptance of SQHC

> ►*I'm not sure, at first I think it was a bit of an experiment in 2004, so it was just interesting to see how we compared to other authorities. I'm pleased to see that we improved.* (Bibliographical Services Librarian, County Council)

> ►*I think it's helped to focus the minds of people both on the senior management and stock selection, that things like this are being looked at now in a way which will impact the [public library] standards themselves and we do need to be working towards proper data.* (Stock Manager, Metropolitan Borough)

Misunderstanding of the concept?

> ►I *think that my expectations were that it would be more balanced in its approach. It seems to me that it is particularly weighted to what I would call non-mainstream stuff. (*Adult Stock manager, Unitary)

Impact of SQHC on services

In many authorities, library staff found it difficult to attribute any impact to the SQHC, which in a number of cases had been conducted at the same time as other developments in stock development:

> ► *…not from the SQHC…..with our stock purchasing we're big believers in customer surveys; we would look more to the feedback from our customers on certain categories of stock.* (Stock Development Librarian, London Borough)

> ►*That's a difficult one because it (SQHC) is just one aspect of many other things……The SQHC is merely proving that we have done the right things.* (Assistant Librarian, County Council)

Engaging with elected members

The SQHC guidelines (revised April 2005) refer specifically to ways in which the results should be used with elected members: 'Senior managers may want to raise resource issues if the authority is shown to be Weak or Poor. If the authority gains a Good rating or above, use the opportunity to present the strengths of the service…' (p.23). To what extent did respondents feel that they had been able to engage with elected members? The following three respondents each had a 'good' SQHC score:

►*The other thing we have found it useful for is to use with the elected members and our more senior members. There's evidence that we are responding to their needs, with an external assessment of our stock*. (Head of Planning and Performance, Metropolitan Borough)

►*I suspect it wouldn't have any impact on our elected members*. (Stock Development Librarian, London Borough)

►*Well with the results from 2004, I think as I said earlier it really reinforced our own feelings about possible areas of weakness that we did feel we'd already identified. The results haven't been given to elected members but if it became a nationally recognised rating, and if we did badly it would be in the press and they would be saying why aren't you doing better?* (Senior Librarian, Unitary)

6.4 Support using the Stock Quality Health Check and the Website

We were asked to review the SQHC website, focusing on the website's accessibility and navigation; content analysis in terms of volume, quality and appropriateness; user value and impact; strengths and areas for development and improvement.

Our main findings can be summarised as follows:

a) Support by phone and email was found to be good
b) Library staff found it useful to cross-check and compare performance from one library service to another
c) The website was used mainly used for guidance rather than as an interactive too, its role was largely as a 'how to' tool:

> ► *Just the straight instructions and guidance on how to do the check* (Adult Stock Manager, Unitary)

d) We question if library staff are 'engaging with' the content or is the website being used at a more superficial level? (see also comments below under 'content analysis')
e) The website has been used to a certain extent, but there is some criticism of the information the website offers, for example in terms of the presentation of content –graphs, spreadsheets, etc. (plus the appropriateness of accompanying guidance)
f) From the paucity of responses regarding the website, respondents are clearly not finding time to use it in addition to the time spent completing the SQHC: is this a training issue?
g) The discussion board is under-used and is an area which needs further attention if it is to be of value to (busy, time-stretched) senior library staff

User value and impact

> ►*I found the website very useful. We looked at it to begin with and referred back to it with any queries as we went along.* (Head of Planning and Performance, Metropolitan Borough)

> ►*I think that when we did have some questions we could look at that [the website], and I certainly looked at it last year and don't think that there were any problems with it.* (Stock & Development Manager, London Borough)

> ►*They [*Opening the Book*] have also added a discussion forum this year, which was useful because people raised some points on it* (Stock Manager, Metropolitan Borough)

Contrast this with:

> ►*I didn't look at the discussion; I was more interested in actually how to undertake it because of the workload* (Principal Librarian – Strategy, County Council)

►*We didn't use the discussion area…I have been on to have a look at the results and so on, but have not used it in any great depth* (Resources & Technical Services Librarian, Unitary)

►*I didn't have the time to look [at the website]. I had to do extra hours to actually complete the health check so I didn't have the time for extra work on it* (Stock development Librarian, London Borough)

►*[We] haven't really used it much, we have mainly just filled in the health check and sent it back* (Stock & Systems Manager, County Council)

►[How useful was the discussion area?] *Well it wasn't really because hardly anything has been posted. Looking at it now I think there's been about 4 messages on it excluding [Opening the Book's] replies, which isn't a lot, and it's been up and running for quire a few months*. (Principal Librarian, Unitary)

Accessibility and navigation

►*The website was quite easy to use and navigate, and I looked at comparison basics for 'this year'* (Catalogue Librarian, Unitary)

►*The website is very easy to navigate* (Stock Manager, Unitary)

►*I had to have a look at it in the first place because…our resource manager…would have undertaken the 2004 one…before we started I had to familiarise myself with the set up because I couldn't ask other staff to undertake the survey without knowing what was to be undertaken and what problems there could be. I found it fairly straightforward to look at and use*. (Principal Librarian, Unitary)

► *I'm not sure about some of the graphs that appear on the website; they're not very easy to interpret or user friendly.* (Bibliographical Services Librarian, County Council)

Strengths

►*I found it very helpful this year because they have a feature that has sample score sheets and it explains things as you move around…the samples were the most helpful* (Stock Manager, Metropolitan Borough)

►Comparison, cross-check – *It was useful to use to compare our results against other London Boroughs and areas of the country. That's [how] I've actually used [it] the most*. (Stock development Librarian, London Borough)

►*It does explain to you how it [the SQHC] works, and there is also the recommendation for taking action as well, so it's quite useful from that point of view.* (Principal Librarian, Unitary)

Content analysis – volume, quality, appropriateness

► *I think quite a lot of it was more a picture of what other people's practices on stock were, than the thing itself. The questions asked [on the discussion forum] obviously illustrated the backgrounds they were coming from.* (Stock Manager, Unitary)

►*I think a lot of it is pretty good. I think it's a great thing but I would dearly love to know how it all works much more than I actually do. How all the scoring is working with all the spreadsheets etc., because I use them a lot in my work and would obviously like to know how they work to give the information I require. It's such a sophisticated thing and there's so much on there that if I were to really understand it, it would take days and days.* (Assistant Librarian, County Council)

►*The results are score band and score band sorted; they appear different but I don't know what to get from that*. (Bibliographical Services Librarian, County Council)

Negative responses to the site

►*I didn't find it very useful at all. I'm not interested in the results, I suppose that's why* (Senior Librarian, Unitary)

7. Recommendations

R1 Developing the Stock Quality Health Check toolkit

►To widen the membership of the Panel which draws up the list of titles each year, to ensure optimum engagement with the tool by the public library community.

►To consider the development of a list of 'national' core titles and a 'local' element staff in order to ensure public library community 'ownership' of the SQHC. (*This would need to be developed by Opening the Book and representatives of stock selection staff at local authority level).*

►MLA: to be more proactive in clarifying the aims of the SQHC, so that it is not developed in 'a policy vacuum'. (*Subsequent information from MLA has confirmed that it will not be funding the future development of SQHC. It has also indicated that future review of performance will provide an opportunity to clarify the role of tools such as the SQHC which can be used internally and for a degree of benchmarking, but which will not form part of the national performance framework).*

►To discuss the extension of the SQHC to other categories (eg non-fiction, children's materials) with the expanded SQHC Development Panels, to include representative teams of stock selection library staff.

►To ensure a greater transparency of the application of the results of the tool within the Panels *(see above).*

R2 Ensuring the sustainability of the Stock Quality Health Check

►To maintain the confidence of the public library community, the SQHC needs to continue to be grounded in current practice: SCL/regional MLAs and senior management teams within individual library services to take a more proactive role in explaining SQHC to encourage a sense of 'ownership'.

►The SQHC website – in particular the online discussion group - is currently not serving a purpose for all participating public library authorities. The website needs to be developed in conjunction with the proposed regional S*tock Selection Forums* (see R1).

► To clarify the future role of the SQHC as a performance measure: if it is it to be developed as a performance measure which is part of Public Library Standards, then this needs to be communicated.

►To consider the role of the nine regional MLA agencies: the link to stock procurement developments (national/regional/local selection).

R3 Information dissemination and communication

►To develop the role of the nine regional agencies of the MLA in the dissemination of SQHC results, and in supporting public libraries in engaging with the overall SQHC process.

►To ensure ongoing training in the use and application of the SQHC, in the form of regular meetings/regional *Stock Selection Forums* involving public library representatives to discuss, for example, the local and national application of the SQHC and how it applies to related policy initiatives.

►To expand the role of the MLA, including the nine regional MLA agencies, and SCL in bringing together public library services on a regional basis. To support the public library community in incorporating the results of the SQHC into related service developments, ensuring the effort of completion of the tool are not left 'in a vacuum'.

R4 Publicising the wider benefits of Stock Quality Health Check

►To encourage public library authorities to demonstrate the wider benefits of participation in SQHC (eg staff development, reader promotion work, contribution to social inclusion, improving basic skills, etc) to library users, elected members and other local authority services.

Appendix I

Research Schedule: Users

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research project. We are carrying out this evaluation on behalf of the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) with a representative sample of library authorities that have used the Stock Quality Health Check. We will also be interviewing a sample of non-users.

These phone Interviews will be tape recorded and fully transcribed for data analysis. Your views and comments in these interviews will be treated in strict confidence and only be seen by the research team at Sheffield University. Any quotes we use in the *Final Report* will be fully anonymized and will not be attributed to a specific library authority**.**

Project Aims

The aims of the Stock Quality Health Check Evaluation are:

- to survey which types of library authority have used the SQHC and why
- its value and potential as a performance measurement tool
- its outcomes and impact

1. Completing the Stock Quality Health Check

1.1 Who in your authority completes SQHC? (prompt: which level/title)
1.2 How useable was SQHC?
1.3 Approximately how many hours did it take them to complete?
1.4 How would you suggest it could be made more useable?

2. About the value and potential of the SQHC

2.1 How have the results been used?
(prompt: on stock selection; increased budget …)
2.2 What reaction and/or feedback have you had from library staff?
2.3 senior management? (*prompt: strategic planning, comparison eg with bookshops, in looking at the Best Value process)*
2.4 frontline staff?
2.5 To what extent is the SQHC useful as a performance measure?

3. SQHC: Outcomes and impact

3.1 What were your expectations of the SQHC?
3.2 To what extent were these met?
3.3 What **impact**, if any, has the SQHC had on the service you provide? *(eg SQHC influence on stock selection and promotion)*
3.4 What **effect**, if any, has it had on **attitudes** towards these activities and functions? (*prompt: eg acquisitions policy, targeting specific user groups)*
3.5 To what extent, if any, has there been a demonstrable improvement in performance as perceived by staff?
3.6 To what extent, if any, has there been a demonstrable improvement in library services as perceived by library users? (*N.B. your perceptions of user feedback, not only formal surveys)*
3.7 What reaction or feedback, if any, have you had from the wider community? *(prompt: eg elected Members, the press and media)*

4. Future value, role and development of SQHC

4.1 To what extent is the SQHC **valuable** as a performance measure?
4.2 What changes, if any, are needed to **develop** the SQHC as a standard performance measure?
4.3 How can the SQHC be extended to other stock categories?
4.4 In what ways, if any, could the SQHC be improved?

5. SQHC website

5.1 How would you rate the support you received to use the SQHC?
5.2 The website: how easy have you found it to use and navigate?
5.3 How useful was its content? *(prompt: too little too/much information)*
5.4 How useful was discussion area?
5.5 What was most helpful on the website?
5.6 Which aspects could be developed further and improved?

Appendix II

Research Schedule: Non-users

1. Explore reasons for non-participation. [*prompt: happy with decision not to participate?]*

2. Awareness

2.1 Extent of knowledge of the SQHC.
2.2 Elements of the toolkit - or the website - currently in use by the library service (prompt: many parts of SQHC website are public access)?

3. Performance - SQHC

3.1 (*If demonstrated a degree of knowledge in response to 2.1*) Having looked at the SQHC, would you say that it was a valid stock performance measure? [*prompts - application to other stock categories etc.]*

3.2 Suggestions for improvement

4. Performance - local
As you have chosen not to use the SQHC, how do you evaluate the performance of the stock in your libraries?

5. Future
Would you consider participating in the SQHC in the future?

APPENDIX III
Sampling

Total no of public library authorities *(Data checked with Local Government Association)*

34	ENGLISH COUNTIES
33	LONDON BOROUGHS
36	METROPOLITAN BOROUGHS
47	UNITARY AUTHORITIES
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150	TOTAL (base no. for sampling)

Excluded from our sample:

- 238 English DISTRICTS (they are not library authorities)
- 22 Welsh Unitary authorities (although In SQHC, MLA requested England only (as funding is from English funding-bodies
- Total England & Wales = 410 (ie 150+ 238 + 22)

Stratified sample to include:

- County/Metropolitan boroughs/London boroughs/Unitary
- 9 regions (ensure mix of *rural/urban* and *large/small)*
- (*using 2005 data*) sample across: poor/good/excellent SQHC scores
- Users and non-users of SQHC

INTERVIEW SAMPLE = 15%
Assume base no. = 150 (Total interviews = 22)
Users = 95 (15% = 14 interviews)
Non users = 54 (15% = 8 interviews)

Analysis by region

1.EAST 11 (8 users; 3 non)
2.E MIDLANDS 8 (2 users; 6 non)
3. LONDON 33 (15 users; 18 non)
4. NORTH EAST 11 (6 users; 5 non)
5 NORTH WEST 23 (19 users; 4 non)
6. SOUTH EAST 18 (13 users; 5 non)
7. SOUTH WEST 16 (12 users; 4 non)
8.WEST MIDLANDS 14 (7 users; 7 non)
9. YORKSHIRE 15 (13 users; 2 non)

Appendix IV

Correlation table
To demonstrate the correlation between an authority's SQHC's score and its views of the SQHC process (based on 'Value & potential' and 'Outcomes & impact' data)

Type of Authority/ SQHC score	Views of SQHC
Met Borough/ excellent	4
Unitary/excellent	4
County/ good	4
LB/fair	4
LB/good	3
Unitary/poor	3
County/excellent	4
County/fair	4
Unitary/fair	3
Met Borough/fair	3
Unitary/weak	4
Unitary/weak	3

Scale:
1 – extremely negative
2 –generally negative
3 – neutral
4 – generally positive
5 – extremely positive

Caveats to be noted:

- The above table is not in itself a piece of evidence, as we have not asked respondents to classify their responses, but we have done this without their suggestion or confirmation that we are correct in our assumption.

- We have constructed a 5-point scale, but given that could not find any examples at the far end of the scale, the differences between each library service become blurred. However, we are including our analysis for consideration.