> ## Libraries are Good for Business
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> ### FINAL REPORT MARCH 2005
>
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Contents

1. Introduction

The following paper presents findings relating to the 'Libraries are Good for Business' evaluation research project undertaken by the Centre for the Public Library and Information in Society (CPLIS) at the University of Sheffield, on behalf of the Yorkshire Museums Libraries and Archives Council (YMLAC). The research involved a pilot value and impact evaluation study of business information services provided by public libraries in the Yorkshire region. The report will initially be used by YMLAC as an internal document. It will be subsequently used to inform regional promotion of the services offered by public library authorities, and further evaluation of business information services offered by a range of library and information providers within the region. Further dissemination may be undertaken by CPLIS within academic journals and at professional conferences.

2. Research aims and objectives

The aim of the project, as set out in the YMLAC Brief and Specification, is to deliver quantitative and qualitative evidence about the level and nature of provision of services to business within public library services in the Yorkshire region, which will inform advocacy work with regional opinion formers and decision makers.

The main objectives of the research are:

- To provide evidence on the level of investment in business information services within public libraries

- To provide evidence of the nature, range and scale of services to business, and within this to provide an assessment of the number, origin and motivation of the users

- To make recommendations on appropriate methodologies to evaluate the impact and 'value' of public library services to the business community

The research has been commissioned to assess the contribution made by public libraries within the context of the economic life of the Yorkshire region and its Regional Economic Strategy, and to evaluate the impact and value of the services provided to the business community. The research will be treated as a pilot exercise to test and propose suitable methodologies for future value and impact research, and to inform a taxonomy of business information services within the region.

3. Methodology

3.1 PLA survey

The first stage of research fieldwork involved a questionnaire-based survey of the fifteen public library authorities in the Yorkshire region. The survey method was chosen as it is considered to be most appropriate at the explorative stages of the social research process because of its relatively straight-forward approach to the study of attitudes, beliefs and values; its capacity to collect generalizable information from a human population; and ease of data standardization (Robson, 2002). Such elements of survey research have facilitated the effective collection of appropriate data within a relatively short period of time.

A questionnaire was designed by the CPLIS team to investigate the range of business information services provided by public libraries; the relative scale of investment and expenditure; business information service priorities and objectives in accordance with research aims and objectives. The questionnaire was distributed electronically to all fifteen public library authorities (PLAs). For the questionnaire used in the PLA survey, please see appendix 3 (page 55). Individual respondents within each PLA were identified via contacts from the Society of Chief Librarians. The targeted sample includes the following authorities:

- Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council
- Bradford Metropolitan District Council
- Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council
- Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council
- East Riding of Yorkshire Council
- Hull City Council
- Kirklees Metropolitan Council
- Leeds City Council
- North East Lincolnshire Council
- North Lincolnshire Council
- North Yorkshire County Council
- Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council
- Sheffield City Council
- Wakefield Metropolitan District Council
- York City Council

Fourteen of the fifteen questionnaires have been returned (93.3% response rate), and the results reported in this paper relate to those responses only[1].

3.2 Review of the literature

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[1] Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council has not been included in the evaluation due to a non-response from contacts within that authority. This should be taken in to account when considering findings about the Yorkshire region as a whole.

A review of the literature has been undertaken to establish context for the research, including the nature of public libraries as business information services; evaluation of business information services; business information and regional economic development. The review has included relevant books, academic journals, professional press and electronic documents. Strategic documents published by participating public library authorities have also been consulted.

3.3 Case study research

Case study research involves the collection of evidence around a particular event, instance or situation, and is empirical in nature, based on experience and observation within pre-determined boundaries (Stake, 2000). The case study approach was considered to be particularly appropriate when seeking a narrative descriptive comparison of different information services. Following the PLA survey, qualitative case study research was undertaken with five PLA case studies, which included the following research methods:

- Observation
- User exit survey
- Staff interviews

The objectives of the qualitative research as a whole were to provide a narrative description of the range of business information services provided, including the number origin and motivation of users. A practical evaluation of the range of business information services, activities and partnerships within each library/case study was undertaken using the principles of ***participant observation***. This allowed the researcher to record not only the range of services available, but also how they are presented to the library user in terms of accessibility, immediacy and transparency. The researcher was also able to observe user interaction with the information services. Robson (2002) describes the 'directness' of observation research as its main advantage; subjects are not asked about their feelings or attitudes, the researcher watches what they do and listens to what they say in a 'real world' context. Participant observation also increases the researcher's awareness of what an organisation is about (Hall and Hall, 2004). Please see appendix 4 (page 58) for the note-taking 'checklist' used during observation fieldwork.

Implications made regarding a taxonomy of business information services within PLA survey results were tested against user assumptions and values using the questionnaire-based **user exit survey** method (for the user exit questionnaire please see appendix 5, page 59). During the observation process, anonymous user exit surveys were undertaken with 'on-site' business information service users[2]. The exit surveys sought to

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[2] Please note, only users visiting the relevant case study libraries *in person* were surveyed during observation fieldwork: the sample does not include enquiries made by telephone/e-mail

establish the origin and motivation of users of such services in terms of the nature of their enquiries and whether or not their visit has been successful (i.e. whether or not there had been a successful outcome to their enquiry). The survey also included a pilot exercise designed to measure the value of public library business information services, inspired by the economic impact study commissioned by the British Library[3] 'Measuring our Value'. Questions were designed to assess a 'contingent valuation' of the business services provided by the public library. This pilot study used on a comparatively small sample can be used to assess the appropriateness of such methods in evaluating the impact and value of business information services.

Staff **interviews** were also undertaken to provide greater perspective on levels of investment and expenditure on information services, service objectives and forthcoming priorities. Wengraf (2001) argues that research interviews have a 'validating' quality which allows the researcher to construct a 'model of reality' which confirms or falsifies previously identified facts or understandings. Thus the interview method was considered appropriate to discuss at greater length and detail statements made by respondents within the PLA survey. Interviews were undertaken with one key member of staff from each of the case study libraries who is directly responsible for the day-to-day provision of business information services. This complements survey data by providing qualitative data to enrich the established statistics and help to create a narrative description of the services that are available, particularly those that are difficult to quantify centrally such as community partnerships and in-house expertise. For a list of questions used during the interview process, please see appendix 6, page 61. All staff interviews were recorded and fully transcribed; where appropriate, verbatim quotations are used within the report.

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[3] British Library (2002) 'Measuring our Value': available from: http://www.bl.uk/pdf/measuring.pdf

4. The research context – review of the literature

Public libraries and business information services

The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals' (CILIP) Standing Committee on Business Information (SCOBI) defines the role of the public library within the context of business as such:

> "Provision of business information will be appropriate to local needs and circumstances, but the role of the public library service is more pervasive than maybe generally recognised since even the smallest service point will possess a copy of the local Yellow Pages, one of the most heavily used items in business libraries on the largest scale"
>
> CILIP (1998)

Potential business information users are described by CILIP (1998) as enquirers from business, industry and other sectors seeking information on potential suppliers, customers competitors and markets; citizens and consumers seeking information on suppliers and investments; jobseekers for data on potential employers and employment prospects; students; local studies enquirers for both current and historical information. The professional body asserts that the free access to business resources provided by public libraries offers 'good value for money' as the resources promote economic regeneration and the potential to enhance services provided by other local agencies such as Business Link, chambers of commerce and economic development units.

An editorial piece published in the Library Review (1994) discussed the lack of awareness, amongst the general public and even at governmental level, of the contribution made by public, special and commercial libraries in day-to-day business life. The piece includes comments made by Business Information Network personnel concerning the vital support system offered by the public library to companies who do not have their own library and information network, and by the Chief Executive of the then Library Association about their 'constant source of amazement and frustration that the crucially excellent service our business librarians offer remains uncelebrated'! In an article about the marketing and promotion of the City Business Library (CBL) in London, Howell (2004) describes the importance of visiting other services (both UK and overseas) and hosting visits within the CBL itself, including individual user tours; tours for informational professionals and tutors; open evenings in collaboration with relevant sponsors.

The importance of responding to user needs is also discussed by Howell (2004), which the CBL have addressed by conducting activities such as an incentive based user survey and the inclusion of a 'contact form' within their *City Business* quarterly newsletter. Bakewell (1987) describes the best methods for clearly defining public library business community information needs, including visiting local firms in person; administering surveys to local business communities; links with chambers of commerce,

development departments and similar organisations; establishing a business user council or committee.

Working partnerships and links with other services can help to provide a user community with the information it needs via a process of 'resource sharing' (Bakewell, 1987), which is especially relevant within the business context, as the public library will need to co-operate with many different 'types' of organisation. Recommended methods of co-operation include greater shared publicity for expensive business information resources; regular meetings of business librarians from all kinds of libraries; joint publications; staff exchanges; co-ordination of business information services at events, exhibitions and conferences. Wallace (2003) describes a formal working relationship between Norfolk and Norwich Millennium Library and Business Link Norfolk Information Service (BLNIS), whereby BLNIS shares premises with the library service. The partnership facilitates the effective sharing of resources, avoiding duplication and includes services such as mailing lists of local, national and international companies; financial status reports and company credit checks; company/peer group analysis by sector; local business news monitoring.

Prosser (2003) describes a more 'hard-nosed business approach' to the development of partnership projects undertaken by the *Business Insight* team at Birmingham Central Library, which has resulted in match-funded projects involving Business Link, Advantage West Midlands Enterprise Agency, private enterprise, and the council's own economic development department.

In an article concerning the same (*Business Insight*) business information outsourcing service provided by Birmingham City Libraries, Assinder (2004) describes a 'decline and fall' in business information in libraries based on financial pressures on library budgets, high cost of business information resources, and the impact of the internet. Outsourced services such as *Business Insight* in Birmingham may offer, it is argued, cost-effective solutions to declining business information libraries. It is claimed by Assinder that the internet has reduced 'low-level business enquiries' by 75%. Though it may be generally perceived that widespread internet usage has caused a decline in the number of business information enquiries made within public libraries, it is dangerous to assume that the internet can replace a professional, public business information service completely:

"Patents information is an another area where the internet seemed to pose a threat, as patent information became free to all…there is still a lot of work to be done [for] large and small firms, which appreciate the searching expertise available… from expert staff. The same applies to trademark searching; though available free on the internet, how many people know all the phonetic possibilities of doing an in depth trademark search?" (Day, 2002)

Evaluating business information services

Robinson (2000) observes that understanding organisational culture and critical business drivers are key to adapting and developing business information services. It is also essential to understand and accommodate social, cultural and environmental issues affecting the targeted business communities.

A project undertaken in the north-east of Scotland sought to examine the range of information provision available to rural businesses; patterns of use of such agencies by companies; the nature of respondents' information needs; problems in accessing information and attitudes to IT (Marcella et al, 1996). Such a thorough study required the use of various research methods including questionnaire-based survey, interviews and case studies. The research revealed findings concerning demographic information about local companies, providing a profile regarding the business community in the region; categories of information sought, frequency of need and the requirement for expert advice; areas of information deficiency, all essential criteria to inform the delivery of an effective and efficient business information service. Results included data and subsequent recommendations that can inform the future development of the relevant public library business information service, for example, the research revealed excessive business information demand on the central library service, and recommended the extension of business information services to rural and branch libraries.

A thorough in-house evaluation of the range of information services offered by an organisation can help to inform service development and also act as an effective marketing tool which can be used for external promotion and internal 'user guide' purposes. For example, Spencer et al (2004) discusses the range of business information services at the British Library within a user context. The paper presents the range of available services using a 'case study' subject-search review. This largely qualitative method is in contrast to a more cost-based quantitative approach used within private sector information service evaluation (James, 2004). The researcher recommends a business information service valuation model to business information managers within companies and organisations who need to be able to justify and value their services as a discrete unit, using the principles of base-cost calculations versus 'premia' and 'discount' adjustments. Such an evaluation would only be of internal relevance to a public library and its governing authority.

Large scale evaluation of business services, on a regional, national and perhaps even international scale rather than of an individual service, can also help to inform service development and raise awareness. A survey of business information provision (across all sectors) within South Yorkshire and North Derbyshire was undertaken to provide information which would help relevant information professionals 'to make strategic decisions' on the development of their services (Clayton, 1999). The study resulted in a directory of business information services under public library, Business Link, academic library (and other) headings including key characteristics,

strengths and weaknesses of the services provided. The main strengths of public library business information services were considered to be the professionalism of their staff; the collection and volume of materials; the accessibility of their services in 'free of charge' high street locations; the breadth of 'other' relevant available resources alongside business information, such as scientific, technical, legal information.

Business information and regional economic development

When evaluating the role and value of business information services provided by publicly funded organisations, it is important to consider their contribution, both actual and potential, within a wider social and economic context.

The Department for Trade and Industry (DTI, 2002) has determined a strategy for regional improvement including greater collaboration between private and public sectors under the strategic supervision of regional development agencies. The role of public libraries as a public information provider could therefore be seen as a major stakeholder by the regional development agencies, especially when considering the role of business information in regional improvement and economic regeneration. This echoes national economic policy dialogue concerning the emphasis on enterprise and the relevant skills, and the importance of efficient and effective business information services and systems. The Green Paper: Entrepreneurship in Europe (European Commission, 2003) advocates supportive and informative framework conditions for successful high-growth businesses and increased business start-ups. From a more generic business and employment perspective, the White paper 21st Century Skills (DFES, 2003) outlined a strategy for improved business support services underpinned by a philosophy of information, advice and guidance.

Business information therefore plays a key underpinning role at national and regional policy level with respect to encouraging enterprise, business start up and growth, and learning and skills development. Day (2002) observes that public library business information services should look for opportunities for linking to other areas of the service not explicitly linked or associated with the business library, such as lifelong learning and careers information, which are relevant resources for businesses interested in development and training opportunities for their staff. This in turn can help to develop the productivity and growth of regional businesses.

The regional development agency Yorkshire Forward stresses the important role of public-private sector co-operation and collaboration within their Regional Economic Strategy (RES). There is an obvious role for public libraries within several RES priority actions, both from information-based and generic perspectives, including; investment in enterprise and high quality public and private support services focused on the needs of high growth businesses; connecting 10,000 young people from deprived communities in to jobs and education through stronger links between local

businesses and educational institutions; restoring civic pride and economic dynamism in town centres; using public-private partnerships to transform city centres. Yorkshire Forward as an organisation has developed its own advanced and efficient information and intelligence network Yorkshire Futures[4], and as such is committed to ensuring quality in its business information provision to help achieve regional objectives. Yorkshire Futures utilises and incorporates nationally available data sets and research commissioned by Yorkshire Forward in to particular information gaps, often undertaken in partnership with other organisations. *Progress in the Region* is an annual document produced by Yorkshire Futures which aims to link data to policy implications for the region and highlight existing initiatives[5].

Day (2002) recognises that political devolution and increased 'regionalism' in the UK can benefit the public library service, in encouraging greater participation and a valid contribution to the information dimension of regional development agencies' research, strategic plans and objectives. From a theoretical viewpoint, information professionals within the public sector need to be aware of principles surrounding contemporary economic evolution and regeneration, in order to take forward the opportunities offered by the knowledge economy and form closer ties between the public library, regional agencies and the business community in the future (Rikowski, 2000).

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[4] Yorkshire Futures: www.yorkhsirefutures.com

[5] Thanks to Victoria Gell, Information Team Leader, Yorkshire Forward, for providing relevant information

5. PLA survey findings

The questionnaire sought to collect data on business information services provided by public libraries in the Yorkshire region in terms of the type of information services provided, expenditure levels and business information priorities and objectives within each region. As such, findings are presented under the following headings:

- Range of public library business information services
- Business information services expenditure
- Prioritising business information services in the regions' libraries
- Future business information service objectives

5.1 Range of public library business information services

Respondents were asked to indicate the type(s) of business information services provided by public libraries within their authority from a pre-selected list, including business-related book stock; access to electronic business information services; academic journals and periodicals; specialist business information staff; professional press; dedicated physical business information space(s); partnerships with other business information providers and any 'other' (to be specified). For a summary checklist please see table 1.

Business information services checklist								
	Book stock	Electronic BIS	Journals	Specialist staff	Prof press	Physical space	Partnerships	Other
Sheffield	√	√	√		√	√	√	
Hull	√	√	√		√			
York	√	√		√	√	√	√	
N. Lincs	√	√	√	√				
Kirklees	√	√			√			
Bradford	√	√			√			√
Wakefield	√	√		√	√	√	√	
NE Lincs	√	√	√			√		
Doncaster	√	√	√	√	√	√		
Barnsley	√	√		√		√	√	
Leeds	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Rotherham	√	√		√		√		
North Yorks	√	√					√	

Table 1

The most popular and widely available business information sources are business-related book collections and electronic business information services. Where 'professional press' has been selected, this includes the provision of specific trade publications such as Caterer and Hotelkeeper, Engineer, Grocer etc. The 'other' service selected by the City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council refers to a directory of companies published

by Bradford libraries. Leeds included two specialised websites including an extensive collection of links and an electronic index to journals, reports, statistics etc that are both developed 'in-house'[6]. Where respondents had selected 'specialist staff' and 'physical space' they were asked to provide details on the numbers of staff (FTE) and the amount of physical space allocated to business information services (m²). Based on responses received, the total number of specialist business information staff is currently 16 FTE. The total physical space allocated to business information services is currently 202 m². For a full breakdown of staff[7] and physical space statistics, please see appendix 2 (page 54).

East Riding indicated that they were unable to submit any information concerning business information services, as they do not have a dedicated business library as such. Following a regional restructure in 1996 (with East Riding coming under Humberside) the area came to be served by Hull Commercial and Technical Library, which gained the main share of funding. The questions contained in the survey were not relevant to the small service in Beverley, where reference and local studies come under the same umbrella.

Where respondents had selected 'partnerships with other business information providers' they were asked to specify the nature of such partnerships. All 6 of the relevant authorities described partnerships with Business Link, which ranged from tentative links including an awareness of the service that each party provides and the reciprocal referral of users to their service, to a more specific working partnership regarding occasional projects. Both suggest strong *informal* links between the two services. Wallace (2003) of Norfolk Library and Information Services describes a successful formal working relationship between the public library and Business Link Information Service, which illustrates the potential for a collaborative community-based business information brand. A more formal working relationship between the two services in the Yorkshire region may be a credible and effective undertaking given the regional economic and business information objectives discussed in section 4.4.

Other regional business information partnerships included the South Yorkshire International Trade Centre, the Sheffield Enterprise Agency, Barnsley Development Agency, SINTO, West Yorkshire Careers, district councils, job centres, Product Design and Development Centre (Hull) and the Chamber of Commerce. Although only 43% of respondents included in the survey findings have quoted partnerships with other business information providers within their respective regions, there is clearly much

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[6] www.leeds.gov.uk/weblinks
www.leedsbusinessindex.net

[7] It is important to note that there may be some discrepancy between specialist staff FTE numbers and their relative expenditure figures. This is because some respondents, including Hull, North Lincs, Wakefield and Doncaster indicated that staff such as Reference and Information Librarians will have business information skills and roles amongst other responsibilities. As such, staff expenditure figures should be treated as approximate guidelines.

scope for the development of regional business information partnerships with public libraries as key stakeholders.

5.2 Business information services expenditure

Respondents were asked to provide expenditure figures for each of the business information services highlighted above. This included amount and percentage of book fund allocation; expenses associated with the provision of electronic information services, including licence fees and maintenance; the annual cost of journal and professional press subscription; annual staff salary costs; total annual expenditure and any change (percentage plus or minus) from the previous financial year. For a full breakdown of expenditure responses, please see appendix 2 (page 54).

The total expenditure on business information services by public libraries in the last full financial year was £590,935.96[8]. The highest costs incurred in the provision of business information services by public libraries are for book stock (total of £117,000 per annum); for electronic business information services (£196,859.96 per annum); and for staff salaries (£240,893 per annum). As each of the responding authorities provide book and electronic sources, which are perhaps as such perceived to be the most important business information sources to provide, this may explain their large proportion of total business information costs. The cost of staff salaries is slightly more contentious as staff roles are not as easily identified as specific business information resources (with reference to footnote, page 12).

50% of respondents reported no significant annual change (percentage increase or decrease) in the level of expenditure on business information sources from the previous full financial year. The only unusual result is the decrease quoted by Bradford, which may be explained by the closure (and subsequent relocation) of the Business and Commerce Library as described within the relevant 'case study' chapter (page 28).

5.3 Prioritising business information services in the regions' libraries

Respondents were given a list of seven pre-selected business information services, and asked to rate them, in their personal opinion, on a scale of 1-7 in terms of their perceived importance and value (1 being most important, 7 being least important). The same question was asked of business information/library users during the case study stage of research field work (see section 6, page 39). The object of this exercise was to compare library and user opinion concerning the provision of business information services

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[8] This figure represents the total amount spent on resources listed in the PLA questionnaire. Some authorities drew attention to 'miscellaneous' business information resources which are difficult to quantify in terms of expenditure, for example, Rotherham provide dedicated PCs for the use of electronic business information resources (which are also available in Leeds and Bradford Central Libraries).

by public libraries, and the perceived value of individual information services. This will inform the development of a 'taxonomy' of business information services in terms of essential and desirable criteria. For the full list of business information services used in the exercise and respondent results, please see table 2.

Business information source ratings 1-7 (1 = most important, 7 = least important: PLA responses							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Availability of professional advice and guidance on the effective use of BIS	2	4	4		1	1	
Access to substantial business-related book collection	1	1	3	3	4		
A dedicated and visible physical space for business users and communities	3	1	2		1	2	3
Access to professional journals and publications		1		2	1	4	4
A dedicated public library business information website			1	3	3	1	4
Access to electronic business information sources and databases	5	1	4	2			
Partnerships with other business information providers in the locality	1	3		1	3	4	

Table 2

Although there is a fairly even distribution of results, it is clear to see which services are weighted towards the most and least important ends of the scale. As suggested by the wide-ranged provision of electronic resources across the region, access to electronic business information sources and databases is considered to be the most important service within the relevant PLAs, with five first places and most responses weighted between first and third place. A dedicated public library business information website is the joint least popular choice, sharing four 'least popular' selections with access to professional journals and publications.

Respondents indicated that this was a difficult question to answer, as some considered services to be of equal value and importance, and some respondents such as Kirklees indicated that their personal preferences may differ from those of the their organisation (or rather peers within)! Leeds Library and Information Service ranked all choices with the number 1, indicating that each component of a business information service is essential to support their 'corporate agenda' and to "meet impact standards in the economic regeneration area". Despite the different approaches to this question, it has proved to be valuable in providing comparable data concerning library and user priorities.

5.4   Future business information services objectives

Respondents were asked to identify their 'top 3' objectives with regard to the management of their respective business information services over the next two years. For a summary of responses please see table 3. This offers some insight in to the role of business information services provided by

public libraries from a strategic perspective, and how this relates to other public policy initiatives and regional economic development.

The 'top 3' objectives for PLAs in Yorkshire with respect to business information services over the next two years[9]:	
Sheffield Libraries, Archives and Information: Sheffield City Council	1. As part of Sheffield City Council's social inclusion and economic regeneration remit, to work with New Deal area Burngreave to hold business information sessions 2. To participate in the Yorkshire Forward Enterprise Show targeted at start up businesses 3. To generally aid the economic regeneration of the city as set out in the Council's development plan and the Sheffield First partnership plan
Hull Libraries: Hull City Council	1. Currency of information 2. Value for money 3. Wide availability to users
City of York	1. To investigate outsourcing of business information services to Business Insight (Birmingham libraries) in order to make saving on stock budget and utilise their online service 2. To increase the income generated by business information services
North Lincolnshire Council	1. To continue to provide relevant and up-to-date business information services 2. To incorporate local business information needs in to future community profiling 3. To review future business information services to ensure best value
Kirklees Libraries: Kirklees Metropolitan Council	1. Actively promote the service to SMEs 2. Promote electronic business resources to wider public 3. Intensive staff training
City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council	1. Research current business information need 2. Align business information service to that need 3. Market the re-aligned service
Wakefield Libraries and Information Services: Wakefield Metropolitan District Council	1. Promotion of service to new and existing users 2. Continue to develop book and electronic resources 3. Continue to train staff in availability and use of resources
North East Lincolnshire Council	1. Information provision for new and small businesses
Doncaster Library and Information Services: Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council	1. Refocusing the Business Library to match the requirements of SMEs 2. Undertaking studies on the use of electronic resources for business information 3. Marketing business information services more effectively
Barnsley Libraries: Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council	1. Marketing and promotion 2. Effective networking - business organisations 3. Effective networking - business
North Yorkshire County Council	1. We will be buying in to a business information service provided by Birmingham Library Service which will save on costs and should provide a better service to a large rural authority
Leeds Library and	1. Developing a merged Business and patents Service

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[9] The table includes verbatim quotations taken from individual PLA responses/completed questionnaires

Information Service: Leeds City Council	which can (cost) effectively and efficiently deliver information remotely, complement our face to face service and generate income 2. Supporting the corporate agenda and meeting impact standards in relation to economic regeneration – looking at innovative ways of supporting business in the community through strategic planning with area management 3. Developing more effective partnerships and targeted marketing for our services which will result in raising our profile locally and regionally
Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council	1. Review of current provision, including analysis of effectiveness and performance 2. Strengthen links with other local service providers e.g. RIDO, Chambers

Table 3

The quality of business information services in terms of their currency and relevancy is a high priority, indicating a commitment to providing an appropriate and cost-effective service to business communities, and the importance of having 'up-to-date' information sources. Wakefield and Kirklees both name staff training in the provision of business information services as important objectives, although the development of necessary skills is implied across the sample. This is particularly true of marketing and publicity skills, evaluating the services provided and ensuring that the appropriate audiences are using services correctly. Authorities including Rotherham and Doncaster indicate a greater commitment to the evaluation of existing and services in terms of effectiveness, performance and accountability. This demonstrates a commitment to improving the profile of public libraries' business information services across the region.

Half of the responses listed above explicitly align future business information service objectives with those of their authority in terms of regional economic development and growth. The business information requirements of local SMEs are cited by three respondents as important driving forces behind business information service development and promotion, which will in turn have the potential to aid their sustainability and growth. A recent report on supporting learning in small businesses (Doyle and Hughes, 2004) indicated that learning is dependant on local and accessible information. Following the publication of Enterprise League Tables (HMT, 2000) which identified Yorkshire and the Humber as poor regional performers in business start up rates, the regional development agency Yorkshire Forward has set the objective to achieve higher business birth and survival rates under its Regional Economic Strategy. This includes a commitment to long term culture change; business support systems; the development of entrepreneurial skills; access to finance; the generation and promotion of high growth businesses (Yorkshire Forward, 2005), all of which are dependant on strong regional partnerships underpinned by effective business information services.

Larger PLAs such as Leeds and Sheffield City Council have very clear regional objectives which demonstrate the potential for an effective role for public libraries in assisting economic regeneration and development. This includes a more formulaic approach to community profiling and greater co-

operation with other local authority departments in meeting the corporate economic regeneration agenda. In another example, Barnsley Libraries have reacted to recommendations to engage more with the wealth creation objectives of their authority by creating a specific business information post.

York and North Yorkshire have both specified a future 'out-sourcing' of business information services involving the *Business Insight* [10] service provided by Birmingham Libraries. Business Insight offers a subscription-based service to electronic business information resources, which both York and North Yorkshire perceive as being a value-added service that will be of greater benefit to the rural communities that they serve.

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[10] http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/businessinsight.bcc

5.5   Summary of key PLA survey points and their implications

- The opportunity for regional partnerships in business information service provision is an important consideration and objective for public library authorities, particularly as only 6 respondents have mentioned existing partnerships. Business Link are particularly relevant and *potentially* effective partners in delivering a recognisable regional business information service

- When considering levels of investment in public library business information services, the fact that 50% of respondents reported no significant annual change (particularly percentage *increase*) in the level of expenditure may require further investigation as to the reasons why, and the priority given to business information services within different 'types' of PLA

- Electronic business information sources are considered to be the most important service and are provided by all PLAs involved in the survey. However, a dedicated public library business information website is considered to be considerably less important, which raises questions for future research (perhaps in the form of a specific evaluation of electronic services) about how electronic business information services are presented, branded and marketed to users, and the implications of this for PLA business information service identity

- The quality of business information services in terms of their currency and relevancy is a high priority in terms of providing a valuable service to business communities. This has implications in terms of collection management and renewal, and how this is sustained within different authorities

- Larger public library authorities have a clearly defined positive role in terms of regional development and economic regeneration. There is scope for other authorities to emulate such roles and align their business information services to meet the needs of regional economic objectives and the relevant business communities

6. Case study research

The subsequent stages of research involved qualitative fieldwork including five case studies. The case studies included at least one example from four defined 'families' of PLA within the region, including small metropolitan, larger metropolitan, dispersed rural and dispersed urban. Within each case study, observation, interview and survey research methods were employed. The following PLAs were visited:

- Sheffield City Council (larger metropolitan): Sheffield Central Library
- Kirklees Metropolitan Council (dispersed urban): Huddersfield Central Library
- Bradford Metropolitan District Council (small metropolitan): Bradford Central Library
- North Lincolnshire Council (dispersed rural): Scunthorpe Central Library
- Leeds City Council (larger metropolitan): Leeds Central Library

Case studies were also selected based on the *types* of information service that they represent. These included Leeds as an example of a specialised electronic service alongside a 'traditional' service; Bradford as an example of a recently merged information service; North Lincs as an example of a service catered to SMEs; Kirklees as an example of how business services work within a (small) reference library; Sheffield as an example of regional business information partnerships.

What follows is a description of each case study including observation notes, user exit survey findings and qualitative data acquired via staff interviews (discussed under 'business information service objectives and development' headings). It is important to note that user exit survey findings relate to the sample of business information users visiting the relevant libraries during the observation period only. The researcher identified the relevant users during the observation process as they physically consulted business information resources, *or* when making a business information-related enquiry at the library desk. The sample does not include enquiries made by telephone or e-mail. Following individual case study descriptions, a summary of case study findings will be discussed including general user exit survey analysis and a presentation of key themes.

Examples of 'best practice' from within the Yorkshire region are presented within the case study text, including examples of professional business information skills development and training; business information events and marketing; specialised electronic services.

For copied examples of promotional leaflets and literature available within case study services, please see appendix 7 of the bound report. Other samples will be provided separately.

Service description

Sheffield Central Library includes a designated *Business Science and Technology Library* (BSTL), which is situated on the ground floor. The library is very clearly signed and accessible from the main library entrance.

The enquiry desk is situated on the right hand side upon entrance to the BSTL. Staff offices are located directly behind the enquiry desk. During the observation period, 2 members of staff permanently staffed the desk, and up to two staff members frequented the library floor from their offices and were able to answer user enquiries in passing. The enquiry desk presented an immediate 'first port of call' for users upon entering the library, and is clearly visible and accessible from all parts of the library should help be needed at any point.

A comprehensive business information service is provided in Sheffield, designed to meet the needs of large companies, SMEs and start up businesses, alongside general consumer and job seeking information. The physical library consists of a large L-shaped space with book stock shelved along the walls. Stock is presented in Dewey sequence with clear, visible subject headers at the top of each bay. There is a business information 'area' opposite the enquiry desk and on the immediate left upon entering the library. This area consists of:
- Designated 'patent' enquiry office
- Four bays of UK business directories
- Four bays of telephone directories
- Two bays of company annual reports
- One shelving unit containing 'overseas' business directories
- Three bays of statistics
- Two bays of business dictionaries and reference books
- Three bays of patent, trademark, design and invention stock
- Seven bays of law stock
- 15 open access PCs and four study spaces

The 'general' BSTL space contains the following business information resources:
- Five bays of business-related book stock
- Four bays of business and technical journals
- One bay of patents journals
- European Information centre
- A further 45 study spaces and 6 PCs

User guides

At the time of observation, the BSTL had a specific stock display/promotion concerning business start up materials, information and advice. The display was noticeable and attractive, with colourful slogans such as 'are you an entrepreneur?' drawing attention to the display. The display contained books on starting your own business; Business Link and BSTL business information leaflets; business opportunity profile folders and local information leaflets on business start up advice and support.

Various user guides and leaflets are available to take away, including:
- Patent Information in Sheffield
- Business Science and Technology Library user guide to resources
- World Metal Index promotional leaflet
- Local Business Information
- 'It's the Business' newsletter aimed at potential business start ups
- City Business Magazine – South Yorkshire

Business information notices are displayed around the library advising users that information may be available 'online' if not on the shelves and directing users to the enquiry desk for help and guidance.

User enquiries

During the observation period a total of 28 users visited the BSTL. Most users booked to use a PC; the visit was made on a Friday and by 12pm all PCs were in use.

A total number of 6 business information enquiries were made in person throughout the observation period. Of these 6 business information enquiries:
- 3 were market research enquiries; the other 3 users specified that their enquiries were of a 'business start up' nature
- 4 out of 6 business information enquiries were wholly successful (users acquired ALL the information they needed; the remaining 2 enquiries were partly successful (users acquired some of the information they needed)
- All 6 business information users required the assistance of a member of library staff
- Only 1 of the users had used the library as a business information service before and had returned to the library inspired by their 'own knowledge and awareness'
- The reasons for choosing the library for the first-time users included the fact that they worked locally (2); recommendation by colleague/peer friend (2); and own knowledge and awareness (1)
- User profiles: 2 users were self-employed and belonged to the 'creative and arts' sectors; 1 full-time student in higher education; 1 employed part-time in the finance sector; 1 employed part-time in 'creative and arts' sector; 1 employed full-time in retail sector
- 5 users gave general feedback comments which were very positive and

particularly complimentary to staff:

"The lady on the helpdesk is marvellous!"

"Pleasantly surprised by range of information… v. helpful staff"

"Good resources – helpful staff"

"Good service, extremely helpful"

"Excellent service"

Business information service objectives and development

The Sheffield Libraries, Archives and Information Position Statement 2004 describes the policy to be 'a key provider of business information services in the region' as a headline policy, and includes the objective of:

Working with various partners to improve the information needs of start-ups, SMEs and support agencies, including SINTO, Sheffield Business Club, the National Metals Technology Centre; Sheffield First; Sheffield Business Link

Specific projects include 4 patent clinics in 2004/05; maintenance of library web pages on business information; marketing of the service at enterprise show (May 2005); introduce business advice sessions (April 2005)

The library service in Sheffield has been restructured to come under the city council economic regeneration 'umbrella'. The specific targets of the PLA have been re-aligned to complement 'Sheffield First' targets, which include Closing the Gap and Thinking City which are well established:

"We've just been restructured and we all work under economic regeneration… we put our priorities in with the city council and say 'yes' we are meeting those targets"

Regeneration targets include taking the service 'out' of central library and undertaking outreach work in New Deal areas including Burngreave, Crystal Peaks and Stocksbridge. Information services will be developed in to advisory sessions within these areas. Other regeneration linked activities include participating in enterprise events, which raises the profile of the service and makes a valid contribution to regional development agency objectives in terms of encouraging business start up in the region:

"We are looking at promoting the services 'out' of this building… going to areas such as Burngreave… looking at developing the business information services in to business advice sessions…We've done some outreach in Burngreave already… we're having a presence…we do go to the enterprise show in Sheffield"

Sheffield hosts monthly patent clinics in association with a patent agent and a member of Library staff from Leeds, which include one-to-one sessions – the library is looking to develop this service alongside business advice sessions to strengthen the business service brand and identity.

The information needs of the business community will be more accurately defined at branch library level in accordance with a Community Charter mark.

This is thanks to a proactive initiative on behalf of the relevant library staff in developing outreach work and working more closely with branch librarians in defining user needs and developing services accordingly.

The business information service at Sheffield Central Library has working partnerships with Sheffield Business Club involving business-related events in the city; regular business information group meetings with SINTO; electronic resource sharing with organisations such as the South Yorkshire Manufacturing Alliance; the Patent Network described above; referral relationships with Business Link and Sheffield Enterprise Agency (SENTA); electronic purchasing partnerships with other PLAs; access to learning partnerships with both Sheffield university libraries. Due to personnel issues the working relationship with Business Link is not quite as strong as it has been in the past, but Sheffield Central Library are very open to developing the working relationship between the two providers and take advantage of the mutual association with SENTA, which would facilitate a strong business start up information identity:

> "We are aware of Business Link and will make referrals… we have a strong working relationship with SENTA (Sheffield Enterprise Agency)… I'm not sure if they're still autonomous but they've moved in to the same premises (as Business Link)…"

> "We would be happy to work with Business Link… they do attend SINTO meetings… the formal link we had when a member of our staff was on secondment with them has gone… its much more informal now"

It was felt by the Sheffield respondent that the business information service in central library has a strong identity in the city, and that regular users value the service very highly. The fact that services are provided free of charge is a huge benefit, along with the fact that professional help and assistance is provided in the effective use of the resources.

Huddersfield Central Library
Kirklees Metropolitan Council

Observation time: 2 hours

Service description

Business information services form part of the *Reference Library* at Huddersfield Central Library on the first floor. Although the Reference Library is clearly signed upon entrance, there is no visible reference to business information upon entering the library; locating the business resources would require existing awareness or making an enquiry at the main reception desk.

The Reference Library enquiry desk is situated to the immediate left of the entrance, and was permanently staffed by 3 members of staff during the observation visit. The enquiry desk presented an immediate 'first port of call' for users upon entering the library, and is clearly visible and accessible from all parts of the library should help be needed at any point. The enquiry desk is directly opposite the only immediately discernible business information 'section' which consists of:

- Four bays of trade and professional directories
- Two bays of careers guidance resources

The reference Library is a large open-plan rectangular space with book stock shelved along the walls in Dewey sequence. The library includes 38 study spaces and 8 open access PCs. Business resources are integrated in to the reference collection under appropriate Dewey section headings. The following business resources are available within the reference collection:

- 3.5 shelves of 'business and marketing' text books
- 3 shelves of business law books
- 16 business-related journals
- Databases: FAME; COMPASS Europe; Data Monitor; British Standards

User enquiries

During the observation period in Huddersfield a total of 44 users visited the reference library. Only two business information enquiries were made in person however during the observation period (one of which chose not to complete the questionnaire when approached).

Anecdotal evidence from Reference Library staff concerning business information enquiries made during the preceding week indicate that they are usually discrete 'market research' enquiries requiring the consultation of company directories. Such enquiries may therefore relate to business start up, consumer issues, or study and research. The one participating user

enquiry had the following characteristics:

- Full-time student in higher education
- The enquiry was made to aid study (research for dissertation)
- The enquiry was partly successful
- The assistance of a member of library staff was required
- The library hadn't been used as a business information service before
- The library was visited because family live locally

Business information service objectives and development

The business information service in Huddersfield central Library is undergoing a process of development, including the identification and acquisition of new resources and subsequent staff development and training:

> "I think the range of services we have is good, and will be better from next year…. The only thing we're lacking in is market research, but we've just signed up to Data Monitor which will fill the gap, we've also identified other databases… the first step over the next few years is to get the services in place, and then to make sure that the staff are all au fait with them!""

The service will then be working more closely with the wider council department to effectively promote the service, drawing upon external marketing expertise and skills which library staff don't necessarily (and traditionally) have. Primary objectives are to extend the service to SMEs within the region:

> "We have to go out there and promote it… devise ways of reaching out to the business community… I feel that libraries fall down hugely on publicity… Within Kirklees we come under Culture and Leisure, and within that section there is a promotions officer… I've been talking to her about what we do, so hopefully there will be more expertise and guidance, rather than just librarians with no expertise trying to come up with a publicity campaign not really knowing what they're doing"

When asked if there would be funding available for the library service from within the council section's promotions account, the respondent was unsure and raised the point that available funding is often a problem and the reason for not pursuing prolific promotional campaigns.

Existing partnerships in the provision of business information services within the region include a reciprocal scheme with academic institutions and their respective library services and informal referral relationships with organisations such as Business Link. Kirklees PLA acknowledge the strategic (both regional and professional) role and benefits of developing effective partnerships and consider them to be a service priority:

> "We have a project in Kirklees called the Welcome project where we're trying to offer all the resources within higher and further education establishments and the public library, trying to work together… whereby any member of the public can use their (book) business resources"

> "We have a relationship with Business Link in a very casual manner… I once rang them in response to a user enquiry, and afterwards they called me back and said that we should be

doing more things together which we agreed on but nothing ever happened! Its all a bit hit and miss without actually setting the time aside to cement things… the will is there… I'd certainly like closer links with Business Link"

"I copied your questionnaire to our head of service and he said that he would have put (ranked) partnerships higher… so they are a service priority… partnerships are a big thing in some of the major strategy documents such as Framework for the Future… we are aware of that and are taking it on board"

Business information service events:

Wakefield Libraries and Information services

Wakefield Libraries and Information Services produced an internal document following the relaunch of their business information services in 2004. The report describes publicity campaigns and events organised by the service to raise awareness encourage increased use by the SME and self-employed community of Wakefield District. Events included:

- Business Breakfast 8.00-9.30am
- Business Happy Hour 6.00-7.30pm

The events gave visitors the opportunity to browse the resources, meet staff and other members of the business community over croissants and juice at the breakfast event or wine and cheese at the happy hour event!

The events were publicised via:

- Press releases to local radio stations and newspapers
- Mail-shot of 120 SMEs
- Articles in Business Link newsletter, Federation of Small Businesses Newsletter
- Articles on What's On – Wakefield Metropolitan District Council (WMDC) website
- Advertised via WMDC *Distributions* newsletter
- Attendees at the events were given information packs including giveaways such as pens, post-it notes etc, promotional leaflets and joining cards

The events offered networking opportunities with representatives from Business Link; possible joint promotions were discussed and Business Link now actively promote the library's business information service in their start up packs.

Feedback comments from event evaluation sheets included:

- "Very informative and professional librarians"
- "It is great to have this provision in Wakefield"
- "Great idea – consider this as an annual event"

Bradford Central Library
Bradford Metropolitan District Council

Observation time: 3 hours

Service description

Business information forms part of Information Services at Bradford Central Library. The floor directory in the main reception area directs you to the fourth floor for 'business information services'. On the fourth floor the entrance door is clearly marked "Business Information Service' and an impressive business start up information and resources promotion had been displayed in the fourth floor foyer. The department itself is a large mezzanine floor, which overlooks the information service/reference library on the third floor.

The enquiry desk is located to the left hand side of the entrance and is clearly visible from all areas. 2-3 members of staff at any one point during the observation period staffed the desk.

The stock contains a mixture of reference and loan stock, which is all clearly marked. There are separate sections for journals; business start up advice and resources (including sector profiles; legal and financial advice leaflets produced by external organisations such as Business Link, Institute of Chartered Accountants, banks, Department of Trade and Industry; company information; directories; book stock. Stock includes:
- 2 bays of MINTEL reports
- 2 PCs for the sole use of electronic business information resources
- 2 filing cabinets containing company annual reports
- 5 bays of UK trade directories
- 5 bays of worldwide trade directories
- 6 bays of business related book stock
- 7 bays of statistics
- Display unit of business related journals

There are many user guides and leaflets available to takeaway, including the following examples:
- Key companies in Bradford 2004
- User guide to Juniper (electronic company database)
- User guide to Cobra (electronic resource on starting and running a business)
- User guide to EBSCO (electronic journal service)
- Business Information leaflet (guide to library resources)
- Small business guide to the internet (produced by HSBC)
- UK Trade & Investment key facts 2004 booklet
- DTI UK online for business promotional bookmark
- Setting up in Business, Small Firms – buying a franchise, Employing Staff booklets (produced by Business Link)

There are many other internally produced guides to using the resources which make the service very accessible and 'user friendly', for example, staff have inserted notes in to some resources advising that it is also available on-line, including instructions on how to access the resource electronically; specific and relevant reports are downloaded from the internet and are available for reference to save on printing costs for the user.

User enquiries

A total number of 25 users visited the library during the observation period. Of these, 5 business information enquiries were made in person. Of these 5 enquiries:

- 4 enquiries were based on market research; 1 respondent selected 'other' and indicated that their enquiry was related to how to advertise and market their business
- 3 enquiries were wholly successful; 1 partly successful; 1 unsuccessful
- All 5 business information users required the assistance of a member of staff
- Only 1 of the 5 users had used the library as a business information service before, and had visited the library again based on their own knowledge and awareness
- Of the 4 'first time business information users', 1 had chosen to visit because they live locally; 1 had visited based on own knowledge and awareness; 2 had visited based on recommendation(s) from a colleague/peer/friend
- 2 users were self-employed; 1 were employed part-time; 1 employed full-time; 1 full-time HE student
- 3 users belong to the retail sector; 1 to 'tourism and hospitality'

Business information service objectives and development

The City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council[11] asserts that one of the ten confirmed roles for public libraries across the District is that they should be 'bases for enterprise, innovation and regeneration', although no specific mention is given to business information services. The former Business and Commerce Library in Bradford Central Library has been merged with the reference library to form an Information Services department. However, staff responsible for business resources demonstrated a commitment to preserving the quality and profile of business information services, particularly as the specialist staff skills base has been maintained:

"In 2002 we had a library restructure when the Business and Commerce Library merged with the reference library and also some lending stock, which became a new department – Information Services… but we do see business information as a large part of our department, and we're calling it a business information service, as offered by information services"

"The former Business and Commerce library had 9 FTE posts specialising in business

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[11] City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council: Public Library Position Statement 2004

> "information – all those staff have stayed with Information Services so we still have our business information skills base"

Regional economic development policies and objectives play a formative role in the business information service delivery and planning in Bradford. Previous funding initiatives have helped to develop resources for small and medium enterprises in the Bradford area and a lot of business start up initiatives utilise the library services. The business information service is perceived as an accessible community 'gateway' to all the information and guidance required to start and grow a business. Other regeneration projects undertaken by the department include job search sessions in partnership with other local training and information providers:

> "A few years ago we had ERDF objective 2 funding to resource SMEs and we do still see a lot of start up businesses coming our way… the social regeneration policies show that there's a need for a business information service and I'm aligning our service improvement plan to match those corporate and regional agendas"

> "As a non-threatening environment that draws a lot of information together I think we're a vital starting point for the community and a potential business start up… we had a stall at the Think Business enterprise show at the university about a month ago… it was interesting to see people from the patents office, and the inland revenue… we can offer an in-road in to all of that… which is probably where our strengths lie"

> "We do co-host job search sessions with the community development unit and the education advice service for adults, and both of those have the potential for some of those people to start their own business"

Existing regional partnerships include training providers within the business start up context, and networking peer review-based partnerships with other PLAs and their respective business information services. Similarly to Sheffield business information service, the working relationship with Business Link has deteriorated in recent years further to structural changes to their service, though staff in Bradford are also keen to renew working relationships with Business Link:

> "Over the last few years we've had a lot of start up business schemes in Bradford, some resourced by training providers, and we've formed partnerships with them and they've sent their students to us to help with business plans and marketing plans"

> "We've had strong links with Leeds Library, the business information service there… there's a networking partnership between Leeds, Sheffield, Hull, Huddersfield to a lesser degree… a resource sharing partnership when funding was low, to make sure we weren't over-lapping too much… the Yorkshire Libraries electronic resources working group is very useful – the reference librarians get together to evaluate electronic resources and a lot of them are business resources"

> "We did have a partnership with Business Link a few years ago up until their restructure… we find it difficult to keep up with Business Link and the changes they make… when we worked with them they had an information manager from the library authority and together we were a core provider… they concentrate more on the service in Leeds now… their personnel seem to change so frequently its hard to establish a relationship"

Scunthorpe Central Library
North Lincolnshire Council

Observation time: 2 hours

Service description

From the main entrance of Scunthorpe Central Library, a directory lists business information and directs visitors towards the reference library on the second floor. The reference library consists of a large open space with an enquiry desk directly opposite the library entrance, and visible from most library 'sections'. The library contains 36 workspaces, 12 open access PCs, and a local studies 'section'. 3 members of library staff throughout the observation period staffed the enquiry desk.

There is no immediately obvious or discernible business information 'area' – business information resources are stocked accordingly within general book stock in Dewey sequence and the general journal collection. Business information resources included:
- 4 shelves of business related text books
- Business journals the Economist, Management Today, and specialised publications such as Materials world and Structural Engineer
- 9 shelves of business book stock in the lending library
- New business books display
- Electronic databases including FAME, British Standards

It is important to note that at the time of the visit, Scunthorpe Central Library was in the process of a physical restructure, with different departments moving to different floors. The move is being carried out during library open hours, as such, stock is 'in transit' between departments/floors.

User enquiries

A total of 23 users visited the reference library in Scunthorpe during the observation period. Only one business information enquiry was made, as described below:
- The enquiry was made for study purposes
- The enquiry was wholly successful
- The user did not require the assistance of a member of library staff
- The user had used the library before and lived locally
- The user was a part-time student in higher education
- The user gave the following feedback comment:

"An appropriate environment for the purposes of study due to right room temperature, lighting, availability of staff members and noise level"

Business information service objectives and development

North Lincolnshire Libraries Position Statement 2004 does not make any reference to business information or the role of the library in fulfilling regional economic development objectives.

The staff respondent stressed that there was a need for the 'dust to settle' following the previously mentioned library restructure before any real decisions can be made with respect to the planning of business information services. The business service was described as a small operation that catered for the small business needs of a largely rural community. The needs of such a business community are very distinct from those of the larger authorities we have already discussed; the types of small business particular to such an authority are dependant on local business information providers due to their inability to subscribe to expensive databases and services themselves and their dependence on the professional information skills of library staff to help them with their enquiries. However, expensive electronic licenses and subscription services are under threat within the PLA itself because of low usage figures giving little value for money:

> "A lot of the enquiries we get are very basic… the industries round here tend to be one man and a paint brush…when they come in we are obviously more au fait with using the internet, so we can help them out… it's a very nebulous thing"

> "The sort of people we have from smaller businesses aren't necessarily internet literate… obviously they can't pay massive subscriptions for business databases… but then again neither can we… FAME is under threat because it's so expensive… I'm hanging on to it by my fingertips… its very costly, but its super… when we get to use it its great but the actual use is so small its difficult to justify"

A customer profiling exercise revealed that there are very few SMEs with more than 6 employees; as such the information needs of the business community are very basic as they undertake little research and development. Staff at Scunthorpe Central Library believe that it is important to continue to provide such services for the community which they serve, as they still receive requests for services which other PLAs have ceased to provide:

> "Usage figures for British Standards was something like 32 in a year… bearing in mind that we pay about 12,000 for that… its under threat but we're jumping up and down to keep it… its unfortunate because small businesses are asked to tender to British Standards… if they can't get it locally what do they do?"

> "We still get a lot of people wanting to do mailing lists and we still get people wanting British Standards which we still have… although a lot of local libraries are packing that in"

Working relationships with Business Link have again existed in the past but "fizzled out" due to a lack of time on behalf of both representative members of staff. Relationships were formed out of a proactive 'resource sharing' idea of the two individuals involved rather than an official initiative.

Business information service staff development and training

SINTO

SINTO (based in Sheffield) provides a professional networking and support alliance, primarily for information providers and librarians in the Sheffield and South Yorkshire regions, including public, academic and specialised services. Established in 1938, its original aim was to make information collections available to all businesses. Day (2002) has stated that SINTO should be used as a model of good practice by other regional information networks. SINTO Business Group involves members from across Yorkshire, including the public library business information services discussed within this report.

The regular SINTO Business Group meetings facilitate the sharing of ideas and professional support amongst a variety of business services, helping to improve and raise awareness of the resources provided across the region, which in turn supports the continuing professional development of individual business librarians. Specific professional development and 'awareness raising' regular features include:

- SINTO Business Directory – regularly updated directory of business information services and resources within the region
- Business Information Newsletter – informing members of any changes and developments to business information services, events, training opportunities etc
- Visits – networking and 'shadowing' opportunities are extended beyond the Yorkshire region with the inclusion of visits to other business information providers; for example, the next planned visit will be to Birmingham Libraries to observe the Business Insight service (which York and North Yorks are planning to subscribe to, as discussed within the PLA survey chapter)
- Training courses and events – SINTO provides a number of general training opportunities and courses for the information professional, for example on website and database management, and on the use of specific information services

Leeds Central Library
Leeds City Council

Observation time: 4 hours

Service description

The Business and Research Library (BRL) is located on the second floor of Leeds Central Library – indicated by a floor listings notice within the library's main entrance. The BRL is a large, ornate, galleried room divided in to two 'sections'. The enquiry desk is directly in front of the entrance, between the two sections of the library. During the observation period, 3 members of staff staffed the desk.

The business library, or section of the BRL, is to the right hand side of the enquiry desk upon entrance. Resources contained within this area include:
- 4 dedicated PCs for electronic business information resources only
- 14 study spaces
- 2 bays of Key Note reports
- 2 bays of MINTEL reports
- 3 bays of telephone directories
- 2 bays of statistics
- 1 bay of specific 'new and small business' resources/book stock
- 1 bay of Leeds and local economy
- 5 bays of UK directories
- 2 bays of company annual reports
- 6 shelves of current edition business journals
- 3 bays of bound journals
- 6 bays of European information

There are many leaflets and user guides to take away, including:
- Jobseeker workshop (in Leeds libraries) information/promotional leaflet
- Guide to Business and Jobseekers resources ('access point' neighbourhood renewal projects)
- Patents Information Unit user guide
- Patent and Trademark Search services leaflet
- UK online for business promotional bookmark
- SME Knowledge Network (Bradford University) leaflet
- Business Start Up Information at Leeds Central Library user guide
- Business information factsheets
- Useful Websites for Business Start Ups directory

Along with other guides produced by external organisations such as Business Link, DTI etc and local relevant information such as graduate business start up initiatives/services (Leeds Metropolitan University)

User enquiries

During the observation period, 36 users visited the Business Research Library at Leeds Central Library, and 10 business information enquiries were made. The nature and characteristics of those enquiries are described below:

- Of the 10 business information enquiries made 3 were related to business start up; 4 to market research; 1 legal research enquiry; 1 'general interest'; 1 'other' enquiry relating to tax
- 5 enquiries were successful and the other 5 were partly successful
- 9 of the 10 business information users required the assistance of a member of library staff
- 5 of the users making a business related enquiry had used the library as a business information service before
- 5 users had visited the library based on their own knowledge and awareness; 2 live locally; 2 work locally; 1 used the library following the recommendation of colleague/peer/friend
- 2 users were employed part-time; 2 were full-time students (I HE, 1 FE); 3 were unemployed (2 graduates, 1 retired); 3 were self-employed
- Sectors included retail (1); industry (2); creative and arts (1); tourism and hospitality (1); and 3 'other' (web design/multimedia, plumbing, motor mechanic)
- Feedback comments again commended the helpfulness of staff; the range of resources; the accessibility of the library; the business start up resources and included the following comments:

"I was surprised by the range of information available… I wasn't expecting there to be as much as my university library which I am no longer able to access!"

"Staff very helpful"

"Have only partly acquired information as I will need to come back when I have more time – the information is here. The service provided by the library is very convenient for people working in the city centre"

"It is useful to be able to 'drop in' for a one-off enquiry and to have the relevant information available. Staff are approachable and helpful"

"Nice environment to work in"

"Friendly, helpful staff"

"Efficient service"

"The business start up section is excellent and I believe this is the only location I can access market data publications such as MINTEL, Data Monitor etc – to buy these privately would be impossible"

Business information service objectives and development

One of the main objectives stated in the Leeds Library and Information

Service Position Statement is 'supporting businesses to enhance economic prosperity, innovation and sustainable employment' under a community and Neighbourhood Renewal umbrella. Planned activities cited to help achieve such objectives include Business Start Up seminars involving Business Link and Patents clinics; learning sessions aimed at local businesses (setting up a website, book-keeping, employment law); ensuring that service is flexible enough to respond to local employment and economic conditions; evaluate jobseeker sessions and seek more funding.

Business information services are also undergoing structural changes and 're-launch'. An advanced electronic information service responding to e-mail enquiries has been developed incorporating a patents service and remote business service. Funds have been streamed in to specialist content development which has raised the profile of the business service:

"We have a reasonably well funded service at Central Library which is undergoing a lot of re-engineering… we had a patent information service which probably had a national reputation which was affected by patent information becoming available on the internet and made quite a lot of income at one time… so we've brought that service in to central library and merged it with our remote access business service where enquiries are mainly made by e-mail"

"The face-to-face service in central library has been merged with a general research library and hasn't had such a focused profile if you like – that's been ticking over for a couple of years – where we have been good is getting money to do content around the business services from various funding streams [IAG, LSC]; through that we've done things like a directory of call centres within Leeds and Yorkshire, directory of IT services, employments agencies in Leeds, web-based and paper copy… the employment agency directory has been incredibly popular, at one time getting about 3000 hits a month on the website… the content creation has been an added dimension to the service"

Neighbourhood Renewal funding and economic regeneration have also brought the service sharply in to focus, with the development of a specialised job seeking service; the creation of new posts to aid the future community-based role of the service; developing library plans to incorporate regional development agency objectives:

"As far as economic regeneration goes it has been prioritised in terms of the job seeking service which uses business information because we use those resources to help people with background for interviews"

"We're looking at the economic vitality of communities which is one of the impact standards and we're bringing it back in to quite sharp focus and some jobs have been created around that… from that point of view you could say we're prioritising [business information services] because we're putting more staff emphasis on it… at the moment its more about what we're working towards rather than what exists"

"We're aware of Yorkshire Forward policies and objectives but we're not really plugged in to them… we would like to be… for example the regional business capital competition which Leeds City Council are involved with at the moment… as an information provider we'd liked to be involved… that is in next years plan to try and do that"

Systems of marketing and promotion and community profiling are also undergoing a programme of 'professionalisation' within the business information service, including the production of a high-quality detailed portfolio of services to act as a branded marketing tool, and collaborating with

professional marketing staff from within the council to develop an effective marketing plan. The service is also looking at 'scaling out' business information resources to branch libraries to generate a community business service tailored to the needs of individual business communities:

"We haven't done a lot of work on promoting it… we don't know if it meets the need of the business community at the moment… part of our planning for this year is to develop something we're calling a portfolio of services which will define in more detail what we can offer various market segments"

"I'd say we're at the start of community profiling… we've got meetings set up with other people in the council that deal with business information… We're hoping we can use the portfolio to go out and re-market ourselves to the people and the players in the business community… we need to decide how we're going to target individual businesses and we're working with our marketing department on a marketing plan to do that"

"We don't have any outposts in our branch libraries… we want to try and pilot some kind of community business service… it might involve developing the web services further… its something that we're looking at"

The merging of established business information services within the central library has meant increased opportunity for working partnerships, which the service is keen to embrace. Successful partnerships are however dependent on an appraisal of the services provided by information providers within the region in order to avoid duplication and understand where each individual service 'fits in' to the regional picture, and to ensure that individual brands and identities are upheld. Previous working relationships with Business Link for example have suffered from the blurring of identity boundaries and a lack of understanding on what the individual services represent. The service will be developing working partnerships in the near future with 'internal' as well as external organisations, such as Leeds Development Agency:

"The patents and business information service which was based in library headquarters has done a lot of work with Business Links, mainly in North Yorkshire, not so much with Leeds Business Link which is something we want to look at"

"In terms of defining their information needs we need to decide what ours are and how they fit in… a library service is quite niche compared to those provided by the likes of Business Link… ours are probably much broader and richer but we need to explore that link with them because we don't really know in all honesty what information services they are providing"

"We are going to develop more partnerships… we did have a partnership with Business Link in Leeds which I have to say didn't really work out… it was a few years ago and they wanted us to deliver a service which almost had their brand to the exclusion of the library brand"

"We're trying to develop better links with other parts of the council, like Leeds Development Agency in terms of developing what's on the city council website… that will involve making the service more transactional"

Specialised electronic business information service

Leeds Information and 'E' Services Unit: Business and patents

The Business and Patents service within Leeds Central Library's Information and 'E' Services Unit provides an excellent example of a specialised business information resource delivered electronically from a central service. The service is strongly branded and has a national reputation, and serves the while of Yorkshire, not just the Leeds region.

The Patents service has a strong regional presence with other business start up and enterprise-based organisations and events including:

- Patent clinics for the Chartered Institute of Patents Agents (CIPA) involving patents for inventors
- Patent clinics with Business Link North Yorkshire including demonstration searches at locations such as York Science Park, which complement other services provided by Business Link and are usually oversubscribed
- Access to services through other such agencies, for example links on CIPA and Business Link websites
- Enterprise shows with North Yorkshire rural businesses
- Entrepreneurship events at Bradford University and Huddersfield University
- Delivering a module on patent searching for the Green Science degree course at York University
- Partnerships with other PLA patents services (e.g. Sheffield)
- Future developments include staff training at branch level which is a priority for providing a community-based service; develop enquiry management system to assist community profiling; work with more external agencies on collaborative projects

User exit survey summary

User profile summary

Of the total number of 23 business information enquiries made during the observation period four were full-time higher education students. The most frequent employment status was self-employed, whilst higher education and retail are the most frequent sectors. For a full break down of sector and employment status, please see table 4.

Sector/employment status	Employed F/T	Employed P/T	F/T student	P/T student	Self-employed	Unemployed
Finance		1				
Legal						
Retail	2	1			1	1
Industry					1	1
FE			1			
HE			4	1		
Creative & arts		2			2	
Tourism & hospitality		1			1	
Other					2	1

Table 4

Nature of enquiries

Market research enquiries were the most frequent, with 11 of the total of 23 (47.8%) business information enquiries being market research-related. Business start up enquiries are next 'most popular', with 6 (26%) being made during the observation process.

Success rates

13 of the 23 enquiries made (56.5%) were successful, meaning that all the information needed by users had been acquired; 9 enquiries (39%) were partly successful (some of the needed information had been acquired). Only 1 enquiry made was unsuccessful.

General user evaluation

69.6% of the business information service user sample strongly agreed that public libraries are important sources of business information (please see table 5). 60.9% agree that public libraries suitably meet the needs of local business communities. 43.5% agree that public libraries could do more to assist the business community by working more closely with other business information providers. The majority of users either disagree or are 'undecided' concerning the effective publicity of public library business information services. This suggests that in the opinion of the business information user service, more needs to be done by the public library in terms of marketing their services and collaborating with other business information providers to

provide an effective, marketable and recognisable regional business information service.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Public libraries are important sources of business information	**16**	**5**	**1**		
Business information services provided by public libraries are adequately marketed and publicised	**1**	**7**	**8**	**4**	
The information needs of local business communities are suitably met by public libraries	**2**	**14**	**6**		
Public libraries could do more to assist the business community by working more closely with other business information providers	**5**	**10**	**6**	**1**	

Table 5

Effectiveness of contingent evaluation

Given the relatively small sample of business information service users within this study, no real important or appropriate conclusions can be drawn from the valuation exercise in terms of measuring the value of services provided by public libraries based on the amount of money that users would be willing to pay for an individual business information enquiry and an annual subscription fee. The results show that most of the sample used in this study (11/23) would be willing to pay less than £5 for the individual enquiry they had made and most (9/23) would pay less than £100 for an annual subscription fee (8/23 users would pay £100-200). This may be useful in indicating the average amounts that users would pay for services, but is only worthwhile on a contingent analysis scale when used with a much larger sample, and where advanced analysis could be undertaken providing comparable data between amount that users are willing to pay, type of enquiry, and levels of expenditure on the relevant resources. This would also need to be measured against total populations (for example, number of users per annum) and to allow for existing value-added services.

Business information service ratings and priorities

Business information source ratings 1-7 (1 = most important, 7 = least important: user responses							
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**
Availability of professional advice and guidance on the effective use of BIS	9	6	4	3			
Access to substantial business-related book collection	7	6	3	4	2		
A dedicated and visible physical space for business users and communities	4	3	6	3	4	1	1

Access to professional journals and publications	1	3	2	5	4	2	5
A dedicated public library business information website		2		2	5	5	8
Access to electronic business information sources and databases	2	3	7	2	2	5	1
Partnerships with other business information providers in the locality				3	4	9	6

Table 6

The most important element of a public library business information service according to the user sample studied is the 'availability of professional advice and guidance on the effective use of business information services', with 9 'most important' selections, followed by 'access to a substantial business-related book collection' with 7 selections. 82.6% of respondents ranked the role of library staff between 1st and 3rd in terms of their importance as business information resources. A dedicated public library business information website was considered to be the least important resource with 8 '7th place' selections. Access to electronic business information sources and databases, which was considered to be the most important resource by the PLA staff sample, is considered to be reasonably important by users, with '3rd place' having the most number of selections. If we refer back to the range of available business information services across the PLA sample (table 1) it is worth noting that *all* of the respective services provide the resources most valued by users and staff alike (although not all have selected 'specialist staff', this may be justified by the joint nature of some of the service provided within reference and information libraries). There is clearly a solid foundation of business information services provided by public libraries within the region that can be built upon for the benefit of wider business communities and users.

Summary of key case study findings

General findings

All of the case studies visited have undergone recent restructure, or are in the process of restructuring on a physical or organisational basis. This may offer some explanation of the relevant expenditure 'plateau' described in section 5.5 and suggests that an on-going evaluation of PLA expenditure on business information services may be worthwhile. The volume of change and restructuring within business information services suggests a commitment to the development of these services and a golden opportunity for key regional stakeholders, development agencies and other information providers to contribute to (and subsequently benefit from) such developments.

The importance of marketing services effectively, irrespective of the 'type' of service and business community that they serve, cannot be understated. All case study services report a considerable failing 'so far' in this field. None of the library users surveyed had been inspired to use the library by 'library marketing and publicity' which reinforces the lack of effective activity with respect to publicising public library business information services. Some case study libraries are adopting a more professional approach to marketing activities by working closely with other council departments with the relevant expertise. This could suggest a role for other key business information stakeholders within the region to collaborate with PLAs on effective marketing strategies, especially providers with greater experience in effective promotional campaigns. Such synergy could help to ensure that public library services are reaching the appropriate business communities.

User exit survey

Volume of business start up/market research enquiries

The fact that the majority of business information enquiries made during the observation period were related to market research and business start up highlights the important role of public library business information services in supporting enterprise within the region - especially when we consider the success rate of enquiries made. The fact that many of the relevant users were consulting the business information service for the first time suggests that they are at the explorative stages of business start up, thus there is an opportunity for other organisations involved with the support of business start up in the region to collaborate with public libraries and offer a seamless information, advice and guidance service to aspiring entrepreneurs.

The important role of library staff

Only one out of twenty-three business information users did not require the assistance of a member of library staff when making their enquiry, which highlights the importance of *professional* guidance in the effective use of

business information services.

Key themes of relevance to regional stakeholders

Contribution to business start up and economic regeneration

Based on the proportion of successful business enquiries made concerning business start up and market research, alongside the wealth of business start up information available and actively promoted within the region's public libraries, the potential role of public libraries in encouraging and supporting business start up and growth in the region deserves acknowledgement. From a regional perspective there are clear contemporary opportunities in terms of public policy and economic regeneration to develop and reassert the role of public libraries as business information services.

The economic regeneration contribution of public libraries also extends in to more developed professional resources, such as the jobseeker services offered at Leeds and Bradford, and the specialised content creation initiatives being undertaken at Leeds. Outreach work being undertaken at Sheffield, and the branch library development plans in Leeds illustrate a commitment to community development and support. Public libraries are proving to be proactive and forward thinking in response to their organisations and region's economic regeneration, neighbourhood renewal and community development objectives.

Opportunity for regional partnerships

The relationship between the public library business information services and the respective Business Link services is uniformly 'informal' across the case study sample, and is mostly based on a mutual knowledge and awareness of the respective services and a referral relationship. In examples such as Bradford and Sheffield the relationship was once much stronger and effective, but has declined due to organisational and personnel issues. Other services such as Huddersfield Reference Library have indicated a mutual desire for the two services to work together, which haven't quite materialised because of existing work commitments and the subsequent lack of time to 'get together'. All respondents have indicated a desire to forge a stronger working partnership with Business Link and to develop a strong regional business information collaborative service, particularly with reference to business start up information, advice and guidance. It may be appropriate for another regional stakeholder to act as mediator between the two services, and provide the formal link, which brings the two services together for the benefit of the relevant business communities. Such mediation could help to sustain the working relationship, and overcome issues involved with organisation restructure and changes in personnel, location etc.

All public library business information service respondents are keen to develop working partnerships with all relevant external agencies,

organisations and providers, not just Business Link, which would be of mutual benefit to other such organisations and the business communities they serve.

Professional information skills a key asset

The value of the professional skills and awareness of business information service library staff cannot be underestimated. This is illustrated by the extent to which business information users rely upon their assistance. Observations made within the literature review suggest that the internet and the subsequent widespread availability of electronic business information sources have had a damaging effect upon the use of business information services provided by public libraries. However, as indicated by the respondent in North Lincs/Scunthorpe Central Library, it is not safe to assume that users and relevant business communities have the appropriate skills, confidence and resources to access and use electronic resources effectively. This is not particular to rural communities and small businesses either:

"The internet has had an effect on usage… whereas people used to send their secretaries to the library they now ask them to look up something on the internet… people still use us for the difficult enquiries, where they may need help" (Sheffield)

Wallace (2003) raised the lack of ICT use (and subsequent inadequate use of web-based information sources) by SMEs as a major concern in a review of rural business information provision, highlighting that SMEs should be made aware of the profound librarian skills and range of available (under-utilised) electronic resources within public libraries. Librarianship is a profession and staff working within public library business information services are highly trained and have advanced information retrieval and analysis skills, which are used to make their resources as accessible and 'user friendly' as possible. Such skills are of enormous benefit to the individual business user making a single enquiry, to groups of users in jobseeker and patent search sessions and ultimately to business communities and the region as a whole.

7. Business information service: *taxonomy*

Based on responses given in terms of business information service availability, necessity, preference and priority, it is possible to formulate a '*three-tier*' taxonomy of business information services provide by public libraries in the Yorkshire region, using the seven criteria used in the PLA and user exit surveys:

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Availability of professional advice and guidance on the effective use of BIS	**A dedicated and visible physical space for business users and communities**	**A dedicated public library business information website**
Access to substantial business-related book collection	**Access to professional journals and publications**	**Partnerships with other business information providers in the locality**
Access to electronic business information sources and databases		

Level 1

Level 1 represents a *core* business information service based on availability across the region and user expectations, i.e. the services listed within this level are provided by all PLAs within the region and are prioritised by the business user sample.

Level 2

Level 2 represents a slightly more developed and specialised service based on availability across the region and user expectations.

Level 3

Level 3 represents an advanced service based on larger authority priorities and services. Whilst the two criteria listed here are the least important according to the pilot user survey, they may be expected by larger more advanced business communities and are thus essential to advanced business services such as Leeds and Sheffield, who align their objectives to those of their authority.

Level 3
Advanced service
Dedicated website
Partnerships

Level 2
Developed service

Dedicated physical business information space
Professional journals

Level 1
Core service

Professional advice & guidance
Physical book stock
Electronic business information sources
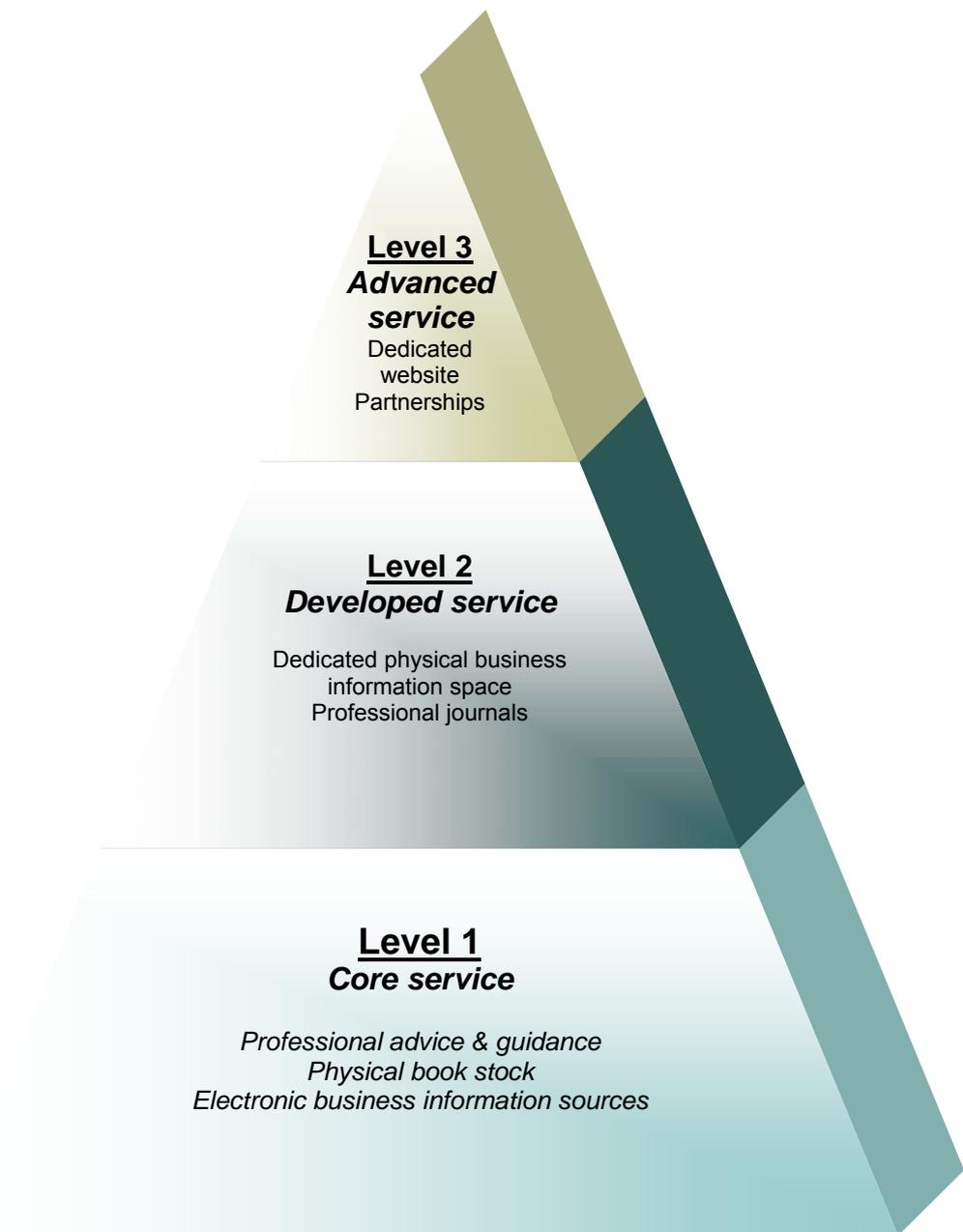
Public library business information service taxonomy diagram

8. Methodological effectiveness & recommendations for future evaluation research

The chosen research methods of questionnaire-based surveys, observation and interview have proven to be effective on a pilot basis. The questionnaire survey method has allowed the collection of appropriate data within a specified time frame in a concise, accessible format. The observation method within a case study context has facilitated the narrative description of a selection of business information services including the range of services available and user interaction with those services. The researcher/service interaction helps to develop a 'real world' understanding of the effectiveness of business information services within public libraries in terms of their accessibility, quality, presentation and most importantly 'user-friendliness'. The staff interview method has generated a greater understanding of service aims and objectives with respect to business information services further to PLA questionnaire responses and analysis; it is important to combine quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive evaluation, particularly when considering complex issues such as the strategic role of an individual service within a corporate and regional agenda.

It is recommended that the research methods employed within this pilot study are appropriate for a wider and more thorough evaluation of business information services within libraries. The following factors and considerations should be incorporated in to a larger study:

Broadening the 'user enquiry' sample

It is possible to adapt the user exit questionnaire method for enquiries made by telephone or e-mail. The most important aspect of conducting such research is the necessary co-operation and involvement of library staff themselves. It was not possible to include such a sample within the pilot study because of the impracticalities involved in providing access to the sample for an external researcher, particularly within the specified time frame. Similarly, within the context of a larger study, the same impracticalities would apply. Staff responsible for responding to telephone and e-mail enquiries would need to administer the questionnaire to allow the most efficient and effective data collection. This would be dependant on the relevant staff willingness and ability to co-operate. This may be taken for granted at the beginning of the project, but it is important to acknowledge that even in this relatively small sample/study, one PLA did not respond at all, and only 4 authorities provided 'additional materials'. Some staff training may be required, particularly to build confidence in administering a telephone survey. Responding to e-mail enquiries would be less contentious, as the questionnaire could simply be attached to replies along with a request for the questionnaire to be completed.

The important thing to consider when administering a telephone survey is that questions should be as easy and 'straight forward' as possible to deliver and to comprehend. If we consider the user exit survey used within this study (please see appendix5, page 59), questions 1-9 with their 'tick box' responses would be suitable, however, questions 10-11 would be less appropriate as

they require more considered 'scaled' responses which are easier to complete when reading the questionnaire oneself. The whole questionnaire would be suitable as an attachment for e-mail enquiries however, as it can be easily completed and returned electronically assuming that the respondent is able to do so. Clear guidelines should be attached concerning how to complete the questionnaire and return details such as e-mail address and a deadline for submission.

Telephone and e-mail enquiries should be evaluated during the same period across the case study sample to provide comparable data in terms of enquiry numbers, frequency, nature of enquiries etc.

Fieldwork duration

It is important to note that only a relatively short period of time was available for observation research during this project. For a more thorough observation to be achieved, each case study visit could for example be undertaken to reflect all key opening times of the individual service (morning, lunch periods, afternoon, evening and weekends) and to reflect key periods relating to the research subject and its individual characteristics, for example for business information enquiries this could include the end of financial year, or end of academic year for graduate business start up enquiries. The length of time available for each stage of the research is of course entirely dependant on the length and duration of the evaluation project as a whole. It is thus important to allow enough time and resources for an effective evaluation to be undertaken, and for the project to be timed and planned accordingly.

Longitudinal approach

When an evaluation study seeks to track changes and developments from a service, organisational and regional perspective, the project would benefit from adopting a longitudinal approach, for example, repeating the research on an annual basis. This is especially true when considering an organisations aims and objectives from a strategic point of view; a longitudinal study would facilitate the effective evaluation or whether or not objectives had been achieved, and changes and developments that had taken place. It is important to acknowledge changes that may occur within case study samples (for example, changes in personnel); as such, interview respondents should be selected based on job title/post to provide consistent comparable data.

The 'non-user' sample

When considering the value and impact of an information service within a particular context, it is important to consider the needs of that community as a whole. As such, the inclusion of a 'non- library user' sample from the business community would be beneficial to an evaluation of business information services provided by libraries. This would allow an examination of their business information needs; whether or not their needs could be met by the public library service; their reasons for not using the respective services. A qualitative approach to such data collection, for example focus groups, would

provide interesting comparable data to staff interview responses. Both sets of qualitative data can be compared in terms of library service objectives and the need and expectations of the business community they serve.

Method 'transferability'

The research methods used in this study can easily be adapted for an evaluation of other library and information sectors, for example, academic libraries or company information services. Such transferral to other sectors would simply require the tailoring of research instruments to match alternative sectors and services. This could simply be the re-phrasing of individual questions, for example, during an interview with an academic librarian questions may be re-phrased to investigate the role of the service according to *organisational* rather than authority objectives. The more generic questions contained within the user exit survey could be applied to any service (nature of enquiry; enquiry success rates etc). The successful transferral of research methods is dependant upon the researcher's awareness and knowledge of the service(s) being evaluated and the sometimes subtle differences between such services.

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Appendix 2 – business information services expenditure summary

	No. of staff (FTE)	Floor space (m²)	Book stock (£)	% of book fund	Electronic BIS (£)	Journals (£)	Staff (£)	Professional press (£)	Partnerships(£)	Estimated total annual expenditure (£)	% annual change
Sheffield		13	27,500	2.75	18,000	250		9000		55-70,000	+2
Hull				5	(25%)					40-55,000	
York	1	10	15,000	5.5	10,500		25,170	250		40-55,000	none
N. Lincs	0.5		7,000		18,000	2,000	13,000			25-40,000	none
Kirklees			23,000	3.8	27,250			1750		40-55,000	none
Bradford	6	114	15,000	3	12,500		90,000	5,000		10-25,000	-50
Wakefield	3	5	10,000	2.5	15,000		5,000	1,000	1,000	10-25,000	+12
NE Lincs		2	3,000	0.02						<10,000	none
Doncaster	1	23	9,500	1.43	6,637			683		10-25,000	none
Barnsley	1			11	12,304.96		25,723			25-40,000	+2.75
Leeds	3.5	15	2000	7.6	63,668	250	82,000	13,000		70-85,000	none
Rotherham		20	5000	1	10,000					25-40,000	none
North Yorks			10,000	1	3,000				2000	10-25,000	
Total	**16**	**202**	**117,000**		**196,859.96**	**2,500**	**240,893**	**30,683**	**3,000**		
Average	2.3	25.25	10,636		17,896	833	40,149	4,383	1,500		

Notes:

 Respondents were asked to provide figures relating to the last **full** financial year.
Some respondents did not fully complete the questionnaire; all available data is included in the above table.

U N I V E R S I T Y   O F   S H E F F I E L D

DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION STUDIES

CENTRE FOR THE PUBLIC LIBRARY & INFORMATION IN SOCIETY

Project supervisor: Briony Train 0114 222 2653 b.train@sheffield.ac.uk
Researcher: Kerry Wilson 0114 222 6345 k.m.wilson@sheffield.ac.uk
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Libraries are Good for Business:
The value of business information services provided by public libraries in Yorkshire

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The following questionnaire forms part of a research study being undertaken by the Centre for the Public Library and Information in Society (CPLIS) at the University of Sheffield on behalf of the Yorkshire Museums Libraries and Archives Council (YMLAC)[12] investigating the value of business information services provided by public libraries in the Yorkshire region.

Please consider each question carefully and provide as much information as possible

Questionnaires may be completed electronically and returned to **Kerry Wilson** at the following e-mail address:

k.m.wilson@sheffield.ac.uk

or printed out and returned by post to:

Kerry Wilson
Researcher
Department of Information Studies
University of Sheffield
211 Portobello Street
Sheffield
S1 4DP

If you have any queries regarding the questionnaire or the research project, please contact one of the research team (full contact details listed above).

Please return your completed questionnaire by **Friday 17th December 2004**

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR TIME AND CO-OPERATION

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[12] YMLAC contact: Liz Roberts liz@ymlac.org.uk
http://www.ymlac.org.uk/

'Libraries are Good for Business' PLA questionnaire

Question 1 – you and your authority

Please provide contact details for yourself and your authority (to be used in the strictest confidence for research purposes only):	
Name of PLA:	
Your name:	
Job title:	
Telephone:	
E-mail:	

Question 2 – business information services (BIS):

Which of the following business information services are provided by your PLA (please tick the appropriate boxes)?	
Business-related book stock:	Access to electronic BIS:
Academic journals and periodicals:	Specialist/dedicated BIS staff*:
Professional press:	Dedicated physical BIS space(s)*:
Partnerships with other BIS providers e.g. Business Link (please specify):	Other (please specify):
* Please provide the following details where appropriate:	
Number of BIS specialist staff (FTE):	Dedicated floor space (m²):
Comments:	

Question 3 – expenditure

3a. Please provide approximate expenditure figures per annum, using the last/most recent full financial year as an example*, for each of the following business information services and sources (to the nearest £250):			
Business-related book stock (£): Proportion of overall book fund (%):	Electronic BIS licenses and support (£):		
Academic journals and periodicals (£):	Specialist/dedicated BIS staff (£):		
Professional press (£):	Maintenance of physical space (£):		
BIS partnerships and projects (£):	Other (£) – please specify:		
* Year from to			
3b. What is the total level of expenditure, approximately, on business information services per annum within your PLA, using the same full financial year as an example (please tick the appropriate box):			
< £10,000:	£10,000-25,000:	£25,000-40,000:	£40,000-55,000:
£55,000-70,000:	£70,000-85,000:	£85,000-100,000:	> £100,000:
3c. By what percentage (%) approximately did the total level of expenditure on business information services change from the previous year (please complete/tick the appropriate box)?			

Increased (%):	Decreased (%):	Stayed the same:

3d. In terms of PLA expenditure as a whole, please consider the proportion of BIS expenditure in terms of:
Proportion of management overhead (%):
Proportion of central service recharge (%):
Comments:

Question 4 – importance of business information services

In your personal opinion, please rate the following business information services on a scale of 1 to 7 according to their perceived importance in terms of public library provision (1 = most important, 7 = least important)
Availability of professional advice and guidance on the effective use of BIS:
Access to a substantial business-related book collection:
A dedicated and visible physical space for business users and communities:
Access to professional journals and publications:
A dedicated public library business information website:
Access to electronic business information sources and databases:
Partnerships with other business information providers in the locality (e.g. legal advisers; financial consultants; market researchers):
Comments:

Question 5 – future planning

What are the top 3 priorities/main objectives for your PLA with respect to business information services over the next two years?
Objective 1:
Objective 2:
Objective 3:

Question 6 – case studies

If there is a particular library/libraries or business information service(s) within your PLA which you feel are especially relevant to this study or that you would like to draw attention to, please provide details below:
Name: **Details:**
Name: **Details:**
Name: **Details:**

THANK YOU

Appendix 4

<div align="center">

YMLAC observation checklist

</div>

Library:
Date:

Time began:
Time ended:

User tally:

Areas to observe	**Notes taken (√)**
Location of BIS from main entrance (accessibility)	
Signage (visibility, readability, clarity)	
Physical layout/presentation of BIS	
Volume of BIS	
Staffed service/information desk (no's of staff, location in relation to BIS stock etc)	
User interaction with BIS (user-friendliness, interaction with staff, sources/services most frequently used etc)	
Relationship between BIS and other services and collections	
Marketing and promotion materials*	
User guides to BIS and their effective use (leaflets*, posters etc)	
Physical quality of book stock and print materials	
Environmental issues ('attractiveness' of surroundings, work stations, study areas etc)	

*Remember to collect examples of promotional materials and user guides

Appendix 5

Libraries are Good for Business - User exit survey
Centre for the Public Library and Information in Society
University of Sheffield
on behalf of
Yorkshire Museums Libraries and Archives Council

Section A – your library visit today

1. Please state your current employment status by ticking the appropriate box:

Employed full-time ☐	Employed part-time ☐	Full-time student ☐
Part-time student ☐	Self-employed ☐	Unemployed ☐

2. Please state the sector you belong to by ticking the appropriate box:

Finance ☐   Legal ☐   Retail ☐   Industry ☐
Further education ☐   Higher education ☐   Creative & arts ☐
Tourism & hospitality ☐   Other* ☐

*Please specify…………………………………………………………………………………

3. **What was the nature of your business information enquiry today:**

To aide study ☐   Market research ☐   General interest ☐
Specific work-related enquiry ☐   Professional project-based research ☐
Business start up ☐   Legal research ☐   Other* ☐

*Please specify…………………………………………………………………………………...

4. **Please indicate how successful your enquiry has been:**

Successful (I have acquired all the information I need)   ☐
Partly successful (I have acquired some of the information I need)   ☐
Unsuccessful (I have not acquired any of the information I need)   ☐

5. **Did you require the assistance of a member of library staff when making your enquiry today:**

Yes   ☐   No   ☐

6. **Have you used this library as a business information service before:**

Yes   ☐   No   ☐

7. **What inspired your decision to visit the library for business information today:**

I work locally   ☐   I live locally ☐   Library marketing & publicity ☐
Recommended by colleague/peer/friend ☐   Own knowledge & awareness ☐
Other*   ☐

*Please specify…………………………………………………………………………………...

Do you have any general feedback or comments about your library visit today:……………………………………………………………………………………
………………………………………………………………………………………………………
………………………………………………………………………………………………..

Section B – libraries and business information services

As a business information service user, we are interested in your thoughts and opinions on the value of business information services and your information needs and priorities. As such, please consider the following questions:

8. If utilising the services of a *private* business information service, how much would you expect or be willing to pay for the single enquiry you have made today (as a one-off payment):

$<$ 5 pounds ☐   5-10 pounds   ☐   10-15 pounds ☐   15-20 pounds   ☐
20-25 pounds   ☐   25-30 pounds ☐   30-35 pounds ☐
$>$ 30 pounds   ☐

9. If you were a member of a private business information service, how much would you expect or be willing to pay as an annual subscription fee:

$<$ 100 pounds   ☐   100-200 pounds   ☐
200-300 pounds   ☐   300-400 pounds   ☐
400-500 pounds   ☐ $>$ 500 pounds   ☐

10. Please consider the following statements concerning public libraries as business information services and select the response which you identify with the most:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Public libraries are important sources of business information					
Business information services provided by public libraries are adequately marketed and publicised					
The information needs of local business communities are suitably met by public libraries					
Public libraries could do more to assist the business community by working more closely with other business information providers					

11. Please consider the following 'types' of business information service and rate them, *IN RANK ORDER,* from 1-7 in terms of how important and valuable you consider them to be (1 = most important, 7 = least important) in terms of your business information needs:

Availability of professional advice and guidance on the effective use of business information services:	
Access to a substantial business-related book collection:	
A dedicated and visible physical space for business users and communities:	
Access to professional journals and publications:	
A dedicated public library business information website:	
Access to electronic business information sources and databases:	
Partnerships with other business information providers in the locality (e.g. legal advisers; financial consultants; market researchers):	

Thank you very much for your time and co-operation

Appendix 6
<u>**YMLAC staff interview questions**</u>

Business Information Service models and strategic development

How would you define the business information service currently provided by your PLA?

Would you say that the service provided currently meets the needs of your business community?

What role do business information services play in terms of PLA strategic development? Are they prioritised?

What are the main objectives for your PLA in terms of business information services for the foreseeable future (refer to questionnaire response and elaborate)?

Community profiling and business information needs

Have the business communities within your region been consulted to determine their information needs? How are their needs defined?

Does your PLA have a community profiling policy with respect to business information services?

Does the PLA acknowledge and respond to regional economic development and RDA objectives when considering the future development of business information services?

Partnerships and regional collaboration

Do you currently have any working partnerships with other business information providers in the region (refer to questionnaire response and elaborate)?

What is the nature of your working partnership with Business Link? Will this relationship be developed and sustained in the future?

Is your PLA open to developing future regional business information partnerships?

Is the library used as a venue for business-related events?

How do you perceive the public libraries' regional identity as a business information provider? Do the public recognise this role?

Any other comments/observations

Appendix 7

Examples of promotional leaflets and user guides including:

- **Useful Websites for Business Start Ups (Leeds Central Library)**
- **Business and Jobseekers' Resources (Leeds Central Library)**
- **Business Science and Technology library Guide (Sheffield Central Library)**
- **Patent Information in Sheffield (Sheffield Central Library)**
- **Cobweb information for business guide (Bradford Central Library)**
- **Juniper guide (Bradford Central Library)**
- **Business Information guide (Bradford Central Library)**