International Reading Survey: presentation of findings

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The International Reading Survey was an international scoping survey of reader-centred service provision in public libraries. It was never intended as a widescale attempt to map provision in all countries, but instead as a short-term piece of research, the aim of which was:

> 'To provide a representative international overview of the extent to which public libraries provide a reader-centred service, in order to inform future service provision.' (from the original project proposal to IFLA Reading Section, August 2001)

At last year's IFLA conference in Boston I gave a brief paper on current trends in reading research in the UK. I focused on two areas in particular – literacy and reader development, suggesting that recent literacy-based research had been influenced by the implementation of the Government's National Literacy Strategy, and by subsequent initiatives such as the National Year of Reading and the National Reading Campaign.

Reader-centred activity – or 'reader development', as it is now frequently referred to in the UK – has become a key UK Government concern in recent years, to the extent that the Government allocated two years of funding specifically to projects in this area, and to ongoing research to investigate the outcome of these projects. The aim of this fund was to enhance:

> '...libraries' traditional strength in promoting reading as a skill and pleasure.' [i]

As a result of these funded projects, public library staff are now expected not only to acquire the relevant skills to promote reading as a leisure activity to current readers, but also to encourage the non-users and non-readers to enjoy books.

This project, therefore, was intended to investigate the extent to which other countries were conducting such activities, and their value and impact on staff and readers. When the proposal was passed to the Reading Section in August 2001, it was felt that this piece of work was a timely project that would complement two of the priority areas of the work of the Reading Section, namely research about reading and the development of literacy guidelines for library staff. It was also hoped that it would inform future discussion both at IFLA and in the individual countries represented at the conference.

At one of our Section meetings last year the proposal was passed, and a working group appointed to help me conduct the research more effectively. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the other members of this group, Thomas Quigley of Canada, Gertrude Kayaga Mulindwa of Uganda and Shirley Fitzgibbon of the United States, for their help and support.

Objectives of the research

What were the objectives of our research? Earlier I stated the aim - *'To provide a representative international overview of the extent to which public libraries provide a reader-centred service, in order to inform future service provision'* – and within this aim we had three objectives:

- ❖ To conduct an initial scoping survey of current reader-centred activity in public library authorities in a wide range of countries.

- ❖ To use the data collected in order to illustrate staff perceptions of the impact of reader-centred work on their service, and to share examples of good practice.

- ❖ To disseminate the information to all countries via the Internet.

Methodology

So how did we attempt to achieve these objectives? There were three phases to the methodology:

- ❖ **Phase 1**: To devise a questionnaire survey that members of the Reading Section Committee could send to colleagues in a wide range of library authorities (or the national equivalent) in his/her country. Nine countries are represented on the committee, so it was hoped that we would receive an equally wide response.

- ❖ **Phase 2:** To select small case studies from the questionnaire data, of a sample of public libraries to be contacted and questioned further regarding their original responses.

- ❖ **Phase 3:** To analyse the data and produce a paper reporting the findings that could be available on the Internet and, where necessary, in printed format.

The questionnaire survey

When devising the reading survey we wanted to make it clear to our respondents that the focus was not on the educational development of literacy skills, but on reading for pleasure. We were looking at those promotional activities organised in libraries (and elsewhere, as appropriate) in order to promote reading, to enhance the reading experience of both

adults and young people. We wanted to hear about the promotional activities taking place in respondents' regions, and what they felt to be their value and impact on their organisation, and on their readers. We hoped to obtain examples of good practice that could be shared internationally.

To start the discussion necessary in order to devise the questions for the survey, issues such as the following were presented to the working group:

- Definitions of the term 'reading promotion'
- Staff skills required to promote reading as a leisure activity, and equally to encourage the non-user or non-reader
- The nature of promotional activities in libraries, and their perceived impact on library users
- Reading promotion as a priority to library staff, the library service, and the government.

Following various additions and amendments, we arrived at four key areas for our survey:

1. Reading policy
2. Partnerships to promote reading
3. Your reading activities
4. Staff skills and training needs.

Within each of these areas there were between two and eight questions, some very straightforward yes/no questions, others requiring more information. We were fortunate to receive the help of Jan Martine in obtaining a French translation, and of Anjlee Bhatt, at the University of Central England in Birmingham, who put the survey on the website, either for online completion or as a PDF file to download: www.cie.uce.ac.uk/cirt/projects/rsindex.htm
Respondents were able to choose whether to complete the survey in English or French – we had hoped for other languages, but unfortunately we had difficulty obtaining translations. Grateful thanks to Jan Martine for the French version.

How was the survey distributed?

Members of the Reading Section sent the website address to selected colleagues and other members of the public library profession in their country, or neighbouring countries, and the survey was also promoted on the Reading Section page of the IFLA website [http://www.ifla.org/VII/s33/project/irs.htm].

The second phase

For the second phase of the project, ten respondents were selected to answer a number of further questions, both concerning their individual

responses and a series of more general questions addressed to each of the ten, but still falling within the original four subject areas:

1. Reading policy:
- How the policy has worked in practice
- How effective it has been
- To what extent it has facilitated the development of partnerships with other agencies/organisations.

2. Partnerships to promote reading:
- Reasons for the development of partnerships
- Details of financial commitment
- Benefits of the partnerships.

3. Your reading activities:
- Details of reading activities organised for adult readers or non-readers
- How evidence of the value and impact of reading activities has been – or could be – used.

4. Staff skills and training needs:
- Reasons for suggesting that certain skills were necessary to promote reading to readers or non-readers
- Details of training courses or programmes.

For the purposes of this report/presentation, these additional responses provide further information concerning the responses to the questionnaire survey.

Phase 1: findings

We received 50 returned questionnaires, which was an excellent response to a survey that had been distributed in this way. It was also encouraging that we achieved our objective of obtaining information from a wide range of posts, in a wide range of countries, as we received responses from eighteen different countries.

Profile of respondents

It was interesting to see the job titles of those who responded, and again to see the wide range. Five people simply described themselves as 'librarians', but the others gave a more specific title. Thirteen respondents were general senior management, such as Chief Librarian, Head of Operations or Director of Service Planning and Development. Eight worked specifically with children and young people, with titles such as:

- Regional Teen Services Manager
- Head of Children's Services
- Senior Youth Library and Information Worker

- Manager of Young People's Services.

Within this group, there were also two librarians with a specific educational focus: Literacy Coordinator, and Learning Support Librarian.

Others I would like to draw your attention to are the three who worked specifically in marketing and promotion:

- Community Relations Manager
- Public Relations Manager
- Head of Library Publicity Department.

There was even a Readers' Advisory Librarian, which is a post directly relevant to this survey investigating the promotion of reading for pleasure.

1. Reading policy

If we begin with the first section of the questionnaire, that which looked at the reading policies of respondents' public libraries. When asked 'Does your organisation have a written policy to promote reading as a leisure activity?', 29 replied that they had.

When asked to give further information for example in terms of specific policy documents or URLs to a relevant website, it was clear that five of the eighteen people who completed this question had interpreted reading policies as relevant only to children and young people, despite the lack of explicit instruction to focus only on the promotion of reading to children and young people at the beginning of the questionnaire:

> 'We would like to find out more about how you promote reading in public libraries. We are not asking you how you promote literacy skills, but about ways in which you promote reading as a leisure activity.'

The children's library service has undoubtedly promoted and encouraged reading for pleasure for many years, using a wide range of activities and programmes, and highly trained, specialist staff. As the UK Government Department of National Heritage reported in 1995:

> 'By making books available to all who want them, together with specialist staff to make them accessible through advice and assistance in the choice and use of them, libraries are uniquely placed to make a significant contribution to the encouragement of reading amongst children and young people.' [ii]

However, it would be unreasonable not to take into account the significant recent increase of reader development activities for both adults and young people that have taken place not only in libraries but also in all educational and social centres. This increase could be viewed not as a threat to the funding and status of children's librarianship, but as a means of bridging the gap between adult and young people's reading, of ensuring that promoting reading is now the concern and interest of many agencies.

Policy and strategy documents

Two respondents referred to policy documents created by their national professional organisations, either more generally 'the act of librarianship', a 'library statute' (Belarus) or a specific policy:

> 'We promote the Intellectual Freedom Policy of the Canadian Library Association.' (Canada)

For some, the promotion of reading for pleasure is one element of the overall service strategy. This may be part of the Collection Development Policy (Canada), or the family reading strategy:

> 'Leisure reading falls into the [remit] of the family member portion of our policy.' (US)

In other cases, respondents referred to the service mission statement. An excerpt from a British Columbian Public Library reads as follows:

> 'We enrich the life of every person in our [community] by providing equal access to the world's ideas and information through books, programs and resources…We welcome and support all people in their love of reading…We celebrate the freedom to read, to learn and to discover.'[iii]

Mini case-study: England

Three English respondents referred to a specific reader development strategy that was either already developed or was in the process of being adopted by the Management Team. One also mentioned that reader development 'features in the County Library service plan', and a fourth referred to a 'readers' group strategy' and a 'readers' strategy' that had both been implemented within her local authority.

The development of a reader development strategy was part of the exit strategy for the Branching Out project, a national initiative funded by the Arts Council of England that, between 1998-2001, trained staff in 33 English library authorities in the techniques of reader development. In order to embed the training of the project in the culture of the organisation, each participating library authority was required to develop a three-year reader development strategy during the third and final year.

In the second questionnaire, one respondent from Gateshead Library Council explained how the document had worked in practice, and how effective it had been:

> 'It has focused our minds so we can see where we are going. We are now into Year Two of a three-year strategy. It's sometimes difficult to keep to the timescale but at least it gives us real targets. It has shown Management and the rest of the staff that we mean business and that reader development is important. Our reader development strategy is now…included in the Annual Library Plan.'

An extract from this Annual Library Plan reads as follows:

> 'With a three year action plan, the strategy will create an integrated approach to stock promotion, training and events.'[iv]

When asked whether the existence of this document had facilitated the development of partnerships with other agencies, the Gateshead respondent gave the following answer:

> '…Others have asked for our help [because of our involvement in Branching Out]. It means that lots of us are doing the same thing, so it's easier to cooperate.'

2. Partnerships to promote reading

It was encouraging to read that the 37 people who responded to this question provided a wide range of partnerships they had used or had specifically developed in order to promote reading, within and beyond their local community.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, more than three-quarters of respondents worked with other libraries:

> 'The District library is [the] center of a public library cooperative system…Some of [the authorities] are provided in cooperation with public libraries.' (Czech Republic)

Approximately half of respondents had worked with publishers and/or booksellers (24, 26 respectively), and approximately one third with other regions and/or promotional agencies (18, 16).

Interestingly, three-quarters of respondents (37) gave 'other' examples of partnerships they had developed. These were extremely wide-ranging, but for ease of reference they can be divided into regional and national groups.

Regional level

Youth

Educational

> Kindergartens, schools: 'The district library is in a close contact with basic and secondary schools…' (Czech Republic)
>
> 'Parents' Associations' (UK)
>
> 'teachers and educational workers' (Czech Republic)
>
> 'We have always encouraged teachers to book visits for classes of all ages. If necessary, we go to the schools, too. In this way we reach many children whose parents don't bring them to the library.' (Canada)
>
> 'We have always cooperated with the schools (6-16 year old pupils)…we have a team that started in 1997…making a plan about how the public libraries should be for the students…We have a person who works both in the library and in a…team for the school…[she] is paid by the public library…the organisation working with the public library for the students has made an agreement that nobody in the region has to pay to obtain resources from each other.' (Norway)

Recreational

'Summer reading club' (Canada)

'[the library] provides excursions, workshops and other meetings with the children and young adults in every age category' (Czech Republic)

'Youth clubs' (Norway, UK)

Adults

Educational

Adult education (Botswana, Canada, UK)

University: 'We have meetings at least [twice] each year discussing how we shall cooperate' (Norway)

'We cooperate with [the] department of non-formal education, and vocational centres' (Botswana)

'Literacy outreach groups', 'community literacy groups' (Canada)

Recreational/cultural

Arts museum (Norway)

Authors, celebrities (Canada, Croatia, US)

Literacy Council (Canada, US)

Friends of the library (US)

Non-library based reading groups (UK)

Local government cultural department: 'the cooperation with the 'Kulturamt', the local authority for cultural affairs: there are two or three meetings per year in order to organise the reading events over the whole year.' (Germany)

Professional

Palau Library Association (Micronesia)

Foreign embassies in the Republic of Belarus

National reader development project (Branching Out, UK)

CLAC: Les Centres de Lecture et d'Animation Culturelle [Centres for Reading and Cultural Activities](France).

Mini case-study: France and French-speaking countries

The CLAC programme is a programme to encourage reading for all in rural areas. It uses as its resource the networks of reading-related and cultural activities whose management and funding is shared between the Agency for French-speaking communities and the host nations.

The CLAC is a resources centre aiming to increase knowledge, access to information, leisure activities and personal development, through which a geographically restricted community can have access to the benefits of cultural and socio-cultural activities.

By the end of 2001, the Agency for French-speaking communities had installed a network of 213 centres in rural areas in 17 countries, largely in Africa and the Indian Ocean. Situated in areas with between 5,000 and 25,000 inhabitants, they provide a rural community with access to the book, to audio-visual materials and to a wide range of cultural activities.

So what have these CLAC achieved since 1986?

The only place for public entertainment in their area, the centres are visited by thousands of people who choose to read, to play educational or board games, to join in competitions, to watch documentary or fiction-based films, or do join in a wide range of other cultural activities.

Over 80% of readers are young people aged less than 18 years who each borrow on average 1.4 books per month. In 1999, for example, more than 1 million books were circulated throughout the various Clac networks.

Version francaise:

> 'Le programme CLAC est un programme de lecture publique en milieu rural qui s'appuie sur des réseaux de Centres de Lecture et d'Animation Culturelle (CLAC) dont la gestion et les charges financières sont partagées entre l'agence et les pays d'accueil. Le CLAC est un centre de ressources à la connaissance, l'information, les loisirs et le developpement ou une population géographiquement délimitée peut avoir acces à des biens culturels et à des activités socioculturelles.'[v]

A la fin de l'annee dernière, L'Agence de la Francophonie avait mis en place un résau de 213 Centres de lecture et d'animation culturelle en milieu rural dans 17 pays, developpés principalement en Afrique et dans l'Ocean indien.

Ces Centres sont des lieux de lecture, d'information et de loisirs. Situés dans des localités de 5,000 à 25,000 habitants, ils permettent au public rural l'acces au livre, à l'audiovisuel ainsi qu'à diverses activités socioculturelles.

Quelles sont les réalisations des Clac depuis leur création en 1986?

Seuls lieux d'animation dans leurs localités, ces centres sont fréquentés par des miliers de lecteurs, d'utilisateurs des jouets éducatifs et des jeux de société, de participants à des concours et de spectateurs pour les projections de films documentaires ou de fiction ou autres activités socioculturelles.

Plus de 80% du lectorat est composé de jeunes de moins de 18 ans qui empruntent une moyenne de 1.4 livres par mois. En 1999, plus de 1 million de volumes ont ainsi circulé dans l'ensemble des résaux.

To return now to the investigation of the partnerships described by questionnaire respondents, if you remember we asked a group of 10 respondents for further information concerning each of the four key areas of the original survey. For the section on partnerships to promote reading, we asked them to state if, and to what extent, such partnerships had been beneficial to the organisation.

For most respondents, a primary benefit was the exchange of information, and sharing ideas with new colleagues:

> 'We learn things from each other – and we find [a] solution that everybody can be satisfied with.' (Norway)

For others, a major benefit was that additional funds helped them to provide a better quality, and higher-profile service:

> 'The library is able to offer services or collections to the community that it would otherwise find a challenge to offer or not have at all. The participation in a partnership raises the profile of the library and of reading in general which is a definite benefit to us.' (Canada)

> 'There is a benefit in public relations; in having a funding body; in interesting other authorities in reading as a leisure activity.' (Germany)

However, one respondent felt that the benefits were felt by all despite the lack of additional funding offered by partner organisations:

> 'The cooperation [has] been running for more than ten years – this is a fact that can show the cooperation to have been beneficial. It is hard to explain if we have no 'money' in our hands, but everybody feels that these activities are useful.' (Czech Republic)

3. Reading activities

46 respondents stated that they promoted reading in their library(ies), and 45 said that they organised special projects, activities or programmes via which to do so.

Although the original journey did not differentiate between promotion to adults and young people, the second questionnaire included the question *'Do you organise reading activities for adults as well as children? Please give examples.'*

One respondent explained that the focus of reading promotion within their organisation was on the young reader:

> 'We are especially promoting activities for children: creating a very special…environment at the Young People's Library, where children and teenagers enjoy the freedom to make…choices.' (Bulgaria)

A second felt that there was no local demand for adult-centred activity:

> 'Activities for adults are not regular…There is no such need [for] these types of activities…there are many cultural events in the city and inhabitants are [able] to choose according to their taste and mood.' (Czech Republic)

However, other respondents provided a wide range of information concerning ways in which the promotion of reading for pleasure included an adult audience:

> 'In my role as the Readers' Advisory Librarian I am a frequent speaker to community groups and as such am constantly promoting great reading to adults.' (Canada)

> 'We organise lectures and book presentations for adults.' (Germany)

A particularly detailed response was provided by a Finnish librarian, in which she described three separate events to target an adult audience:

> 'For adults we have literary conversations about books and author visits. The Adult Education Center takes care of most…of them, we provide the place, service and advertising.
>
> 'We organise literary evenings perhaps once or [twice] a year…
>
> '…and then we have…every November a Scandinavian literary event (now, I think, in seven or eight countries), which is called *Candle Night*. In libraries of all partaking countries we read the same text at the same time (in our own languages) and then discuss it, tell stories, sing or listen to music. The themes are different each year…' (Norway)

The perceived value of the activities to the readers

47 respondents thought that their reading activities were of value to participants, and 40 felt that they could provide evidence of this value.

This was undoubtedly one of the more difficult areas of the survey. We are all aware how it is to have a 'feeling' for success, that something we have organised has effectively reached the target audience. Yet how can this feeling be quantified? How can the evidence be found to convince senior managers and funding bodies that an initiative is worth continuing for a further period?

These are the sort of questions frequently raised in times of financial difficulty, and in today's project culture, it seems more important than ever to provide evidence of value and impact in order to obtain further funding. In the United Kingdom, for example, public librarians are now working in what we call a **bidding culture.** This means that if we want to, for example, develop the service we provide to the old people in our community, but don't feel that we have sufficient money to do so, we can apply – or 'bid' for money from the Government, or another funding body. This is a highly competitive process, and many more people apply for money than actually receive it. However, a considerable amount has been given to a wide range of projects, so much so, in fact, that you will hear us talking about living in a **project culture.** I thought I should also refer to the potential danger of the UK situation, of this project culture. Over the last two years, a period during which the Government has provided a concentrated fund to library projects, the following comments have been repeatedly made:

- ❖ 'Incredibly valuable work is being done with very little money'

- ❖ 'There are not enough staff available to do the project work'

- ❖ 'Staff do not have the time to attend training programmes'

- ❖ 'Hard work is often done by a small number of enthusiastic staff'

- ❖ 'Libraries are well-known for their short-term projects...which then stop'

The solution, therefore, would seem to be that library-based project work needs the following two things:

- ❖ **mainstreaming** – i.e. making project work a part of everyday library work, with sufficient time, staff, resources, and commitment.

- ❖ **sustainability** – i.e. ensuring that projects do not end after nine months or a year, but are continued in the daily work of the library.

These two points are not easy to achieve, but without them, library projects in the UK, however excellent for a time, will never become part of our standard service provision.

Despite these difficulties, it is extremely positive that 40 of the 45 respondents were able to supply evidence of the impact on participants of their reading activities. A large proportion of the evidence that respondents felt able to provide was quantitative, for example in terms of stock circulation, membership and event attendance figures:

Stock circulation:

> 'Statistics of issues generated by some book promotions' (UK)

> 'Increase in circulation of young adult materials' (US)

Three Canadian respondents noted that circulation figures altered according to the number of promotions on display at a given time:

> 'We find that circulation dramatically increases during the Reading Challenge and the Summer Reading Club' (Canada)

> 'Circulation decreases when we don't offer programmes and don't have displays set up' (Canada)

> 'There is a direct relation between successful promotion and use of collection and services.' (Canada)

A respondent from Bulgaria agreed:

> 'I [display] books which were at the library collection for 2 years, they were not read at all. When young people saw them together with pictures they are interested in reading them' (Bulgaria)

Membership

Three respondents reported increased membership of the library service in general or of reading groups as evidence of the value of the reading activities they had organised. One referred to the 'increased use of the library' (Canada), a second to 'new family members' (UK), and a third observed:

> 'When new people come to hear authors, if they are not library members, they take out membership.' (Canada)

A fourth commented that promotional events organised in her library had resulted in a 'take-up of reading group membership' (UK).

Attendance

Two US respondents referred to 'attendance' figures and 'participation numbers' they had collected, whereas two from the UK used less specific terms:

> 'Large numbers of Dads involved…' (UK)

> '…steady build-up of audiences for events and [an] increase in [the] number of reader groups' (UK)

Evaluation

Many respondents referred to 'evaluation' or listed specific evaluative activities that they had conducted in order to formally monitor the impact of promotional events on the audiences:

Collecting data:

> 'event monitoring forms' (UK)

> 'our early childhood literacy program…last year gathered baseline information on incoming kindergarteners' reading readiness levels, and will now continue to assess those levels. We have also engaged an outside evaluator for that program.' (US)

Others felt that collecting anecdotal data was also a useful way to obtain evidence:

> 'positive feedback from parents' (Canada)

> 'Increased…interest in reading groups' (UK)

> 'teens enjoying the library and saying so' (US)

> 'students ask for titles, or recommendations for books' (Micronesia)

> '…every year teenagers tell us they have read books they would not have read' (UK)

> '[the reading activity] gets customers speaking about reading and its importance in our lives' (US)

The second questionnaire asked the ten respondents to describe ways in which the previously listed evidence:

- had been used, e.g. to inform senior managers
- could potentially affect funding for future activities
- had been disseminated to the readers themselves – library users, events audiences?

Six respondents stated that they informed senior managers of the value and impact of their reading activities, although the extent to which this occurred varied considerably, as the following examples illustrate:

'I regularly inform senior managers' (Bulgaria)

'Response to these programmes from the public is passed on to the Management Group. Hopefully it is then used in their decision-making processes' (Canada)

'We report about all events…to communal senior managers…' (Finland)

'…senior managers and board members know about all our programmes. The Head of Children's Services is a member of the Management Team and also sits on the Coordination Team advising the Board's Strategic Planning Committee.

'I have used such evidence to sustain book and programme budgets in tight times and increase them in good times, get funding for special initiatives such as the children's millennium project, and gain approval to open our own children's bookstore.' (Canada)

The potential impact on funding allocation was less frequently acknowledged, and it seemed that responses to the question '*Could the evidence affect funding for future activities?*' were cautiously made:

'Yes maybe, but this is a slow process' (Bulgaria)

'As far as we know, no' (Germany)

'I hope so, but I have no good examples (Norway)

A more positive response came from the United Kingdom:

'Yes, now we have more confidence that events will work and [will] be worthwhile. [We are] getting more ambitious' (UK)

Dissemination

The dissemination of evidence to the reading audiences was similarly tentative, with one exception:

'Only through readers' groups' (UK)

'No, not yet' (Germany)

'Not specifically' (Canada)

'…No, we have not contacted readers' (US)

'Yes, all the time, we discuss very often' (Bulgaria)

4. Staff skills and training needs

Almost three-quarters of respondents (34) had members of staff within their organisation with specific responsibilities to promote reading as part of their job description, and a slightly higher number of respondents (37) stated that reading promotion was an aspect of the work of all staff.

Skills required to promote reading

Respondents were asked to list firstly those skills they felt were required to promote reading to current readers, and secondly those skills they would felt would help to encourage non-readers to enjoy books and reading.

Before discussing the data, it would be useful to ask 'Who is the non-reader?'

- ❖ a person with low literacy skills
- ❖ a non-library user, someone who possesses the skills to read but chooses not to.

Both groups could legitimately be describe as 'non-readers', yet both evidently have very different needs, and face very different potential problems when considering the public library service. To illustrate this point, we can use two recent reading projects in the UK, both conducted by public library services, both having benefited from national Government funding.

The Vital Link: The Vital Link is a reader development project involving public library services from nine English local authorities, that aims to reach 'emergent readers', people who possess basic reading skills but are by no means confident readers:

> 'To inspire, support and motivate emergent adult readers and recruit new 'hard to reach' learners' [vi]

The role of the library in this project has tended to have a recreational rather than an educational focus, with the emphasis on reading for pleasure. However, a question that has frequently been asked both by participating librarians and tutors is:

> 'Do we have a right to intervene, to assume that non-readers (or those with limited literacy skills) actually wants to be introduced to books?'

At a recent Vital Link meeting, a Senior Librarian from the north of England spoke on behalf of the non-reader when he addressed the following comment to an audience of librarians and basic skills tutors:

> 'I don't want you to exclude me, I want to be excluded by choice.' (Vital Link evaluation workshop, London, 09.07.02)

The Mind's Eye is the second of the projects that can be used to illustrate potential issues to consider when directing a service towards the 'non-reader'. The original project remit was to reach the group most statistically likely not to borrow fiction books from the public library, the 18-50 year old male. At the beginning of the project, certain data were available to suggest that this group did sometimes visit the library, but tended to do so only in order to obtain a specific piece of information, for example from the Business Information library, or to borrow non-fiction. The Mind's Eye gave this group the opportunity to read non-fiction and narrative non-fiction. Anne Downes, Project Manager with Opening the Book, defined this new publishing trend as follows:

> 'This type of writing takes a different approach to non-fiction than the simply informational…The authors are attempting to make a contract with their readers in the way that fiction authors do – to engage the interest, seduce the intellect, shock the sensibility and demand that the reader participates as an equal in the adventure of a good read.'[vii]

This opportunity was provided by positioning an attractively displayed, specifically chosen collection of books, in the areas of the library most likely to be visited by the target group. The project would therefore satisfy the Librarian who made the comment 'I don't want you to exclude me, I want to be excluded by choice'.

We can now consider the answers to the questions regarding the skills required to promote reading to the reader and the non-reader. It is interesting that some respondents approached the point of view of encouraging children to develop the reading habit from an early age, whereas others directly addressed the reading or non-reading adult, having adopted strategies to introduce the target groups to the pleasures of reading. Examples of such strategies include the following:

The reading child:

> 'Knowledge of the contents of books and of children today: grandmother's favourites are very seldom suitable for our kids who live in such a different world.' (Finland)

> 'I think [that] the most important thing is the librarian's personality, especially when working with young people in a fast-changing world…because of this I think the librarian should possess very special skills.' (Bulgaria)

> '…if training can be provided on children's library services this can help because if children learn how to be habitual readers at an early age, this problem of reading will be solved.' (Botswana)

The non-reading child:

> 'A wide knowledge of and appreciation for children's literature. An understanding of cognitive development, an understanding of the community, children's needs and interests.' (Canada)

> 'Storytelling, story hours, knowledge of books and picture book slides, very good sense for children's needs, patience…' (Germany)

The reading adult:

> 'The members of departments for adult readers [to] have reading promotion as a part of [their] work' (Czech Republic)

> 'You need to be able to discuss books both formally (booktalks and discussions) and informally in the stacks' (US)

> 'Knowledge of stock and new titles, confidence to promote material to members of the public' (UK)

The non-reading adult:

> '…some understanding of why not everyone wants to use the library, being able to work with those that are socially excluded.' (UK)

> 'You need to go out into the community to promote reading to those who do not have a reading habit.' (US)

Participants' responses to both questions can be divided into the following themes:
- Personal skills
- Professional skills.

Personal skills

For many respondents, the skills required to encourage both the reader and the non-reader to read would not be found in a job description, but could instead be described as 'personal skills', personality traits that, if possessed by a librarian, would perhaps be more likely to provide such encouragement:

> 'showmanship' (Canada)

> 'Enthusiastic and creative staff' (UK)

> '…enjoyment of people and empathy for them' (Canada)

> '…being able to talk to all types of people' (UK)

> 'Good powers of persuasion!' (Canada)

> 'a positive kind personality' (Bulgaria)

'Sens de l'ecoute et de l'accueil' ('Good listening skills and a welcoming approach') (France)

One librarian gave the following full response to the question, a response which illustrates her strong belief that empathy and respect are two vital skills required in order to effectively reach the non-readers:

'You have to respect them, and find out [what] kind of subject or themes they are interested in. Maybe a movie built on a book can help them to get through a book? People who have [a] problem learning to read are not stupid, it is important that people working in the libraries know that. If you have this kind of problem it is important that people encourage you and show that you are great when you have managed to read something, even if for most of us this is no problem.' (Norway)

Professional skills

Respondents to both questions clearly felt that marketing and promotion were critical ways of developing and encouraging the reading habit:

'promotion' (US)

'advertising' (Croatia)

'media presentation' (Italy)

'advertising techniques' (Micronesia)

Outreach work

Respondents recognised the importance of outreach work, particularly when promoting the library service to non-readers, many of whom would not be regular users:

'Frequent *outdoor* presence of the library' (Italy)

'…knowing who your readers or potential readers are or the different groups in your community that need attention' (Namibia)

'You need to go out into the community to promote reading to those who do not have a reading habit' (US)

Communication skills

A further skill that would be useful when conducting outreach work or any work to encourage non-library users is the ability to communicate effectively. For some respondents, this was described as 'communication skills', for others the definition was more complex:

'…librarians with knowledge about how children think and feel' (Norway)

'Reading aloud to children of all ages' (US)

'Enthusiasm and excellent communication skills, enjoyment of people and empathy for them' (Canada)

'Some level of psychological knowledge' (Bulgaria)

However, it was also felt that these skills were equally important when promoting reading to current readers:

'being able to talk to all types of people' (UK)

'public relation skills' (Italy)

'highly developed interpersonal skills' (UK)

Book knowledge

For some respondents, a skill that is frequently overlooked is book knowledge, having an awareness of all resources that are available to encourage the current reader and the non-reader. From the responses they gave, however, it would seem that almost all librarians felt that to have knowledge of the materials was insufficient to encourage the non-reader to read. Although the word 'knowledge' was used several times, equally frequently cited were terms such as 'interest', 'love', 'enthusiasm', 'passion', 'appreciation':

<u>Readers:</u>

'good knowledge of the library collection' (Canada)

'knowledge of stock and new titles' (UK)

'You have to read the books that you are going to *sell*' (Norway)

<u>Non-readers:</u>

'Staff members themselves should have a love for books and reading; a sound knowledge of a large number of authors and the type of books they write in is a must' (Namibia)

'knowledge of [the] range of books that they [non-readers] would enjoy/are relevant to them' (UK)

'Read, read, read and read more books' (Micronesia)

Having acquired the knowledge of available reading materials, respondents felt that equally valuable was the ability and confidence with which to encourage and recommend books to others:

<u>Readers:</u>

'confidence and interest in books' (UK)

'An enthusiasm and excitement about reading' (Canada)

'…a willingness and a high level of enthusiasm about books and reading is critical' (Canada)

<u>The non-reader:</u>

'awareness of varied interests to 'hook' non-readers (UK)

'the ability to determine their interests and recommend related books, [and] follow-up so that these people know someone is interested in their reading' (Canada)

'To be able to help them find something to support their interests and show them the library collections as a bit potential of useful, interesting and needed information and knowledge' (Czech Republic)

'It has been very much my experience that many people are actively searching for reading choices and want to know about great reads. I believe that librarians are well-placed to do this.' (Canada)

'The modern library is directed towards the model where users are the main characters. We must proceed from their information requirements…' (Belarus)

Training

Interestingly, although 40 respondents suggested that they and their colleagues possessed the necessary skills to promote reading for pleasure, 45 felt that training would nonetheless be helpful to them. Approximately two-thirds of the group (33) had previously participated in training programmes to develop these skills, training that had been provided by the following agencies:

Training provider	No. of respondents
Library staff	7
Professional trainer	10
Both	8
Other*	7

<u>*Other</u>:
- Workshops, conferences
- Literature Development Worker
- Booksellers
- Adult and Continuing Education Colleges.

The sample group is too small from which to draw any significant conclusions, although it is interesting that the largest group had hired a professional training provider, which at least suggests that training in reading promotion is a sufficient priority to merit expenditure.

To further investigate the issue of training and professional development in this area, three additional questions were asked in the second survey:

- *If you said that you had staff training for reading promotion, was this one course for a specific purpose, or do you have an ongoing training programme?*
- *How effective do you think that the training has been? Please explain your answer.*
- *How, and to what extent, is the training information passed to other staff?*

The sustainability of training programmes

Sadly, only two of the ten respondents reported that they had an ongoing staff training programme in reading promotion. A Canadian librarian gave the following detailed response:

> 'All staff joining the Children's library team have to complete a project involving reading and critiquing picture books. All staff members have a range of age levels they must be able to make reading recommendations for and therefore read from the collection as part of the job. New books are made available to staff before going to the shelves. We send staff out to relevant workshops whenever they are offered. We talk about books and how to promote them and use them in programmes all the time as part of our daily business in a children's library.' (Canada)

A British respondent described a similarly combined approach, with both an ongoing and a less sustained training programme available to all staff:

> 'Ongoing NOF reader development training[viii], plus one-off when required – setting up readers' groups, display, stock selection.' (UK)

A third librarian said that previous training in reading promotion had been available, but that due to recent budgetary cuts,

> 'Now we have training programs only for IT and computer skills.' (Czech Republic)

A fourth said that no training was provided within her organisation, but that she did not feel it necessary:

> 'There was no training, but I have found that the skill can be developed over time.' (Canada)

The effectiveness of staff training programmes

The response to this question was similarly mixed. One librarian clearly stated:

> 'The effect is not really measurable' (Germany),

although a second respondent was more positive:

> '[We're] getting there, I feel as if we have to keep plugging away at it all.' (UK)

The most positive response again came from one of the Canadian librarians, who described the actual outcomes of training sessions provided within her organisation:

> 'All of my staff can and do make sound reading recommendations to our patrons. We get lots of requests for recommendations and lots of positive feedback from patrons who enjoyed our choices. We also spend time showing parents how to choose books their children will like, so we have a higher satisfaction rate and more repeat business.' (Canada)

Dissemination of training information to other staff

Within the organisations participating in training programmes, the main method of cascading training information to colleagues was via staff meetings, usually weekly. Alternative dissemination methods included the following:

❖ One-to-one training with the Head of Service

❖ Workshops with private training providers

❖ 'assigned readings' (Canada).

It was acknowledged that dissemination is not a straightforward task, and that it can be difficult to measure the extent to which all staff are aware of training issues:

> 'Often, I suspect that it's not, but we can only keep going!' (UK)

Conclusions

Reading policies

Although not all respondents' organisations had devised a specific reading policy, many included the promotion of reading within the overall service strategy or library plans. These were felt both to provide a timescale for future developments and to increase the status of reading within and beyond the organisation. As a librarian from the Czech Republic reported:

> 'Written strategy together with some statistical data could be [a] good demonstration of the utility and usefulness of the library activities. This is very hard to show…because such public services have no direct – and from the view of contemporary society [this is] the most important – financial effect.'

A respondent from the United Kingdom explained that such a strategy could also support the overall promotion of the reading activities of the library service:

> 'Our strategy has enabled us to prove that we can now make events work and we have a core audience from readers' groups which gives the staff confidence to promote elsewhere.' (UK)

Partnerships

Respondents participated in a wide range of partnerships that had either been developed specifically in order to promote reading or that had previously existed. Most communicated regularly with other libraries, but many examples were given to describe ways in which other agencies had become involved in the work of the local library service, both for young people and adults and for educational and recreational purposes.

It was felt that in many cases partnerships led to more effective service delivery and higher quality promotional activities:

> 'The library is able to offer services or collections to the community that it would otherwise find a challenge to offer or not have at all.' (Canada)

Reading activities

Almost all respondents organised specific activities via which to promote reading for pleasure, both for adults and young people, and almost all thought that these activities were of value to their recipients. Considerable evidence of this value was provided, both quantitative (stock circulation, membership and attendance figures) and qualitative (readers' feedback, anecdotal evidence, qualitative questionnaires.

Internal evaluation of reading activities was also being conducted in many cases, and findings were being disseminated to colleagues, senior managers and the general public, although the latter process was tentative.

It is clear that reading activities and their promotion are felt to be very closely connected to all library activity. As one librarian commented:

> 'Even [though] the library services have been enlarged so much recently, the main object of library activities – reading – is kept, and my opinion is it will be kept, side-by-side modern technologies' (Czech Republic)

Staff skills and training needs

There was a considerable depth of response to the questions concerning the staff skills required to promote reading for pleasure to readers and non-readers. Librarians who focused their responses on children and young people were concerned that promotional skills were crucial, and those who considered both children and adults often described a different approach for each age group. As a Bulgarian respondent suggested:

> 'I think we have to search for a new meaning of 'reading', maybe trying to discover what 'reading' means for children and young people…I am convinced that young people discover the pleasure of reading by the intermediary of the computers and adults discover computers by the intermediary of reading…we have to think about differences between habits of reading for different ages…' (Bulgaria)

A particularly thorough response was provided by a respondent from Belarus, who listed many skills that she felt were required of all library staff in order to effectively promote reading to both the current reader and the non-reader:

- 'General knowledge on science and its application
- information culture, communication culture
- professional ethics
- being good at service promotion and search of documents using modern technologies
- taking into consideration information needs of users and their social and psychological distinctions
- constant self-education and acquiring new knowledge and skills
- possessing personal characteristics needed for social and library work
- possessing special professional skills (functional)
- direct contact with users through communication
- involvement of users in library events and displays.'

Although the International Reading Survey was small in scale, it revealed a large amount of interesting data from eighteen different countries, pertaining to reading policies, partnerships, promotional activities and staff

skills and training. Activity to promote reading for pleasure is wide-ranging and far-reaching.

All of the above data are a valuable indicator of the international status of the promotion of reading for pleasure, and could be used as a critical starting point for future research.

[i] Resource (2001) The Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries' website of the DCMS/Wolfson Public Libraries' Challenge Fund. http://www.resource.gov.uk/action/dcmswolf/00dcmswo.asp

[ii] The Department of National Heritage (1995), *Investing in children: the future of library services for children and young people.* Library and Information Services Council (England), Working Party on Library Services for Children and Young People. London, HMSO, p.16.

[iii] Excerpt from Mission Statement, Prince George Public Library, British Columbia, Canada [http://www.lib.pg.bc.ca/general/index.html#statement] [accessed 14.07.02]

[iv] Gateshead Council Annual Library Plan 2001, http://www.gateshead.gov.uk/libraries/Annual%20Plan.doc [accessed 14.07.02]

[v] Francophonie (2001) 'Presentation du Programme CLAC: Concept du Programme'. France: Francophonie.

[vi] Well Worth Reading (2001) 'The Vital Link: reader development and basic skills' . Funding application, DCMS/Wolfson Public Libraries Challenge Fund DCMS Reader Development Programme.

[vii] Downes, A. (2001) 'Making non-fiction seductive', *The Library Association Record,* 103 (3), pp.30-31.

[viii] The New Opportunities Fund (NOF) is a National Lottery fund created to award grants to health, education and environment projects throughout the UK. Many of its grant programmes focus particularly on those in society who are most disadvantaged.