OVERDUE BOOKS AT LEEDS UNIVERSITY LIBRARY
Why books become overdue and what the library can do about it

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Abstract

Background
As university libraries try to meet rising user expectations with limited resources, it is important to look at ways of ensuring that existing book stock is returned on time and kept in circulation. This study investigated overdues at Leeds University Library, with a view to critiquing the library’s overdues procedures and suggesting possible improvements.

Aims
The study aimed to investigate three main issues: reasons why library users return their books overdue; the effectiveness of the library’s current overdues policies; and evaluating suggested improvements to overdues procedures. The study considers both the library staff perspective and the user perspective on these issues, in order to gain a balanced view of the situation.

Methods
The study was carried out using a mixed methods approach. Library users were surveyed using a print questionnaire distributed at library enquiry desks. 200 surveys were distributed and 181 usable responses were received. Library staff were recruited via the online staff SharePoint to take part in semi-structured interviews. Ten staff members were interviewed for the study.

Results
The primary self-reported reasons for users' late return of books were forgetfulness and not realising that books were overdue. Some users also had ongoing difficulties which contributed to their overdues. The library’s current policies were considered clear and easy to understand by users, but some problems were identified. These included: difficulty using online renewals; complaints about the reservations system; the large size of the student population, and user reluctance to seek help. Some suggestions for improvements were identified, including increased use of e-books and text message reminders, along with better library publicity.

Conclusions
As a result of the study findings, some common reasons for overdues have been identified and some improvements are suggested for the library service. These include: policies that focus on the return of recalled books; more positive library publicity; promotion of e-books, and consideration of text message reminders and a one-off Fines Amnesty. Further research might focus on the White Rose group of Yorkshire universities to compare strategies and success rates in dealing with overdues.
Chapter 1: Introduction

i. Introduction

This research project investigated overdue books at Leeds University Library. This included an investigation into reasons why library users return books overdue, an assessment of the library’s existing overdues policies, and an evaluation of suggested methods of encouraging timely returns. The research was carried out using mixed methods: library users were surveyed using a print questionnaire, while library staff took part in semi-structured interviews. This meant that both staff and user viewpoints were taken into account when drawing conclusions from the research and identifying ways to improve the library service.

ii. Background to the study

Although university libraries are increasingly providing e-books, electronic journals and other digital content, print resources are still in demand by many users. While a small number of academic libraries have gone bookless or substantially reduced their print collections (Newcomb, 2011), the majority continue to provide a combination of electronic and print resources. Several studies have found that, although students and researchers may have an increasing preference for electronic content, the majority still use both print and electronic resources (Zha et al, 2012; Folb et al, 2011; Rowlands et al, 2007).

However, while electronic resources can often be accessed by many users simultaneously, print books are restricted to use by one person at a time. In academic libraries, where large numbers of students often need to use the same core texts in a very short space of time, this can create stiff competition for print textbooks. In recent years, many UK university libraries are operating on reduced budgets and are less able to afford multiple copies of textbooks (Fearn, 2009). The cost of providing electronic resources can also divert funds away from printed materials. Libraries therefore need to find ways to ensure that
books are returned by the due date, in order to keep books in circulation and enable access for as many users as possible (McMenemy, 2010).

This situation arises at a time when UK university students will be paying substantially increased tuition fees from September 2012 (Coughlan, 2012). It has been speculated that students’ expectations of university will rise in line with higher fees, with new undergraduates focusing on value for money (Taylor, 2011). These expectations are likely to include a well-stocked library with key textbooks available for use. If universities are not able to substantially increase the number of books purchased, they may need to focus instead on encouraging timely returns of existing books so that resources can be shared as widely as possible. The most common way of dealing with overdue books is by charging fines, but fines are often unpopular with students and can generate negative publicity. Students starting university in September 2012 may be particularly unwilling to pay library fines due to higher tuition fees and increased levels of personal debt. Therefore it is particularly relevant at present to evaluate library policies on overdues and fines, and to investigate alternative means of encouraging students to return their library books on time.

### iii. Current situation at Leeds University Library

Leeds University has 4 library sites (3 on campus, one off-campus), providing for over 33,000 students (University of Leeds, 2012). Leeds University will be charging the maximum £9,000 per year in tuition fees for undergraduates from September 2012. Recently, the university library has featured in the national press when it emerged that Leeds University collected the largest total amount of library fines of any UK university. Leeds came top of the list in two widely reported polls which ranked university libraries by the total amount of fines they had collected in 2009/10 (Ralph, 2011) and in the six academic years from 2004/5 to 2009/10 (Guardian, 2012). Leeds University Library collected £341,009 in fines for the academic year 2009/10, the most recent year for which figures are available (Ralph, 2011). It should be noted that these fines surveys do not take into account the number of students enrolled at each university. For
example, Salford University was second to Leeds in the amount of fines collected in 2009/10, but has around 19,000 students (University of Salford, 2012), so collected considerably more fines per student than Leeds University.

Nevertheless, media coverage about fines has drawn attention to Leeds University Library and has led to criticism from students in the union newspaper Leeds Student (e.g. Edmonds, 2012; Anderson, 2011). As a gesture of goodwill, the library donated one week’s worth of fines to charity during the university’s RAG (Raise and Give) week in March 2012 (Dearlove, 2012). It is evident that University of Leeds students are regularly returning books overdue and that there is currently a backlash against the fines system. Therefore, investigating overdues at Leeds University Library provides a unique opportunity to evaluate current policies and identify areas for improvement in a library which has known issues with overdue fines.

[For a summary of Leeds University Library’s existing policies on overdues and fines, see Appendix 5].

iv. Research aims and objectives

This study aims to investigate staff and students' views of the current situation regarding overdue books at Leeds University Library. Very little research on overdues and fines has been carried out at UK university libraries; this study aims to address this gap in the literature. Focusing on overdues at Leeds University Library locates the problem in an academic library which has recent, well-publicised issues with overdues and fines. By investigating the reasons why books are returned overdue, and assessing the library’s current policies on overdue books, the study aims to identify ways in which the library can encourage students to return books on time. As such, it is hoped that this research will benefit both the library and its users.
The research aims are as follows:

1. To investigate the reasons why Leeds University Library users return library books overdue.
2. To evaluate Leeds University Library’s current policies for dealing with overdues.
3. To suggest new ways in which the library could deal more effectively with overdue books.

In order to achieve these aims, the following objectives have been identified:

1. To identify the most common reasons why users return library books overdue. The reasons for returning books late are important because they shed light on the user experience of overdues. Identifying underlying reasons can also help to identify possible solutions. For example, if forgetfulness is a primary reason for books becoming overdue, then the library might focus on ways of reminding users when their books are due.

2. To find out about users’ feelings and opinions on overdue books. The goal here is to explore questions such as: how much personal responsibility do users feel with regard to their library overdues? Are users altruistic or selfish in their library behaviour? Again these factors have implications for how staff deal with overdues in everyday working situations.

3. To find out staff and user opinions of the effectiveness of existing library policies. The library needs to establish which of its current policies are working well. Fines, for example, may be unpopular, but are they effective? The unpopularity of fines may be because they work well, causing users to return books sooner than they would like. Alternatively, perhaps fines are unpopular because users
see them as ineffective in preventing overdues. When evaluating policy, it is important to distinguish between what works and what is popular.

4. To gather staff and user opinions on a list of proposed changes to the library’s overdues policies.

Potential suggestions for dealing with overdues have been drawn partly from existing overdues literature and partly with the help of library managers at Leeds University. Both staff and library users will be asked for their opinions on these suggestions. This gives stakeholders the chance to provide feedback on library policies, and draws on staff experience in identifying possible pros and cons of alternative policies.

5. To compare the staff viewpoint and user viewpoint on overdues in order to maintain a balanced perspective.

Library users may not be aware of the underlying library management issues in dealing with overdues, while library staff may not be fully aware of the effects of overdues policies on students and staff. Comparing the two perspectives may result in contradictory evidence and opinions, but this is necessary in order to explore both sides of the argument.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

i. Introduction
   Although several news articles have recently been published about fines collected by university libraries, there is very little research into overdues at academic libraries in the UK. The majority of recent overdues research has been carried out in developing countries, where academic libraries are perhaps more reliant on printed texts than electronic resources. Other studies have focused on public libraries, or on specific subject areas such as medical libraries. Common themes and areas of discussion in the existing literature are discussed below.

ii. Overdues in academic and public libraries
   The need to encourage users to return library books on time is common to both academic and public libraries. While public library users may not need books so urgently as university students and researchers, both sectors can provide only limited resources which must be shared between a large number of users. As a result, overdue books are recognised as an inevitable part of library work. As Adomi (2003: 19) notes, “Every library has a mechanism for retrieving overdue materials”. The inevitability of dealing with overdues is often portrayed as a source of much effort and frustration for library staff. Hansel & Burgin (1983: 150) refer to public libraries' “war” on fines, while Little (1989: 22) feels that attempts to manage overdues have an “air of desperation” about them. Kean & McKoy-Johnson (2009) describe disputes over library fines as a source of stress for both students and staff in academic libraries.

   There is broad agreement that the primary concern for libraries is to keep books in circulation and enable access for as many users as possible (Bhatt, 2011; Murugathas, 2009; Flood, 2008; Adomi, 2003; Little, 1989). The ethical aspect of book circulation is also highlighted by McMenemy (2010: 79) who states that penalising overdues can “encourage users to be more community-minded”. However, another consideration is that in many cases overdue fines
are a source of income for the library (Emojorho, 2004). At times, the aim of sharing resources fairly is at odds with the financial imperative to generate income. As McMenemy (2010) observes, to charge fines for overdue books is to impose an economic penalty for a matter of principle; effectively to put a price on fairness.

iii. Why do users return their library books overdue?

Several studies have investigated the reasons why library users return books late. These include studies of public libraries (Little, 1989; Hansel & Burgin, 1983), medical libraries (Alao, 2002; Shontz, 1999) and academic libraries, mainly in the developing world (Bhatt, 2011; Murugathas, 2009; Udoumoh & Okoro, 2007; Adomi, 2003) and in one case, New Zealand (Anderson, 2008). There is very little research into overdues in UK academic libraries, which might be considered a gap in the literature, particularly in light of recent news coverage about the large amounts of fines collected by UK universities.

Common reasons for users returning their books late were identified by several studies (Bhatt, 2011; Murugathas, 2009; Anderson, 2008; Alao, 2002). The most common reasons across multiple studies include:

- Forgetfulness; users did not remember to either renew or return the books on time.
- Inconvenience; users were not able to get to the library on the due date, or found renewal systems inadequate or inconvenient.
- Necessity (or perceived necessity); users felt that they still needed the overdue book/s for their studies so kept them beyond the due date.

While the above reasons were mentioned in the majority of articles, the frequency of each reason did vary between studies. This may depend partly on the type of library user surveyed. For example, the medical students in Murugathas (2009) and in Alao (2002)’s research were most likely to report that they kept books past the due date because they still urgently needed them. On the other hand, Anderson (2008)’s study of university students across several
subject areas found that forgetfulness was the most common reason for books becoming overdue.

Alternative reasons for returning books overdue were suggested in some studies. These include being away from university on the due date (Murugathas, 2009; Alao, 2002) or illness (Alao, 2002). Additionally, Anderson (2008: 63) suggests: lack of knowledge about library regulations; not knowing when/where to return or how to renew books; having lost or misplaced the book; having lent the book to a friend; or being reluctant to face library staff when returning the book late. However, additional reasons for overdues were generally found to be far less common than the three main reasons listed above.

iv. Overdues and demographics

Some studies have attempted to correlate students’ likelihood of and attitude towards returning books late with demographic data such as gender, age and area of study. Murugathas (2009) found that a higher number of female students than male students had overdue books at the time of being surveyed, while Alao (2002) found that more males than females had overdues. However, both of these studies had relatively small sample groups, and Alao (2002)’s study had considerably more male respondents than female. Bhatt (2011) found few significant differences by gender or faculty of study in attitudes to overdues and fines. Anderson (2008) found that students in the Arts and Law faculties were more likely to have overdue books, which may have been related to the available library resources for these subjects. The same study found that older students were more likely to return books late, possibly as they had been at university for longer and therefore had had more time to accumulate overdues. Generally, evidence linking overdues with demographic information is rather patchy and unreliable.

v. Ways of dealing with overdues

The most common way of penalising library overdues is by charging fines. Figures obtained by the Press Association for 101 university libraries only
identified one library, the University of Westminster, which did not charge fines for overdue books (Guardian, 2012). News articles often portray library fines as unfair, suggesting that universities in particular are making money at the expense of students. Ralph (2011: 18) for example describes university libraries as “raking it in” by collecting fines, while Cohen (2012) views library fines as an additional and unwanted expense of going to university. Others have had negative experiences with library staff when dealing with fines (Beard, 2009). These views are predominantly found in the mainstream media.

However, library literature shows a rather different viewpoint, highlighting the necessity of charging fines to ensure that books are kept in circulation (Bhatt, 2011; Murugathas, 2009; Adomi, 2003; Little, 1989). In surveys, this fact is often recognised by library users as well as librarians. For example, Adomi (2003) found that the majority of students (60.5%) did not think that library fines should be scrapped, and Bhatt (2011) found that 78% of students agreed that fines were effective as a way of encouraging timely returns. However, Bhatt (2011) also found that only 31% of users wanted fines to remain in place. This suggests that fines might be unpopular because they are effective, compelling students to return books sooner than they would like to.

Murugathas (2009) used a survey to investigate student opinions on several proposed ways of dealing with overdues at the University of Jaffna. The most popular suggestions were sending reminder notices and allowing students to renew books even if they were very overdue. Punitive methods such as reporting students with persistent overdues to their Head of Department or taking extreme cases to court were highly unpopular. Opinions on fines were more divided, with 56% agreeing that fines were “helpful and welcome” while 34% agreed that fines were “not helpful and intensely hateful” (the remaining 10% were undecided). However, the emotive wording of the question (“welcome” versus “hateful”) tends to cloud the issue here. It does not allow for the possibility that strategies for dealing with overdues might be helpful and hateful to users at the same time.
Other studies have looked at the influence of library policy on fines. Hansel & Burgin (1983) found that longer loan periods ultimately led to more books being returned on time. However, this research was based on public libraries, whereas academic libraries often need to reduce loan periods to ensure that books circulate more widely. Hannabuss (1993) also discusses the complex relationship between loan periods and overdues. Longer loans are more popular with library users, but do not create sufficient pressure to return books on time; short loan periods provide a sense of urgency, but users may find they do not have enough time to use the book so end up returning it overdue. Jacobs (1996: 140) found that many students using academic libraries viewed short loan books as being "essentially unavailable to them". This contradicted the purpose of the short loan period, which was to make books available to more users.

Some studies of overdues have recommended improving or automating library reminder notices to reduce overdues (Alao, 2011; Anderson, 2008). It has also been suggested that text message reminders might be more "immediate and personal" as a way of alerting students to overdues (Walsh, 2009: 10). On the other hand, research by Leung (2007) found that sending reminder notices did not significantly improve overdue rates.

Murugathas (2009) and Udoumoh & Okoro (2007) found that opening hours often made it inconvenient for users to return books at the library, which led to a higher rate of overdues. Extending opening hours therefore produced improvements in the rate of overdues. Bede Mitchell (1988) has pointed out that most ways of dealing with overdues involve negative reinforcement (e.g. punishing users for overdue books, usually with fines), and suggested instead using positive reinforcement (i.e. rewarding users who return library books on time). This method was trialled by Bede Mitchell & Smith (2005) but produced mixed results. There were only small improvements in undergraduate overdue rates, and this effect lasted only for the first semester.
vi. Behavioural and psychological factors

Zaki (1994) suggested that library users were selfish in their refusal to return overdue books, while other studies have found that strong competition to get hold of library books can lead to students keeping books past the due date (Murugathas, 2009; Alao, 2002). Possibly the competitive environment created by scarce resources in academic libraries encourages selfish behaviour. Anderson (2008) asked university students about their feelings when returning books late. The most common response (23% of respondents) was “annoyed”. However, as the author acknowledges, this is an ambiguous emotion which may indicate self-blaming, frustration directed at the library, or annoyance directed elsewhere.

Research into fines in non-library situations gives further insight into human behaviour where fines are concerned. Holmas et al (2010) studied hospitals which were fined when patient stays exceeded a specified limit, in an attempt to increase turnover and free up more beds for new patients. The study found that hospitals which were fined had a longer average patient stay than hospitals which were not fined. The researchers suggested that the fine in this case was too small to act as a deterrent. A study of day-care facilities by Gneezy & Rustichini (2000) found that parents who picked up their children late from day-care were even more likely to be late after fines were introduced as a penalty. It was suggested that parents saw the fine as a fee for additional childcare. Anderson (2008) applied this idea to library fines, asking students whether they viewed fines as a punishment for overdue books or as an extended hire charge. The vast majority of students reported that they saw fines as a penalty for returning books late and not as a hire charge.

vii. Discussion

The majority of literature on academic library overdues has been carried out in developing countries or, in one case, New Zealand. Other studies have looked at overdues in public libraries, primarily in the USA (Little, 1989; Hansel & Burgin, 1983). Literature about overdues and fines in UK university libraries
mainly consists of news articles which often take a negative approach, criticising universities for the amount of fines collected (Ralph, 2011) or attacking the perceived unfairness of fines (Beard, 2009). Few overdues studies have been carried out in English-speaking countries and virtually none have considered academic libraries in the UK, which highlights a gap in the literature. While the forthcoming rise in UK university tuition fees has perhaps heightened press interest in university finances, it appears that there is very little current academic literature about overdues and fines from the perspective of students and librarians themselves.

Existing studies of overdues agree on three primary reasons for returning books overdue: forgetfulness, inconvenience, and an ongoing need to use the book (Bhatt, 2011; Murugathas, 2009; Anderson, 2008; Alao, 2002). These were common across several studies although the frequency of each reported reason varied between different groups of respondents. The most common way of dealing with overdues is by charging fines. In surveys, students often recognise the need for fines, but also tend to report that they dislike being fined themselves. Literature on fines in other contexts (hospitals and day-care centres) has found that fines are not always effective as a deterrent to unwanted behaviour (Holmas et al, 2010; Gneezy & Rustichini, 2000). Links have also been established between overdues and loan periods, and between overdues and library opening hours. The use of positive reinforcement to reduce overdues has been trialled (Bede Mitchell & Smith, 2005) but with inconclusive results.

Existing literature generally investigates the student perspective on overdues, while library staff perspectives have rarely been considered, although researchers in this area are often library professionals themselves. The most common method is the use of quantitative surveys, although some studies have also incorporated data on book circulation and loan periods (Hannabuss, 1993; Little, 1989). Some articles are mainly rhetorical in nature, questioning the meaning or the morality of library fines (McMenemy, 2010; Beard, 2009).
viii. Conclusions and areas for further research

On the whole, literature about library overdues is patchy, with no substantial body of evidence in any particular area. Studies are limited to a few geographical areas, but often use a similar methodology, that of quantitative questionnaires for students, which does enable some cross-comparison between different studies. However, there are several areas where further research could be carried out. These include: studies of public and academic libraries in English-speaking countries including the United Kingdom; studies of librarians’ attitudes towards overdues and fines; and a wider variety of research methods, such as more emphasis on qualitative data and techniques such as interviewing and case studies. Research into overdues at UK university libraries in particular would contribute to the debate over university library fines, and would provide a stronger evidence base for critiquing press coverage about library fines. As such, studying overdues at Leeds University Library using mixed methods contributes timely new knowledge to the body of literature on overdues.
Chapter 3: Research Methods

i. Carrying out research within organisations

Research for this study was carried out at Leeds University Library, where the researcher has been employed for the past five years. This was geographically convenient and greatly reduced the time and cost of travelling. As the researcher is already known to library staff and managers, there was a pre-existing relationship and sense of trust, which offered an ideal opportunity to gain permission for research. The study was completed with the full knowledge and approval of library management. However, carrying out research at Leeds University for an MA course at Sheffield University meant that at times, careful negotiation and compromise was required.

Buchanan et al (1988) noted that external organisations can complicate the research process, whether intentionally or otherwise. As a result, “In the conflict between the desirable and the possible, the possible always wins” (Buchanan et al, 1988: 54). While staff at Leeds University Library were helpful and obliging in many ways, alterations to the study were necessary to accommodate their needs. For example, the researcher originally intended to distribute user surveys by email, but was only given permission to hand out printed surveys at library enquiry desks. This significantly increased the time spent on data analysis. Library managers also had an input into the survey questions, and suggested changes or improvements both from a survey design point of view and from a public relations point of view. In such cases it was necessary to respect the managers’ wishes, and overall there did not appear to be any major adverse effects on the research process.

ii. Mixed methods research

The study was carried out using mixed methods, namely: a mainly quantitative questionnaire distributed to library users, and semi-structured interviews with library staff members. Several of the research objectives for this
study involve gathering data from both library staff and users, and it seemed that different methods were best suited for data collection from each group. As Leeds University’s student population is extremely large, at over 33,000 students (University of Leeds, 2012), surveys were considered the best method of gathering opinions from a large population (Ekman et al, 2006). Library staff constitute a much smaller group and most have been personally known to the researcher for some time. As such, it was possible to use semi-structured interviews with library staff in order to collect more qualitative data, to discuss responses in more detail and to ask follow-up questions (Barriball & While, 1994).

Burke Johnson & Onwuegbuzie (2004: 18) claim that, “Many research questions and combinations of questions are best and most fully answered through mixed research solutions”. Using more than one method of data collection can explore a topic in greater depth, and can help compensate for the weaknesses in different research techniques. Often, this will involve using more than one data collection method on the same population, such as supplementing quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews to elaborate on the data collected in more detail (see Burke Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004: 18-19). This study took a slightly different approach, in collecting information from one set of participants using quantitative methods, and from another set of quite different participants with qualitative methods. This meant it was more difficult to compare the results from each set of respondents, as the data from each group was different in format and style. However, as Sandelowski (2000: 251) suggests,

“…From a constructivist viewing position, there is no hierarchy of data collection techniques whereby one technique is judged to yield more objective (or more accurate or truer) data than another. If the results from two data collection techniques do not converge, these results are treated as interpretive opportunities.”
This study adopts Sandelowski (2000)’s position: that neither qualitative nor quantitative data is superior, and that the combined use of both methods is an opportunity for more complex interpretation.

iii. User surveys

The survey method

Gillham (2000) suggests several pros and cons of the survey questionnaire method. Advantages include: low cost in time and money; ability to survey a large population in a short time; respondents can complete surveys in their own time; respondent anonymity; lack of interviewer bias; standardisation of questions (Gillham, 2000: 5-8). For this study, the need to collect data from a large number of library users within a short time frame was particularly important, as well as the need for respondent anonymity. As previously noted, users may have some negative feelings associated with overdues and library fines. An anonymous survey offered the opportunity for users to respond more honestly, without fear of being judged. In practice, the survey was not perfectly anonymous, as respondents were still required to collect and return surveys within the library building. Ideally an online questionnaire would have been used for greater anonymity (see Joinson, 1999). However, this was not possible for reasons discussed above.

Disadvantages of the survey method include: low response rates; need for brevity and simple questions; no opportunity to correct misunderstandings; wording of questions can affect answers; problems of literacy or language in respondents (Gillham, 2000: 8-14). In this case, the respondents’ opportunity to complete surveys unsupervised is a double-edged sword. It enables anonymity, but also means that respondents may misunderstand questions, or give ambiguous answers which the researcher cannot follow up on. While literacy is assumed to be less problematic among university students and staff, respondents speaking English as a second language may have encountered difficulties in completing the survey. However, as any such respondents were studying for a degree at an English-speaking university, it was assumed that
their language skills would be sufficient to complete the survey. The clarity and wording of the questionnaire were also evaluated by piloting the survey.

_Pilot study_

For the pilot, print copies of the survey were distributed to a small class of students by the researcher’s dissertation supervisor. The class consisted of undergraduate and postgraduate students at Sheffield University, and included students of various ages and nationalities. The primary goal was to ensure that the wording of the survey was clear and could be easily understood by a variety of respondents. Unfortunately it was not possible for the researcher to attend this session in person, but the supervisor observed the students and reported that there were no apparent difficulties in completing the surveys. Following the pilot, some survey questions were amended or removed (see Appendix).

_Survey content_

The final survey contained eight questions. These included demographic questions, behavioural questions and attitudinal questions. The question styles included yes/no tick boxes, agree/disagree statements, and ranking suggestions according to their perceived effectiveness. Gillham (2000: 39) suggested that using a variety of question types makes the survey more interesting for the respondent. Primarily closed questions were used, but two questions (Q4 and Q8) were open questions allowing for free-text responses. Geer (1991) noted that the use of open-ended questions in surveys has been debated, particularly as responses are often influenced by recent information (e.g. events in the news or personal experiences). However, the open-ended questions produced very interesting responses in the pilot study, so the decision was made to keep these questions in the final survey. (For a copy of the survey see Appendix).

_Sampling and distribution_

For the final survey, printed surveys were distributed at library enquiry desks at the three main campus libraries. This takes the sampling approach
described by Fowler (2002: 12), wherein “Sampling is done from a set of people who go somewhere or do something that enables them to be sampled” (in this case, going to the library). One weakness of this approach is that users who visit the library less often, such as part-time or distance learning students, would have had less opportunity to pick up a survey. However, this was an unavoidable outcome of using print surveys rather than an online version. Library staff offered the surveys to users where possible, but did not supervise users as they completed the surveys. A return box was provided at each library site so that users could drop off their surveys without having to consult a staff member.

**Timing**

The surveys were available for completion for a two-week period between 14th May and 1st June 2012. The timing of this was not ideal, as it coincided with the end of year exam period for undergraduates. Many library users would have been very busy and under stress due to their academic workload, so may have been less likely to complete the survey. For those who did complete the survey, the pressures of exams, coupled with the obligation to pay off library fines in order to graduate, may have influenced their responses to a survey on overdues and fines. A further consideration is that Leeds University Library has recently experienced negative publicity in both the national press and the student newspaper about the amount of library fines they have collected (as outlined in Chapter 1). Library users are likely to have had a heightened awareness of overdues and fines-related issues over the past year, and again this may have had an impact on survey responses. It is also possible that users with a strong opposition to library fines may have been more likely to complete the survey. These surrounding factors should be taken into account when interpreting the results of the survey.
iv. Interviews

The interview method

Semi-structured interviews are a good way of exploring complex issues as they enable the researcher to probe answers and ask follow-up questions (Barriball & While, 1994). In this study, interviewing was suitable for collecting data from a small group of library staff, enabling detailed discussion about staff perceptions and experiences of dealing with overdues and fines. The fact that interviewees were known to the researcher helped to establish rapport; Buchanan et al (1988: 61) noted that mutual trust and respect is necessary to gain sufficient quality information when carrying out research.

Interviewers are required to “think on their feet” and observe a careful balance between sticking rigidly to a list of questions and being drawn off-topic by unrelated chatter (Mason, 2002: 67). This is of particular importance when interviewing colleagues and friends. Each interview was based around the same list of core questions, to help ensure that the relevant topics were addressed. The researcher was then free to ask supplementary questions and follow up relevant lines of enquiry. It should be noted that qualitative interviewing is necessarily subjective (Barriball & While, 1994), dependent on the skill of the interviewer, the honesty and eloquence of the respondent and the communication between both parties.

Carrying out interviews

Library staff were recruited to take part in the study via SharePoint, the online staff bulletin. The researcher placed an announcement inviting staff members with any experience of dealing with overdues and fines to email the researcher if they were willing to take part in the study. Those who expressed an interest were sent an information sheet by email, and interviews were arranged with staff who agreed to participate. The interview questions were designed to cover the same general topic areas as the user survey, but from a staff perspective. (For a list of interview questions, see Appendix).
An initial pilot interview was carried out with one staff member. This resulted in two modifications to the interview process. Firstly, interviewees were emailed the list of interview questions in advance, so that they could think about their responses prior to the interview and to reduce the sense of pressure to come up with an answer on the spot. Secondly, the pilot interview revealed that it was not practical to record the interviews due to excessive background noise. Instead, extensive notes were taken by the researcher during interviews, and follow-up emails were sent to interviewees to resolve any queries or fill in details not covered by the notes. In total, excluding the pilot interview, ten staff members took part in semi-structured interviews with the researcher.

v. Research ethics

Survey ethics

The topics covered by the survey (overdues, fines and library policies) were considered to be everyday subject matter for university library users. Although, as previously discussed, users may have had some negative experiences of overdues and fines, the subject was not deemed likely to cause undue distress for respondents. The survey was also carried out anonymously, which meant that respondents could answer without fear of being judged. In terms of personal information, participants were only asked to indicate what type of library user they were (e.g. undergraduate, staff member etc). This meant that there was no way to link individuals with their responses at any point in the research process, thus preserving participant anonymity and confidentiality.

The introductory section of the survey provided information about the aims and purpose of the survey, and made it clear that the research was being carried out for an MA dissertation at Sheffield University, as opposed to a Leeds University Library survey. Respondents were invited to contact the researcher with any concerns or queries (none were received). Consent to participate in the survey was established using a yes/no tick box prior to the first survey question. All completed surveys were read, analysed and interpreted only by the researcher and were not available to any other parties.
Interview ethics

As with library users, the topics covered in interviews were considered to be everyday subject matter for library staff members and were not expected to cause any distress. Interviewees were provided with an information sheet explaining the purpose of the research, and were asked to sign a printed consent form prior to the interview. Interviews were carried out in a private room away from staff work areas so that interviewees would not be overheard by their colleagues. It was agreed that no names or identifying details would be used when quoting or paraphrasing interviewees in this dissertation, and that the researcher would not disclose which staff members had taken part in the research. Notes taken during interviews were kept securely and were not available to be read by any third parties.

ethical approval

This dissertation was given ethical approval by Sheffield University Information School and was classed as low risk. (For copies of ethics documentation see Appendix).

vi. Data analysis

Survey responses were entered manually into MS Excel spreadsheets by the researcher. Quantitative data was used to produce tables, charts and graphs. Due to the nature of the data collected, the results were summarised using descriptive statistics. Qualitative data (e.g. responses to open questions) was analysed and coded into different themes which were then summarised in tables.

Interview data was transcribed by the researcher from notes taken during interviews. Responses were grouped into question responses, so that each staff member’s response to the same question could be compared. The data was also analysed more broadly and interpretively, looking for common themes and areas of tension across all interview transcripts. See Mason (2002: 148-150)’s discussion of analysing data both literally and interpretively.
Chapter 4: Results

The Results section is presented in two parts: firstly the results of the user survey, followed by the results of staff interviews. Detailed comparison between surveys and interviews can be found in Chapter 5: Discussion.

Results of the user survey

Printed surveys were made available at Leeds University Library enquiry desks for a two-week period between 14th May and 1st June 2012. 200 surveys were distributed across three campus libraries. 183 completed surveys were returned by the closing date, of which 181 were usable. The results are presented below. All percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Q1. What type of library user are you?

All respondents (n=181) answered this question. Responses are presented in Figs. 1 and 2.

Fig.1. Types of library user

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of library user</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Fig. 2. Types of library user

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of user</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate student</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate student</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University staff</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>181</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The fact that the majority (87%) of survey respondents were undergraduate students means that the results primarily represent the undergraduate point of view; it is necessary to bear this in mind when interpreting the survey results. Of the 3 respondents who ticked the box “Other” for Q1, one described their user type as “Open study”, one stated “Exchange student” and the third did not provide any further information.

Q2. Have you ever kept a university library book past its due date (so that the book became overdue?)

All respondents (n=181) answered this question. Responses are presented in Fig. 3.

The majority of respondents (80%) had returned library books overdue in the past. These proportions are similar for both undergraduates (80% had past overdues) and postgraduates (81% had past overdues), although the postgraduate users were a much smaller group. Due to the majority of respondents being undergraduates, it is not possible to draw any firm conclusions about which types of library user (if any) are more likely to return books overdue. 36 respondents (20% of the total) had no previous overdues.
Fig. 3. Have you ever had overdue library books in the past?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>User type</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University staff</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>145</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q3. If you have had overdue books in the past, what was the reason?

For this question, respondents were asked to “Tick any that apply”, so the number of responses total more than the number of respondents. 150 participants answered this question. (This reflects the fact that not all respondents had previously had overdue books). Responses are presented in Fig. 4.

The most common reported reason for returning books late was forgetfulness: either forgetting to renew the book (67%), or forgetting to return the book by the due date (53%). It is necessary to distinguish between forgetting to renew and forgetting to return, because some books are not renewable (e.g. books from the High Demand Collection, or books which have been reserved by another library user). A further 39% of users reported that they had not realised the book was overdue.

25% of respondents said their books had become overdue because they had been unable to get to the library. 16% of users found themselves unable to renew their books, which may have been because the books were already overdue or because their existing fines were too high. This may be related to the high proportion of users who forgot to renew their books, because users who tried to renew books more than 3 days after the due date would have been blocked by the online renewals system.
18 respondents (12% of the total) ticked the “Other” option, for which 17 provided a reason. Of these, 11 reported that they had returned the book late because they still needed to use it. 3 respondents stated they had been at home during a vacation period or on holiday; the same reasons might apply to some of those who ticked “Unable to get to the library”. One respondent stated they had been fined for a book which they never borrowed; one had found the library closed when they tried to return their book, and one had left books at a friend’s house.
Less common reasons included personal circumstances, e.g. illness (7%), having lost the book (4%) or having lent the book to somebody else (4%).

**Q4. How do you feel if your library books become overdue?**

This question was in a qualitative format, prompting respondents to enter free-text answers. 127 respondents (70%) answered this question. Comments were coded and classified into categories which are summarised in Fig. 5, and analysed in greater detail below. Many comments fell into more than one category (e.g. complaining about fines and expressing annoyance) so were counted more than once when analysing the results.

**Fig. 5. Feelings about overdue books: summary of comments**
*(in order by most common response)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotions about overdues (other than annoyance) e.g. stress, worry, guilt</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annoyance about overdues e.g. annoyed with self; annoyed with library</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments about fines e.g. fines are too high; fines are justified</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairness/unfairness of overdues e.g. unfair policies; system is fair</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral about overdues e.g. not bothered; don’t care</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These categories are discussed in further detail below.
Emotions (excl. annoyance)

Reported emotions about overdue books were varied, though on the whole were mostly negative. Because there were so many “annoyed” responses, these were treated as a separate category. Of the 47 participants who reported emotions other than annoyance, the results are further broken down in Fig. 6.

Fig. 6. Emotions about overdue books (in order by most common response)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotion</th>
<th>Example quotes</th>
<th>Freq.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sadness</td>
<td>“Sad and poor.” “A tad upset as most of the time I still need them.”</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worry</td>
<td>“I feel worry if I need it pretty urgently.” “Nervous about the bill, but I cannot always get to the library.”</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guilt</td>
<td>“Disappointed with myself.” “A little guilty… not the end of the world though.”</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>“Very angry!” “A mug. The current system is ROBBERY.”</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frustration</td>
<td>“Frustrated, especially if it’s an accident.” “If I haven’t finished with the books, it feels frustrating.”</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>“Ridiculous.” “Forgetful.”</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Breaking down the emotional categories as in Fig. 6 demonstrates that even these sub-categories are often more complex than they first appear. It is
difficult, for example, to separate the emotions attributed to overdues from the emotions caused by fines. Comments such as “Sad and poor” or “Nervous about the bill” suggest that many respondents were more bothered by the fine than by returning the books late.

On the other hand, nine respondents felt guilty about their overdues, indicating that some library users see late returns as a moral or ethical issue. A few respondents were aware that other people needed the books and that, “Morally, I should abide by the rules” (Open Study student).

Annoyance

Annoyance, the second most common theme among responses to Q4, is worth analysing in more detail. Annoyance about overdues can mean several things: annoyance with oneself, annoyance with the library, or annoyance directed elsewhere (see Anderson, 2008: 100). The 40 responses which expressed annoyance about overdues are analysed further in Fig. 7.

Fig. 7. Aspects of annoyance about overdue books (in order by most common)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of annoyance</th>
<th>Example quotes</th>
<th>Freq.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Annoyed (non-specific)</td>
<td>“Annoyed!”</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annoyed at self</td>
<td>“Annoyed but it’s my own fault.”</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annoyed by fines</td>
<td>“Annoyed – fines are too high.”</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annoyed about recalls</td>
<td>“Annoyed if no-one else wants it.”</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annoyed but “it’s a fair cop”</td>
<td>“Annoyed, but sometimes it is essential as there are not enough to go round.”</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While 15 respondents gave an ambiguous “annoyed” answer, other comments were more revealing. Nine participants indicated that they blamed themselves when their books were overdue, while three found overdues annoying but felt that overall the situation was fair. Others were annoyed about fines (9 responses). Recalls/reservations were a source of annoyance for 8 respondents, who were annoyed either because nobody had recalled the overdue book (so why did they have to renew/return it?) or because a book was recalled while they were away or still needed it.

**Fines**

35 respondents mentioned fines in their responses to Q4. These comments are further broken down in Fig. 8. The opinions expressed about fines were primarily negative, with many respondents unhappy about paying fines or about the amount they had to pay. However, 6 respondents felt that fines were fair.

**Fig. 8. Comments about library fines (in order by most common)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect of fines</th>
<th>Example quotes</th>
<th>Freq.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fines are too high</td>
<td>“Fines too expensive.”</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“…They charge extortionate fines.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Charges are fairly expensive compared to other universities”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unhappy with fines in general</td>
<td>“Annoyed about the library fines.”</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Sad as I’ll have to pay.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fines are fair</td>
<td>“We should be fined.”</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Feel it’s my fault and should accept the fine.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>“Sometimes a small fine is worth it…if you still need it.”</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Doesn’t bother me if the fine is small.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Fairness/unfairness

25 users commented on the fairness or unfairness of library overdues. Of these, 17 felt that the overdues system was generally fair. However, 9 of the 17 also included qualifying statements, such as:

“I understand that it is only fair that we don’t hog books but as an international student with the amount of fees I pay I expect to have access to all the books I need at whatever time for however long.” (Undergraduate)

These comments highlight the fact that a system which is perceived to be fair can still cause frustration and annoyance, usually because there are not enough books to go around. 8 respondents felt that overdues were unfair; however, this number does not include many of the other complaints about fines, recalls etc, which fell into other categories.

Neutral/Miscellaneous

15 respondents made neutral comments about library overdues, such as “C’est la vie (That’s life!” or “Don’t care”. Of the 5 miscellaneous comments, two were from users who had never had overdue books and wanted to maintain their good record, suggesting a virtuous circle effect. The remaining 3 comments were concerned with the lack of available books in the library, which respondents felt was a primary cause of overdues.

Q5. Your experience of overdue books

This question asked respondents to indicate whether they agreed, disagreed or were undecided on a list of statements designed to measure attitudes towards library overdues. 179 respondents answered Q5 (although some did not provide a response for every statement, so some totals do not equal 179). The responses are presented in Fig. 9.
The majority of respondents reported that they understand the library’s rules about overdues (88%) and that the library makes it easy to return or renew books on time (82%). Two statements were given identical numbers of “Agree” responses: 115 (64%) of users agreed with “I always try to return my books on time” and 64% agreed with “If I really need a book I will keep it”. Though not necessarily the same 115 respondents who agreed with both statements, the figures suggest an overlap between the two apparently contradictory statements. However, the statement “If I really need a book I will keep it” had

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I understand the library’s rules about overdue books.</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The library makes it easy to return/renew books on time.</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get annoyed with myself if my books are overdue.</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I always try to return books on time in case someone else needs them.</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I really need a book I will keep it, even if it becomes overdue.</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get annoyed with the library if my books are overdue.</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal circumstances often prevent me from returning books on time.</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I avoid borrowing library books in case they become overdue.</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It doesn’t matter to me if my library books are overdue.</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of respondents reported that they understand the library’s rules about overdues (88%) and that the library makes it easy to return or renew books on time (82%). Two statements were given identical numbers of “Agree” responses: 115 (64%) of users agreed with “I always try to return my books on time” and 64% agreed with “If I really need a book I will keep it”. Though not necessarily the same 115 respondents who agreed with both statements, the figures suggest an overlap between the two apparently contradictory statements. However, the statement “If I really need a book I will keep it” had
more “disagree” responses (54) compared with “I always try to return my books on time” (43).

A high percentage of users (70%) indicated they felt annoyed with themselves when their books became overdue. A further 40% of respondents felt annoyed with the library when their books were overdue, suggesting that there is at least some overlap in the sources of annoyance. For example, when the figures are broken down by respondent type, 57 undergraduates (out of 156 undergraduates who answered Q5) agreed that they were annoyed with themselves and also with the library when their books were overdue.

Around one third of respondents (34%) agreed that personal circumstances often prevented them from returning books on time. This is interesting in contrast with Q3, where only 11 respondents (7%) reported that personal circumstances were the cause of their past overdue books (see Fig. 4). A further 31% of respondents indicated that they avoided borrowing library books in case the books became overdue. This would mean that a significant number of users, though not a majority, are restricting their use of the library in order to avoid overdues.

The statement with the highest number of “disagree” responses (73%) was “It doesn't matter to me if my library books are overdue”. This statement also attracted a comparatively high number of “undecided” responses (13%). As such, it appears that most respondents have at least some feelings or opinions about overdue books. This result is concurrent with responses to Q4, where respondents gave a high proportion of emotional comments and only a small number were neutral (see Fig. 5).

Q6. How the library can help

This question asked respondents to rate the perceived effectiveness of a list of existing library procedures for dealing with overdues. Options were: “Very effective”, “Somewhat effective”, or “Not effective”. 179 respondents answered this question, although some did not give a response for every statement, so some totals do not equal 179. Responses are presented in Figs. 10 and 11.
Fig. 10. Effectiveness of current library measures (in order by most effective)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Library methods for dealing with overdues</th>
<th>Very effective</th>
<th>Somewhat effective</th>
<th>Not effective</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online renewals system</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24hr book return slots at Edward Boyle Library</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email reminders when books are due back</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charging fines for overdue books</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Block users from renewing when they have very overdue books</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Block users from borrowing when they have very overdue books</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short loan periods for popular books (e.g. High Demand)</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Automated telephone renewals system</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The library’s online renewals system was rated the most effective method of preventing overdues, with 92% of respondents rating it as very effective and a further 7% somewhat effective. Book return slots were also rated very effective by a majority of users (68%), as were automated email reminders (65%). Charging fines for overdue books is more controversial, rated highly effective by around half of respondents (51%), somewhat effective by 27% and ineffective by 22%. This suggests the majority of respondents believe fines have at least some effectiveness in reducing overdues. Blocking library users from renewing or borrowing when their books are very overdue were similarly divisive. While the majority ranked these policies as very or somewhat effective, around a quarter of respondents (28% and 26% respectively) ranked each of these two methods as ineffective.
Q7. What else could the library do to help?

This question asked respondents to rate the effectiveness of a list of suggested methods for dealing with overdues. 172 respondents answered this question. Responses are summarised in Figs. 12 and 13.

The suggestion rated most effective was to introduce extended loans during vacation periods; 87% rated this as very effective, while only 2% saw it as ineffective. Making more books available online was also a popular suggestion, with 79% of users rating this method as very effective and 17% somewhat effective. Text message reminders were rated as highly effective by 64%, though one respondent commented that too many reminder texts would be irritating.

Several suggestions were rated very effective by around half of respondents, including: rewarding users who return on time (53%); fines...
amnesty (52%); moving more books into High Demand (49%) and only charging fines on recalled books (49%). One user commented that books can be recalled from the borrower even if there are available copies in the library, so in this case fining recalled books seemed particularly unfair.

**Fig. 12. Effectiveness of proposed measures for dealing with overdues**

(in order by most effective)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suggestion</th>
<th>Very effective</th>
<th>Somewhat effective</th>
<th>Not effective</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extended loans during vacation periods</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make more books available online</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text message reminders when books are due for return</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reward system for users who return books on time</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fines Amnesty Week when any book can be returned</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move more books into High Demand Collection</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only charge fines on books recalled by another user</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allow renewals even when books are very overdue</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make more books reference-only</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charge higher fines</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Allowing renewals for very overdue books was given mixed ratings (42% very effective, 31% not effective). Opinion was similarly divided over making more books reference-only (32% very effective, 34% somewhat effective, 34% not effective), although this still suggests the majority felt it would have some effect. Charging higher fines was universally unpopular, with 57% rating higher fines as ineffective. Three respondents added negative comments about raising fines, while three others suggested instead lowering the fines or not charging fines at
Another felt that if fines were raised, the proceeds should go to charity. As with Q6, it is possible that respondents ranked some methods as ineffective simply because they disliked the idea.

**Fig. 13. Effectiveness of proposed measures for dealing with overdues**

Q8 invited users to provide free-text responses with any other comments about overdue library books. 45 users (25% of total respondents) answered this question. Responses were analysed and grouped into categories which are summarised in Fig. 14 and discussed in detail below.
Fig. 14. Any other comments, by topic (in order by most common)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Library fines</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggestions for managing overdues</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library suggestions (not relevant to survey)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments on ideas suggested in Q7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal circumstances</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive comments about the library</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fines

Library fines attracted the most comments in Q8. Of the 18 comments about fines, 10 respondents thought the library should reduce the amount of fines charged, impose a cap on fines, or stop charging altogether. A further 4 respondents felt the library should reduce or abolish fines on overdue books which are not recalled. Two respondents commented that the online renewals system does not allow users to see fines building up on their overdue books, so the total amount can be an unpleasant surprise. Two respondents felt that fines should be increased, and two others thought the library should regularly donate a percentage of fines to charity.

Suggestions for managing overdues

Fifteen respondents offered alternative suggestions for dealing with overdues. Of these, 6 felt that the library should purchase more print copies of textbooks. Three people criticised the renewals system, including one suggestion that no renewals should be allowed during exam periods. Four miscellaneous suggestions included: allowing students to borrow more books; extending loan periods; explaining policies more clearly in advance; and not
allowing users to reserve a book that is on loan if there is another copy available on the shelf.

Two users commented on the library’s attitude to overdues and fines. One suggested that the library should “Cut the false trying to help attitude and actually do something instead of robbing students”. Another user explained that they had severe mental health difficulties and felt that staff could be more sympathetic to these issues.

**Feedback on suggestions in Q7**

9 respondents made further comments on the suggestions for new overdues policies provided in Q7. Of these, two were positive about purchasing more e-books, three supported extended vacation loans, and two wanted more High Demand or reference books. There were two positive comments on text message reminders.

**Personal circumstances**

Three users reported that their personal circumstances contributed to their books becoming overdue. One user had problems returning books while on work placements, while another pointed out the additional costs of returning books for part-time students living away from Leeds: “£6 parking or £8 train fare”. Another respondent noted that in times of mental health difficulties, library renewals were not a priority, being “at the bottom of a long list of worries”.

**Other comments**

Three users made positive comments about the library in Q8. Eleven others made library-related suggestions which did not concern overdues or fines. These included requests for longer opening hours and requests to allow food and hot drinks in the library.
Results of staff interviews

Interviews with ten library staff members were carried out during June 2012. The interview questions were designed to cover the same general topics as the user survey and to provide a contrasting staff perspective on the issues of overdues and fines. Staff who were interviewed held a variety of jobs within the library, including library assistants, managers and faculty team staff. Length of service also varied, ranging from less than a year to 15 years or more. A summary of staff responses to each interview question is provided below.

What do you think are the main reasons that library users return their books overdue?

All library staff members felt that there were several possible reasons for books becoming overdue, and that the reasons often depended on the type of library user. Interviewees tended to divide overdues into categories based on their experience of dealing with library users. Two broad categories emerged in several interviews, which are described below.

*Forgetful and disorganised users* – usually “traditional” undergraduates, i.e. 18-year-olds studying full time for their first degree and usually living away from home for the first time. These users often had avoidable overdues caused by forgetfulness or disorganisation. Many staff thought these users needed to learn responsibility and time management, seen as an understandable part of “growing up” and adjusting to university life. Many interviewees felt the library could play a part in educating these users by explaining library policies and giving advice to prevent further mistakes.

*Users with ongoing problems* – these include part-time or distance learning students, and those with family responsibilities. These users were understood to have a lack of spare time (and money) to spend on library issues. Disabled students were also mentioned in this category, including conditions ranging from dyslexia (which staff felt was often linked to absent-mindedness) to severe and chronic disabilities which prevented users from accessing the library.
buildings and/or online services. Other library users in this group were those with ongoing personal issues such as financial or academic difficulties. These users often had problems ranging far beyond the library, e.g. owing money to the university or having to re-sit exams.

Attitudes to this type of user were varied, often combining sympathy with frustration. Several interviewees said that they were willing to waive fines for students with ongoing difficulties, particularly for disabled students. Others felt that some difficulties were exaggerated; for example, one interviewee was less sympathetic to users who claimed they were unable to return books due to having small children. The interviewee (who is also a parent) felt this excuse was not justified: “Children can get on a bus!” Many library staff were frustrated that users with persistent problems did not contact the library until they had multiple overdues and large fines.

Demand for key textbooks was an issue identified by most staff members. One interviewee referred to this as the “value” of the book, meaning the urgency of keeping a much-needed text weighed against the cost of the fine. Opinions varied as to students’ motivations for keeping popular or reserved books past the due date. Some librarians put this behaviour down to desperation and asserted that “really selfish people are in the minority”. However, one staff member (recently a student) had encountered “vindictive” library users who would keep a book simply to prevent others from using it.

A broader factor in dealing with overdues was the large student population. Librarians felt that the sheer number of users made it impossible to chase individual students with overdues, even those with known difficulties. Instead, the library “relies on users to come to us,” as one interviewee put it. In practice, this meant that many users never contacted the library; a “head in the sand” mentality was frequently mentioned. A few interviewees had experienced working in much smaller libraries and felt that personal relationships with users were often a deterrent to overdues. One librarian used the simile of stealing from a large supermarket compared to a local corner shop; it was felt that students in
small libraries felt more accountable to known individuals, whereas Leeds University libraries might seem rather “faceless” or “bureaucratic” in comparison.

Other causes of overdues suggested by interviewees included: emergencies such as illness or bereavement; having lost the book; difficulty keeping track of multiple books with different due dates; and difficulty in using the online renewal system. The latter was seen as a further cause of “head in the sand” behaviour. Library staff were often perplexed as to why users did not contact the library when they were unable to renew books online, as the delay in reporting the problem usually led to increased fines.

How effective do you think our existing overdues policies are?

All staff members interviewed thought email reminders were useful in preventing overdues. However, there were some disadvantages, mainly that reminders are only effective if users check their emails regularly. One librarian felt that students were sent too many unimportant “spam” emails by the university and that library reminders were overlooked as a result. Additionally, long term library users were thought to be overly dependent on reminder emails. Several staff members felt that “we can’t do much more than remind people” and that it was primarily the user’s responsibility to manage their library account.

The online renewals system was mentioned as an effective way of managing overdues; one librarian felt that reminder emails and online renewals constituted “the bare minimum we could be doing for students”. However, some noted that students who were unable to renew books online often assumed this was due to technical problems and would continue trying for several days, rather than contact the library for help. (Blocked renewals will occur if a book is more than 3 days overdue or if the user’s fines are above the maximum limit). It was widely believed by staff that many users did not understand these rules and would persist in trying to renew online, often incurring larger fines in the process.

As a result of this issue, many staff members thought the maximum fine limit should be lowered (one suggested a £15 cap for undergraduates) to prevent students running up large debts. User instruction was another point of
contention, with many interviewees feeling that students were overwhelmed with library information too early in the term, while others felt that the necessary information was accessible but that students did not bother to look for it.

Some larger issues relating to overdues were also identified. A few librarians mentioned the recent negative publicity about library fines and felt that Leeds University libraries had an “image problem” as a result. One manager suggested that students did not realise the library’s goal is to get books back into circulation rather than to collect the maximum fines. It was also felt that staff were more approachable and helpful than students gave them credit for. One interviewee expressed frustration that some students with genuine problems did not realise that the library could help them, while less deserving users had fines waived for dubious reasons. However, several participants felt staff behaviour was generally effective in dealing with overdues.

**What do you think about the following suggestions for encouraging returns on time?**

Users were given the same list of suggestions as used for Q7 in the user survey. The pros and cons for each suggestion are summarised in tables below.

**Text message reminders**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students “check their phones more often than their emails”.</td>
<td>Need to keep contact details constantly updated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More likely that reminders will be seen in time to renew.</td>
<td>Outdated; most students have smartphones which can easily be used to check email.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Users with several books checked out may receive multiple texts; annoying.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Move more books into High Demand Collection (HDC)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HDC books less likely to be overdue as fines are higher and no renewals allowed.</td>
<td>HDC only useful to those who live on campus; problematic for part time and distance learning students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is obvious to students that HDC books are subject to stricter rules: clearly labelled and kept in a separate area with signage.</td>
<td>HDC is “abused” by a minority of students who hide books.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students may run up higher fines on fewer books.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Space restrictions in HDC shelving area.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Make more books available online

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No due dates for e-books, so no overdues or fines.</td>
<td>Not all titles available in e-book format, or prohibitively expensive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most e-books can be accessed by multiple users simultaneously; reduces competition.</td>
<td>E-books often “a nightmare” for visually impaired students; not compatible with screen-reading software.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-books cannot be stolen or vandalised.</td>
<td>Usage statistics for e-books often “disappointing”.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Make more books reference-only

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reference books cannot be borrowed so do not generate fines.</td>
<td>Reference books more likely to be hidden or have pages ripped out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unlike HDC, reference books located in unstaffed areas so “harder to keep an eye on”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reference books are “unpopular” with students and faculty librarians.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Charge higher fines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May encourage more users to return books on time.</td>
<td>Higher fines would be hugely unpopular with most students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Likely to generate further negative publicity in campus newspaper etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fines only a deterrent to poorer students; wealthier users will pay the fines in order to keep books longer.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Reward users who return books on time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recognises that many students make the effort to return books on time.</td>
<td>“Not being fined is the reward!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students could earn better borrowing rights or “build up credit” against future fines.</td>
<td>Rewards users for a minimum standard of behaviour; “all must have prizes” culture.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Allow renewals even when books are very overdue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prevents users building up “unnecessary” fines resulting from forgetfulness.</td>
<td>Blocking online renewals alerts users to problems on their library account.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blocking online renewals causes students to panic and keep the books, causing more overdues and higher fines.</td>
<td>It is the user’s responsibility to contact the library and “negotiate” with staff to renew their books.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Should be acceptable for books which are not recalled or in High Demand.</td>
<td>Unsure whether the library management system can differentiate between recalled and non-recalled books.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Only charge fines on recalled books

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recalled books should be the priority as they are needed by other users.</td>
<td>Not everybody who needs a book will recall it (e.g. part-time students who are rarely on campus).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focusing on recalls highlights the moral incentive to return overdues (as opposed to financial incentive of a fine).</td>
<td>Not clear whether library management system can identify which books are recalled when charging fines.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Vacation loans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Would benefit international students who are unable to return books during vacations.</td>
<td>Vacation loans were abolished several years ago as they caused so many complaints.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disadvantages postgraduates and academics who are on campus all year round.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Fines Amnesty Week

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shows that the library is more concerned with getting books back than with collecting fines.</td>
<td>Could create more short-term overdues if students wait for the amnesty to return their books.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Might help to get long-term overdues resolved, e.g. invoiced books which are “just sitting in people’s houses”.</td>
<td>Would mainly benefit “undeserving” students with many overdues and large fines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could work if timed correctly.</td>
<td>A lot of extra returns and re-shelving work during amnesty week.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Can you suggest any other ways of managing overdues at Leeds?

Overdues were seen by all staff as an inevitable part of library work. One manager commented that, “If there was a perfect solution, someone else would have found it by now.” However, some potential improvements were also identified. Suggestions made by staff members are summarised below.

Dedicated overdues management team

One interviewee suggested a dedicated team who would personally contact students with multiple overdue books. This would help to overcome some of the problems of dealing with a large student body, such as the library appearing “faceless” and relying on users to initiate contact. However, the staff member questioned “whether anybody would want to work on that team” and was unsure whether there would be enough available staff members to make it work.

More positive publicity

One staff member thought it was important to publicise the library’s rules about overdues and fines, and to use “every available channel” to get the message across. They suggested it would be useful to take a “how to avoid fines” approach, emphasising that the library wants to help students return their books. However, the staff member was unsure about whether the library’s Marketing Team would approve.

Get academic departments involved

One suggestion was to report students with persistent overdues to their academic departments or personal tutors. It was thought that students take their lecturers more seriously than library staff, and that escalating the issue might force students to deal with their overdues and fines more promptly.
Examples from other universities

Several staff members had recently visited York University Library and reported that a new overdues policy is due to be implemented at York for the academic year 2012/13. This will involve charging large fines (£5 per day) on recalled items, and no fines on other overdue books. Leeds University staff are curious about how this will work in practice, and some suggested that if York’s new system is successful, they would be more amenable to only fining recalled books at Leeds.

Any other comments about overdues at Leeds University Library?

One staff member wished to stress that interactions with users at the library enquiry desk were an important opportunity for user education and that library staff should always try to help users manage their accounts and prevent overdues. Two interviewees were keen to stress that specific groups of library users, such as healthcare students or disabled students, faced their own particular set of difficulties and should be dealt with “on a case by case basis”.

There were also several comments about the library’s perceived “bad reputation” regarding fines, which many staff felt was unjustified. It was pointed out that fines “league tables” did not take student numbers into account, and that Leeds students may be more prone to overdues or have the means to pay the fines. Most staff were very positive about the library’s charity donation of fines during Rag Week.
Chapter 5: Discussion

Themes and issues arising from the results analysis are discussed in detail below.

i. Reasons why library users return their books overdue

In the user survey, the most commonly reported reason for returning library books late was forgetfulness. This is concurrent with several studies which all found that forgetfulness was among the most common causes of overdues (Murugathas, 2009; Anderson, 2008; Alao, 2002). 39% of users also reported that they had not realised their books were overdue. This is surprising considering that all Leeds University library users are sent email reminders when their books are due for renewal, and further emails when the books are overdue. Previous studies have suggested introducing or improving automated reminders to reduce overdue rates (Alao, 2011; Anderson, 2008). However, Leung (2007) found that reminder notices did not significantly reduce overdues in libraries. Further, 31% of respondents to Q6 reported that they found email reminders only "somewhat effective" in preventing overdues and 4% found reminders ineffective. That said, overdue rates might be substantially higher without reminder notices.

Some of the reported reasons for overdues are open to interpretation. For example, 25% of respondents said they were unable to get to the library to return books. This might include international students who are abroad during vacations, part-time and commuting students, or those who live near the campus but still do not return books on time. One librarian noted in interview that students often “perceive themselves as being very busy,” (i.e. too busy to return books on time), but that this is a subjective belief. Similarly the “personal circumstances” reported by 7% of users might mean anything from severe personal problems to mild inconvenience in returning books. It is possible that social desirability bias, wherein research participants attempt to present themselves in a favourable light (Fisher & Katz, 2000), is a factor here. Perhaps
some users try to present themselves as being blameless with regard to overdue books; on the other hand, Q3 of the survey offered few truly undesirable options (e.g. “I kept the book to prevent anyone else using it”).

Interviews with library staff suggest that staff have a comprehensive understanding of why users return books late. Forgetfulness was usually the first reason mentioned by staff, and elicited some sympathy among librarians, although there was agreement that the library does a great deal to remind users when their books are due. Most librarians thought that upholding fines for forgetful users was effective in reinforcing library rules and also an opportunity to remind users how to check their accounts and prevent further overdues. Another staff strategy was to waive the first fine in cases of forgetfulness, on the understanding that future fines would be payable.

Library staff also understood that the lack of available textbooks created competition among users and increased the likelihood of overdues. It was generally felt that students became self-centred as a result of the pressures of the university environment, rather than being innately selfish, though some staff had encountered “vindictive” library users. It was also recognised that for some students, the need to use a book outweighs the cost of the fine. This concurs with the 11 respondents to Q3 in the user survey who stated their book had become overdue because they still needed it. Several responses to Q4 also mentioned the lack of available books; as one undergraduate put it, “Sometimes a small fine is worth it if someone has recalled the book and you still need it!” (In retrospect, Q3 should have included a statement such as “I still needed to use the book”. This factor is identified in several studies of overdues and was included in a first draft of the user survey, but omitted in error from the final version).

Interviews also revealed that the very large student population at Leeds University was a concern for staff dealing with overdues. The size and number of library sites, along with the emphasis on online services, was thought to make the library seem “faceless” and “bureaucratic.” A postgraduate comment in Q4 of the user survey also described the library system as “impersonal”. Individual
staff members, however, saw themselves as friendly and willing to help. Some staff had friendly relationships with particular types of user, including one librarian who worked closely with disabled students, and staff at Health Sciences Library who were familiar with the difficulties faced by mature or part-time healthcare students. In these cases, library staff were able to counteract the perceived bureaucracy of the library system and deal with individuals “on a case by case basis,” sometimes waiving fines for students with known and persistent difficulties. While consistent, “one size fits all” rules were necessary for dealing with a large student population, library staff felt that some users were unfairly disadvantaged by the rules and made efforts to treat these students sympathetically. One manager maintained that “We waive more fines than we collect.”

ii. Users’ feelings about overdue books

Responses to Q4 in the user survey indicate that overdues are often an emotive issue for library users (although, as previously discussed, those with the strongest opinions may have been more likely to fill in the survey). Many users reported feeling annoyance, worry, guilt and stress when their books were overdue. In Q5, 70% of users agreed that their annoyance was directed at themselves, while 40% reported that they were annoyed with the library. This suggests that a higher proportion of users are self-blaming about their overdues, though several users were annoyed with both themselves and the library. As a high percentage of users reported overdues due to forgetfulness in Q3, perhaps forgetful users feel they have more cause to blame themselves for their overdues.

Other responses to Q4 expressed frustration with library policies, particularly about the amount of fines charged (which is perceived to be too high, especially compared with other universities). The reservations system was also a cause of frustration, often because a book was recalled while the user still needed or was unable to return it. Conversely, users were also unhappy when their book was fined for being overdue even though it was not recalled by
somebody else. Librarians made a similar distinction between “necessary” fines (to encourage a user to return a recalled book) and “unnecessary” fines (on less popular books which the user simply forgot to renew). This issue could be partly addressed by the proposal in Q7 of only charging fines on recalled books, which is discussed further below.

In Q5, the most disagreed-with statement was “It doesn’t matter to me if my library books become overdue” (73%, nearly three-quarters of respondents, disagreed with this statement). This is concurrent with the many emotive responses to Q4 and the many comments about perceived fairness and unfairness. As previously discussed, it is hard to separate emotions about overdues from emotions about fines. Many comments indicate that these issues are inextricably linked in users’ minds. However, if there was no stress or inconvenience involved in paying a fine, then fines would not be an effective deterrent to overdues. As noted by Holmas et al (2010), fines which are too low to inconvenience users will rarely produce the desired effect.

Responses to Q5 also raise the possibility that some users’ behaviour is affected by the competition for library books. Identical numbers of respondents (64%) agreed with the apparently contradictory statements “I always try to return my books on time” and “If I really need a book I will keep it”. While not necessarily the same 115 users agreed with both statements, the numbers do suggest there is an overlap between respondents. Perhaps some users would ideally like to return their books on time, but in situations where there is an urgent need for the book, self-interest prevails and the user will keep the book past the due date.

iii. Effectiveness of current policies at Leeds University Libraries

In Q5, the majority of users agreed that they understood the library’s rules about overdue books (88%) and that the library makes it easy to return or renew books on time (82%). This suggests that the library’s overdues policies are generally considered to be clear and helpful. However, as Anderson (2008) points out, students may think they understand library rules better than they
actually do; people “do not know what they do not know” (Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2003: 131). Library staff often commented that users who were unable to renew their books online (a problem reported by 16% of respondents to Q3) did not seem to understand the reasons for this and would keep trying to renew for several days rather than contact the library.

The online renewals system was in fact highly rated by users (92% rated it “very effective”), but staff were more critical, mainly because they felt it was not clear to users why their online renewals failed. Email reminders were rated relatively highly by students (64% rated them “very effective”). While staff felt the reminders were necessary, they pointed out that reminders are only useful if they are received and acted upon before the due date. Students’ failure to check their email regularly was seen as a contributing factor, which would also help to account for the high number of overdues attributed to forgetfulness or oversight in Q3. Staff were of the opinion that the library did as much as possible to remind students of due dates, “short of going round to their houses and physically collecting the books” (as one librarian put it).

Charging fines was a divisive issue among users; 22% felt that fines were not effective, while 27% saw fines as somewhat effective. However, it is necessary to distinguish between policies which are “not helpful and intensely hateful” (see Murugathas, 2009: 8) and those which are effective but disliked. Library staff saw fines as being in the latter category, although it was noted that fines are only a deterrent to those who can’t afford to pay them. This was seen by some as contributing to inequality among a student population which is perceived as relatively wealthy.

Blocking users from renewing or borrowing when they have overdue books were again divisive among library users. 44% felt that blocked renewals were effective, while 43% felt blocked borrowing was effective. Library staff generally supported blocking users with overdues from borrowing, particularly if the overdue books were recalled; one staff member described this as “You [the user] are inconveniencing somebody, so the library will inconvenience you”. However, many staff members felt that blocked renewals were not effective
because users did not understand why they could not renew. Users are encouraged to contact the library when such problems arise, but their failure to do so was frustrating to library staff.

Short loan periods (e.g. High Demand Collection) evoked mixed opinions: 42% of users rated them very effective, 31% somewhat effective, and 26% not effective. This was reflected in staff concerns that High Demand books were not useful to part-time or distance learning students, and that a minority of library users hid or stole books from the High Demand area. Similar concerns were raised by Jacobs (1996: 140) who found that many university library users felt short loan books were “essentially unavailable to them”. While short loan books are intended to increase circulation this is not always the case in practice. Telephone renewals were rated by users as the least effective library policy, presumably because so few users knew that phone renewals existed.

iv. Proposed suggestions for improving the overdues system

The suggestion rated as most effective by library users was to introduce longer loans over university holidays: 87% ranked this as “very effective”. However, this suggestion was unpopular with library staff, many of whom recalled that the library used to have a vacation loans system which was abolished several years previously after a large number of complaints. Postgraduates and academics who were on campus all year round had been frustrated that many books were effectively out of circulation during vacations and could not be reserved. Vacation loans were seen as unfairly benefiting undergraduates; one staff member felt vacation loans encouraged undergraduates to believe that “the university just grinds to a halt when they’re away”. Another was of the opinion that Leeds as a research-led university should be catering more for academic and postgraduate library needs. As 87% of survey respondents were undergraduates, the emphasis on vacation loans may not be representative of the wider student body.

Making more books available online was rated as very effective by 79% of users and somewhat effective by 17%. However, a librarian who regularly
worked with e-books stated that actual usage statistics were often disappointing; students may overestimate the likelihood of their using e-books. As Underwood (2003: 323) points out, “The difference between self-predicted behaviour and actual behaviour can be substantial”. Other staff concerns were that not all books were available electronically, and others were prohibitively expensive; e-books were also problematic for disabled students as they were often incompatible with the necessary screen-reading software. While e-books are a good solution to overdues in theory, there are several practical considerations involved.

Text message reminders were rated highly effective by 64% of users, and most library staff felt this was worth looking into, though there were some concerns about the cost and the need to have an up-to-date phone number for each user. Several staff thought text reminders were more likely to be received promptly by users, as suggested by Walsh (2009). However, one librarian felt this idea was outdated, as many library users have smartphones which can just as easily be used to check email reminders.

A reward system for users who return books on time was rated very effective by 53% of users and somewhat effective by 23%. Some library staff were amenable to this idea, suggesting that students could build up credit against future fines, or gain more borrowing rights by returning on time. Other staff opposed the idea, as “Not being fined is the reward [for returning on time]!” It is worth noting that when a reward system was trialled by Bede Mitchell & Smith (2005), it did not significantly reduce overdues. A fines amnesty week was rated very effective by over half of users (52%), but staff had concerns that if users knew an amnesty was forthcoming, they would keep their books for longer, thus increasing short-term overdues.

There was patchy support among users for moving more books into High Demand; 49% rated this very effective, a similar percentage to those who felt the existing High Demand section was effective in preventing overdues in Q6 (42%). Along with previously discussed concerns about part-time students and hidden books in High Demand, librarians pointed out shelf space restrictions and
suggested that students might run up higher fines on fewer books (as HDC books are subject to larger fines). Making more books reference-only was unpopular with both users and staff. 34% of users rated this as ineffective, compared with 32% who rated it very effective. Library staff felt that reference books were harder to monitor, more likely to be hidden or defaced, and not useful to part-time and distance learning students.

Allowing renewals when books are very overdue, and only charging fines for recalled books, were suggestions very popular with staff but less so with users. 49% of users believed that only fining recalls would be very effective, and 33% somewhat effective. Perhaps this is linked to the comments in Q4 and Q8 from users who had had books recalled while away from campus, or had a book recalled while there were other copies available in the library, in which case the fines seemed particularly unfair. Staff felt that focusing on the timely return of recalled books could encourage users to be more considerate, as it was evident that the book was required by somebody else. Concurrently, staff thought fines on non-recalled books were more unfair as users were “fined for being forgetful”.

Allowing renewals when books are very overdue was also supported by most staff, as this was seen as another cause of “pointless” fines. This was linked to the issue of blocked online renewals for overdue books, which staff felt was confusing to users and often led to larger fines. However, only 31% of users thought allowing renewals would be effective, and 27% somewhat effective. Possibly some users were under the impression that this meant overdue recalled books could be renewed, thus keeping much-needed books out of circulation for even longer (this was not the researcher’s intention). For both of the above policies, the limitations of the Millennium library management system were a major consideration for staff. Several were unsure that Millennium could differentiate between recalled and non-recalled books when allowing renewals or charging fines. However, as the library is currently considering purchasing a new library management system, it is possible that these difficulties could be overcome in the future.
Charging higher fines was highly unpopular with users, ranked as ineffective by 57% of survey respondents. Possibly some users ranked this method as ineffective because they felt it was undesirable. Staff thought that, while increasing fines might well reduce overdue rates, it would create resentment against the library and generate further negative publicity. As such, staff and users were in agreement that increasing fines was not advisable for the foreseeable future.

Staff suggestions for improving overdue rates included: a dedicated team who would personally contact students with overdue books; more publicity explaining library rules, with an emphasis on helping students to avoid fines; and reporting students with multiple or persistent overdues to their academic departments. Staff were also interested in the outcome of York University Library’s new policy of charging large fines on recalled books only. The user survey generated few practical suggestions for dealing with overdues. There were many requests to reduce or abolish library fines, but it is not clear how this would improve overdue rates. There were also six requests to purchase more print copies of books; however, due to budgetary restrictions, the purpose of this research was to identify alternative, cheaper methods of keeping existing books in circulation (as outlined in Chapter 1).
Chapter 6: Conclusions

i. Conclusions from research
The following conclusions have been drawn based on the findings from the user survey and interviews with library staff. These are discussed in the context of the research objectives outlined in section 1.

Objective 1: To identify the most common reasons why users return library books overdue.

The user survey investigated users’ self-reported reasons for returning books late, while library staff were also asked for their opinions. The most common reported reasons for overdues were: forgetting to renew the books, forgetting to return the books, and not realising that books were overdue. Other issues included being unable to get to the library and failed attempts to renew books online. Survey responses and staff interviews also identified some users with persistent library difficulties relating to disability, mental health issues, and juggling part-time study with paid employment and caring responsibilities. Staff noted that the very large student population at Leeds University meant that the onus was on the user to contact the library about their overdues. This often meant that users put off seeking assistance, which was a source of frustration for library staff who wanted to help.

Objective 2. To find out about users’ feelings and opinions on overdue books.

When investigating users’ feelings in the user survey, it was often difficult to untangle emotions about overdues from emotions about fines; for many users these are one and the same. There were many negative emotions attributed to overdues and fines, including annoyance, stress, worry and guilt. (However, if no negative emotions were involved, there would be little incentive to return books on time). Fines are perceived by many as unfair and unreasonably high.
Many users expressed a desire to return books on time which was hampered by their perceived need to keep the book past the due date. Staff observed that competition for key texts often caused students to behave selfishly.

**Objective 3. To find out staff and user opinions of the effectiveness of existing library policies.**

Survey responses indicated that most users understand library policies and feel that the library makes it easy to return or renew books on time. Email reminders and online renewals are valued by staff and users, yet the high percentage of overdues attributed to forgetfulness and ignorance suggests that reminders are not always effective. Staff felt that users often did not understand the library policies that prevented them from renewing online, which often led to confusion and higher fines. Library fines provoked criticism and complaints from users (possibly linked to recent negative publicity about fines). Staff predominantly felt fines were effective but disliked; however, fines were seen as less of a deterrent to well-off students. The library’s High Demand Collection had mixed support from users and was criticised by staff for making popular books unavailable to part-time and distance learning students. Staff also felt that the capability of the Millennium library management system often restricted their options when establishing library policies.

**Objective 4. To gather staff and user opinions on a list of proposed changes to the library’s overdues policies.**

Several suggested policies were rated highly by users but less so by staff, or vice versa. For example, survey respondents felt that longer loans over vacations would be effective in preventing overdues, but library staff pointed out that this system had been very unpopular when it was used previously. More e-books was a popular suggestion, along with text message reminders, though both of these had drawbacks. Staff were more eager than users to allow renewals for overdue non-recalled books and to reduce or abolish fines on non-recalled books. Charging higher fines and making more books reference-only
were universally unpopular with both users and staff. Library staff provided some alternative suggestions including a dedicated overdues team, more helpful publicity and getting academic departments involved in dealing with troublesome users.

**Objective 5. To compare the staff viewpoint and user viewpoint on overdues in order to maintain a balanced perspective.**

This objective was fulfilled as a natural stage of analysing and discussing the data from surveys and interviews. It was evident that library staff have a good understanding of the reasons why users return their books late and had developed strategies for dealing with different types of user. While users felt that they understood library policies about overdues, staff identified some areas of confusion, mostly relating to online renewals. Staff and users often differed in their opinion of existing library policies and proposed alternatives, as discussed above. Issues of staff/user relationships also came to light, as many staff felt that users did not realise librarians were there to help and not to collect the maximum amount of fines. This was borne out by the large number of negative user comments about fines.

**ii. Limitations of research**

User surveys gathered responses from 181 users, only a small percentage of Leeds University’s student population, notwithstanding university staff and external borrowers. Further, the majority of respondents (87%) were undergraduate students, so the findings may not be generalisable to the wider user population. The survey may have had an improved response rate if carried out at a less hectic time of year, and an online survey format would have been more desirable had permission been given.
iii. Recommendations for managing overdues at Leeds University Library

The following recommendations have been identified as a result of this research.

- **Consider implementing policies which distinguish between recalled and non-recalled books.** The reservations system is a cause of complaints from students and staff. To allow renewals of overdue non-recalled books would make online renewals easier and help to avoid fines caused by forgetfulness. Reducing or abolishing fines on non-recalled books could be done in conjunction with this. Focusing on the return of books which are demonstrably needed by other users might help to emphasise the ethical or community-minded aspect of overdues. Reducing fines on non-recalled books would affirm that the library’s aim is not to make a profit but to encourage book circulation. The library’s potential move to a new library management system could help to facilitate this change.

- **Promote use of e-books where possible.** E-books, while expensive, can help to alleviate some of the demand for popular texts and can bypass overdues and fines. User enthusiasm for e-books may not be currently reflected in usage statistics; perhaps library staff could try to address user concerns and offer help and advice with using online materials. Popularity of e-books may also rise with the increased use of e-readers such as Kindles.

- **Consider a one-off Fines Amnesty to encourage the return of very overdue books.** This may need to be announced at short notice to avoid an increase in short-term overdues; if so, the amnesty would need to be very well-publicised in a short timescale. This may help to get long-term overdues returned, and to demonstrate that the library’s main concern is to get books back rather than collect large fines. Regularly donating a percentage of fines to charity could also send a positive message.
• *Investigate the use of text message reminders* – including cost and practical issues. Would they make any difference to students with smartphones, and could they succeed where email reminders have had limited success?

• *Use positive publicity to improve user perceptions of the library.* The library could counteract negative publicity about fines with more positive messages, such as a “How to avoid fines” page on the library website. Publicity could be used to explain overdues policies and to highlight that the library’s priority is to make materials available to as many users as possible. The library could also focus on encouraging students to contact the library if they have problems, emphasising that staff are willing to help. This might be done via the library website, signage, plasma screens, or the *Leeds Student* campus newspaper.

**iv. Suggestions for further research**

Overdues literature is currently lacking in geographical diversity and in the use of qualitative research methods. As this dissertation has identified that overdues and fines are an ongoing concern in university libraries, more up-to-date research might be carried out in other UK academic libraries. Given recent developments at York University, it would be interesting to carry out a study of White Rose universities (Universities of York, Leeds and Sheffield) to compare strategies and successes in dealing with overdues.

**Total word count: 14,917 words**


Appendices

Guide to Appendices

Ethics documentation

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[A note on ethics. The ethics documentation included here refers to an online questionnaire, as was originally intended. Approval was later obtained from the dissertation supervisor to distribute print questionnaires instead, as requested by Leeds University.]

Data collection

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Additional information

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University Documentation

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Confirmation of address p. 94
University Research Ethics Application Form
for Undergraduate & Postgraduate-Taught Students

This form has been approved by the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC)

Complete this form if you are an undergraduate or a postgraduate-taught student who plans to undertake a research project which requires ethics approval via the University Ethics Review Procedure.

Your Supervisor decides if ethics approval is required and, if required, which ethics review procedure (e.g. University, NHS, Alternative) applies.

If the University’s procedure applies, your Supervisor decides if your proposed project should be classed as ‘low risk’ or potentially ‘high risk’.

*PLEASE NOTE THAT YOUR DEPARTMENT MAY USE A VARIATION OF THIS FORM: PLEASE CHECK WITH THE ETHICS ADMINISTRATOR IN YOUR DEPARTMENT*

This form should be accompanied, where appropriate, by all Information Sheets / Covering Letters / Written Scripts which you propose to use to inform the prospective participants about the proposed research, and/or by a Consent Form where you need to use one.

Further guidance on how to apply is at:

www.sheffield.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/ethicspolicy/approval-procedure/review-procedure

Guidance on the possible routes for obtaining ethics approval (i.e. on the University Ethics Review Procedure, the NHS procedure and the Social Care Research Ethics Committee, and the Alternative procedure) is at: www.sheffield.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/ethicspolicy/approval-procedure/ethics-approval

Once you have completed this research ethics application form in full, and other documents where appropriate, check that your name, the title of your research project and the date is contained in the footer of each page.

If your Supervisor has classed the project as ‘low risk’:

- Email this form, together with other documents where applicable, to your Supervisor; and
- Sign and date Annex 1 of this form and provide a paper copy to your Supervisor.

Important Note for Supervisors:
Following the ethics review the Supervisor must provide the academic department's Ethics Administrator with a copy of the 'low risk' research ethics application that s/he reviewed and a completed Ethics Reviewer’s Comments Form indicating the ethics decision that s/he took in relation to it. The Ethics Reviewer’s Comments Form can be downloaded here: www.sheffield.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/ethicspolicy/further-guidance/universityprocedure2/reviewersc. The Ethics Administrator reserves the right to consult the Chair of the academic department’s Ethics Review Panel (or equivalent) of s/he has concerns that projects classed as low risk should in fact have been classed as potentially high risk.

If your Supervisor has classed the project as potentially ‘high risk’:

- Email this form, together with other documents where applicable, to your department’s Ethics Administrator; and
- Ask your Supervisor to sign and date Annex 2 of this form and provide a paper copy of it to your department’s Ethics Administrator.

Ethics Administrators are listed at:
University Research Ethics Application Form
for Undergraduate & Postgraduate-Taught Students

I confirm that I have read the current version of the University of Sheffield ‘Ethics Policy Governing Research Involving Human Participants, Personal Data and Human Tissue’, as shown on the University’s research ethics website at: www.sheffield.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/ethicspolicy

A1. Title of research project: Overdue Books at Leeds University Library: Why books become overdue and what the library can do about it

A2. Name of Student: Rachel Bethan Davies
Department: Information School  Email: lip10rbd@shef.ac.uk  Tel.:07985624059
Name of Supervisor: Barbara Sen

A3. Proposed Project Duration: 5 months
Start date: 1st April 2012  End date: 3rd September 2012

A4. Mark ‘X’ in one or more of the following boxes if your research:

- involves adults with mental incapacity or mental illness
- involves prisoners or others in custodial care (e.g. young offenders)
- involves children or young people aged under 18 years
- involves using samples of human biological material collected before for another purpose
- involves taking new samples of human biological material (e.g. blood, tissue) *
- involves testing a medicinal product *
- involves taking new samples of human biological material (e.g. blood, tissue) *
- involves additional radiation above that required for clinical care *
- involves investigating a medical device *

* If you have marked boxes marked * then you also need to obtain confirmation that appropriate University insurance is in place. To do this email insurance@shef.ac.uk and request a copy of the ‘Clinical Trial Insurance Application Form’.

It is recommended that you familiarise yourself with the University’s Ethics Policy Governing Research Involving Human Participants, Personal Data and Human Tissue before completing the following questions. Please note that if you provide sufficient information about the research (what you intend to do, how it will be carried out and how you intend to minimise any risks), this will help the ethics reviewers to make an informed judgement quickly without having to ask for further details.
A5. Briefly summarise:

i. The project’s aims and objectives:
   (this must be in language comprehensible to a lay person)

The project aims to investigate the reasons why Leeds University students return their library books overdue. The second aim is to assess the effectiveness of the library’s current methods of encouraging students to return books on time (e.g. email notices, overdue fines) and to identify any new ways in which the library can help and encourage students to return their books by the due date.

The study may be beneficial for the library and its students, as if more books are returned on time then the books can be more widely circulated and used by as many students as possible.

ii. The project’s methodology:
   (this must be in language comprehensible to a lay person)

This study uses a mixed methods approach. Students will be sent an email questionnaire to fill in, which will be anonymous in order to encourage more honest responses. Library staff members will be interviewed face-to-face, with the interviews recorded and transcribed by the researcher. The interviews will aim to cover the same topic areas as the questionnaire, but in a semi-structured format.

Due to the mixed methods approach, the data collected will be partly quantitative (survey data) and partly qualitative (interview data). The data will be analysed using spreadsheets or possibly SPSS for quantitative data, and thematic analysis for qualitative data. The data collected will be used to explore staff and student perspectives on overdue books, and comparisons will be drawn between the two sets of responses.

A6. What is the potential for physical and/or psychological harm / distress to participants?

The topics covered by the questionnaire and interviews are everyday library behaviour (for students) and everyday work issues (for library staff). It is not anticipated that the issues discussed will be emotive or distressing. Students may have some negative feelings about overdue books, but the questionnaire will be carefully worded to avoid judgemental language, and will give students the opportunity to express their opinions. Student views are integral to the project and will be treated respectfully. Questionnaire responses will be anonymous, which protects the students’ identities and there will be no way to link individuals to the opinions they express.

Library staff are unlikely to be distressed by the interview questions, as overdue books are a day-to-day part of the job. All participants will be aged over 18 and informed consent will be obtained.

A7. Does your research raise any issues of personal safety for you or other researchers involved in the project? (especially if taking place outside working hours or off University premises)

No. Questionnaires will be sent by email and interviews will be carried out during normal working hours with participants known to the researcher.

If yes, explain how these issues will be managed.
A8. How will the potential participants in the project be:

i. Identified?
The study will focus on Leeds University students, whose email addresses will be provided by the university. Library staff members are already known to the researcher.

ii. Approached?
Leeds University will provide a mailing list which will be used to contact students by email with a link to the online questionnaire. Library staff will be approached via an announcement in the online staff bulletin, and also by word of mouth as most are already known to the researcher.

iii. Recruited?
Students will be emailed a link to the online questionnaire so that they can decide whether to take part by clicking on the link. Library staff will be invited to participate via the online staff bulletin or by word of mouth; anyone wishing to take part will be asked to email the researcher directly, and interviews will then be arranged.

A9. Will informed consent be obtained from the participants?

If informed consent or consent is NOT to be obtained please explain why.
Further guidance is at: www.sheffield.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/ethicspolicy/policy-notes/consent

A9.1. This question is only applicable if you are planning to obtain informed consent:
How do you plan to obtain informed consent? (i.e. the proposed process?):

The online questionnaire will contain information about the aims of the study on the first page. This will include a statement that participant data is confidential and that participants can withdraw from the study at any time. Students will be required to give consent to participate by selecting Yes/No. This will be the first question of the survey. Library staff members will be given an information sheet about the project and will be asked to give written consent prior to the beginning of the interview.

A10. What measures will be put in place to ensure confidentiality of personal data, where appropriate?
Students will not be asked for any identifying personal data in the introductory email or in the questionnaire; they are only asked to indicate whether they are undergraduate or postgraduate students. Survey responses will therefore be anonymous both in data collection and in data analysis. It is not possible to interview library staff anonymously, but pseudonyms will be used when transcribing the data and in the final written dissertation. All data will be stored on the researcher’s personal PC and USB storage, and will only be accessible to the researcher.

A11. Will financial / in kind payments (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants? (Indicate how much and on what basis this has been decided)

No compensation will be offered to participants.

A12. Will the research involve the production of recorded media such as audio and/or video recordings?

YES ☒ NO ☐

A12.1. This question is only applicable if you are planning to produce recorded media:

How will you ensure that there is a clear agreement with participants as to how these recorded media may be stored, used and (if appropriate) destroyed?

Recordings of interviews will need to be made for transcribing. The information sheet given to interview participants will include information on how the recordings will be stored and used, and participants will agree to this when providing written informed consent.

Guidance on a range of ethical issues, including safety and well-being, consent and anonymity, confidentiality and data protection’ are available at:

www.sheffield.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/ethicspolicy/policy-notes
For Undergraduate & Postgraduate-Taught Students

Student Declaration

(The student completes Annex 1 if the Supervisor has classed the student’s proposed research project as ‘low risk’)

The Supervisor needs to receive an electronic copy of the form, and other documents where appropriate, plus a signed, dated paper copy of this Annex 1 ‘the Student Declaration’.

Full Research Project Title: Overdue Books at Leeds University Library: Why books become overdue and what the library can do about it

In signing this Student Declaration I am confirming that:

- The research ethics application form for the above-named project is accurate to the best of my knowledge and belief.
- The above-named project will abide by the University’s ‘Good Research Practice Standards’: www.sheffield.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/good
- The above-named project will abide by the University’s ‘Ethics Policy Governing Research Involving Human Participants, Personal Data and Human Tissue’: www.sheffield.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/ethicspolicy
- Subject to the above-named project being ethically approved I undertake to adhere to any ethics conditions that may be set.
- I will inform my Supervisor of significant changes to the above-named project that have ethical consequences.
- I will inform my Supervisor if prospective participants make a complaint about the above-named project.
- I understand that personal data about me as a researcher on the research ethics application form will be held by those involved in the ethics review process (e.g. my Supervisor and the Ethics Administrator) and that this will be managed according to Data Protection Act principles.
- I understand that this project cannot be submitted for ethics approval in more than one department, and that if I wish to appeal against the decision made, this must be done through the original department.

Name of Supervisor: Barbara Sen

Name of student: Rachel Bethan Davies

Signature of student: Rachel Bethan Davies

Date: 04.04.2012
Appendix 2a. Information sheet for surveys (3 pages)

Information Sheet for Participants Filling In Questionnaire

Overdue Books at Leeds University Library: Why students return books overdue and what the library can do about it

You are being invited to take part in a research project for an MA dissertation at Sheffield University. Please read the following information carefully to help you decide whether or not to participate in the study. You may contact the researcher at any time to ask about anything that is unclear.

What is the project’s purpose?
The purpose of this research project is as follows:

- To investigate the reasons why Leeds University students return library books overdue
- To evaluate the library’s current methods for encouraging students to return books on time
- To identify new ways in which the library can make it easier for students to return their books on time

The project will involve surveying students via an online questionnaire, as well as interviewing library staff members. The project will be completed by 3rd September 2012.

Why have I been chosen?
The invitation to fill in the online questionnaire has been sent to all students at Leeds University. The aim is to give as many students as possible the opportunity to participate, as this will make the results more representative of Leeds students as a whole.

Do I have to take part?
It is your decision whether or not to take part in this research project by filling in the questionnaire. If you do decide to take part, you will be given a copy of this information sheet to keep, and you will be asked to give your formal consent to participate in the survey. If you take part in the study, you can withdraw at any time and you do not have to give a reason for withdrawal.

What will happen to me if I take part? What do I need to do?
If you decide to take part in this study, you will be sent an email with a link to fill in an online questionnaire. The questionnaire has 10 questions and should take no more than 15-20 minutes to fill in.
Participants will be asked to complete the questionnaire by 15th June 2012 (the last day of term in Semester 2). Responses to the questionnaire will be collected using the SurveyMonkey website and will be analysed by the researcher to produce tables, charts and graphs as well as general commentary and analysis of the responses.

**What are the possible risks or disadvantages of taking part?**
It is not anticipated that participants will experience any negative consequences as a result of participating in this study. The questionnaire aims to investigate day-to-day library behaviour and this is not expected to be distressing or otherwise harmful to participants. Any unexpected negative effects of participating in the project should be brought to the attention of the researcher.

**What are the possible benefits of taking part?**
No financial or other incentives are offered to participants in this study. However, students who choose to take part will have the opportunity to express their opinions on library policies and procedures.

**What happens if the research study stops earlier than expected?**
If the study finishes early for any reason, all participants will be informed and the reasons for stopping the study will be explained.

**What if something goes wrong?**
If you choose to participate in this study and are unhappy with any aspect of your experience as a participant, you are advised to contact the researcher or the dissertation supervisor (contact details are provided below). If you are not happy with how your complaint is handled, you may contact Sheffield University’s Registrar and Secretary. If you experience any negative effects as a result of participating in the study, please inform the researcher and/or dissertation supervisor as soon as possible.

**Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?**
If you decide to take part in this study, your responses to the online questionnaire will be anonymous and you will not be asked for any identifying information about yourself. Therefore there is no way to link any participant with their responses in the survey. The data from the questionnaire will be kept strictly confidential and will only be accessible to the researcher. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications that result from this research study.

**What type of information will be sought from me and why is the collection of this information relevant to the research study?**
You will not be asked for any personal identifying information if you take part in the study, though the questionnaire will ask you to indicate whether you are an undergraduate or postgraduate student. This is necessary in order to compare
postgraduate responses with undergraduate responses when analysing the results. Other questions in the questionnaire will ask for your personal opinions and experiences of using the library. This is necessary in order to investigate student experiences of overdue books and the library’s policies and procedures about overdues – these are the main purposes of the study.

**What will happen to the results of the research project?**
The research project will be written up as an unpublished MA dissertation for Sheffield University’s Information School. Copies of the dissertation for reference use may be requested via the Information School office. A digitised version of the dissertation may also be made available via the Information School website.

**Who is organising the research?**
This research study is carried out as part of the MA Librarianship course at the Information School, University of Sheffield.

**Who has ethically reviewed the project?**
This research project has been ethically reviewed via the Information School’s ethics review procedure.

**Contacts for further information**
Any questions about the project may be sent to the researcher, Ms Rachel Davies (email: lip10rbd@shef.ac.uk).
Alternatively participants may contact the dissertation supervisor, Ms Barbara Sen at Sheffield University Information School (b.a.sen@shef.ac.uk).

**If you decide to participate in this research project** you will be given a copy of this information sheet to keep.

**Thank you for your interest in this research study.**
Information Sheet for Participants Giving Interviews

*Overdue Books at Leeds University Library: Why students return books overdue and what the library can do about it*

You are being invited to take part in a research project for an MA dissertation at Sheffield University. Please read the following information carefully to help you decide whether or not to participate in the study. You may contact the researcher at any time to ask about anything that is unclear.

**What is the project’s purpose?**
The purpose of this research project is as follows:

- To investigate the reasons why Leeds University students return library books overdue
- To evaluate the library’s current methods for encouraging students to return books on time
- To identify new ways in which the library can make it easier for students to return their books on time

The project will involve interviewing library staff members and surveying students via an online questionnaire. The project will be completed by 3rd September 2012.

**Why have I been chosen?**
Staff members at Leeds University Library have been invited to take part in this project to give your views and experiences on dealing with overdue books. It is important to contrast staff and student opinions on overdues in order to gain a balanced overview of the subject.

**Do I have to take part?**
It is your decision whether or not to take part in this research project by consenting to an interview with the researcher. If you do decide to take part, you will be given a copy of this information sheet to keep, and you will be asked to give your formal written consent to participate in the survey. If you take part in the study, you can withdraw at any time and you do not have to give a reason for withdrawal.

**What will happen to me if I take part? What do I need to do?**
If you decide to take part in this study, you will be contacted by the researcher to arrange an interview. Interviews will take approximately 1 hour and will be carried out during normal working hours, subject to approval by your line manager. Interviews will be in a semi-structured format, i.e. a list of set questions will be used but extra questions may also be asked to help explore the issues in more depth. Transcripts from the interviews will be analysed by the researcher in order to identify key themes and issues around the topic of overdue books. Comparisons will be drawn between staff perspectives on overdues and student responses to the questionnaire, to assess similarities and differences or identify further conclusions.

**Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?**

Interviews will be recorded for the sole purpose of enabling the researcher to produce accurate transcripts of the interview for analysis in the research study. Excerpts and quotations from interview transcripts may be used to illustrate points in the written research study or as part of the appendices to the study. Recordings and transcripts of recordings will not be used for any purpose other than the above without your written permission, and only the researcher will have access to the original recordings.

**What are the possible risks or disadvantages of taking part?**

It is not anticipated that participants will experience any negative consequences as a result of participating in this study. The interview aims to investigate day-to-day workplace experiences of library staff and this is not expected to be distressing or otherwise harmful to participants. Any unexpected negative effects of participating in the project should be brought to the attention of the researcher.

**What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

No financial or other incentives are offered to participants in this study. However, staff members who choose to take part will have the opportunity to express their opinions and discuss past experiences relating to overdue books.

**What happens if the research study stops earlier than expected?**

If the study finishes early for any reason, all participants will be informed and the reasons for stopping the study will be explained.

**What if something goes wrong?**

If you choose to participate in this study and are unhappy with any aspect of your experience as a participant, you are advised to contact the researcher or the dissertation supervisor (contact details are provided below). If you are not happy with how your complaint is handled, you may contact Sheffield University’s Registrar and Secretary. If you experience any negative effects as a result of participating in the study, please inform the researcher and/or dissertation supervisor as soon as possible.
Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?
If you decide to take part in this study, the data from the interview will be kept strictly confidential and will only be accessible to the researcher. The researcher will not disclose which staff members have taken part in the study. When the results of the research study are written up as an MA dissertation, participants will be identified by a pseudonym so that any quotations or opinions cannot be linked to individual participants. The researcher will not disclose which staff members have taken part in the study.

What type of information will be sought from me and why is the collection of this information relevant to the research study?
Questions in the interview will be about your experiences of dealing with overdue books, along with your personal opinions about overdues and library policies. The study aims to investigate reasons for students returning books overdue, and to evaluate library policies and identify suggestions for improvement. The interview questions are designed to gather information about each of these topic areas.

What will happen to the results of the research project?
The research project will be written up as an unpublished MA dissertation for Sheffield University’s Information School. Copies of the dissertation for reference use may be requested via the Information School office. A digitised version of the dissertation may also be made available via the Information School website.

Who is organising the research?
This research study is carried out as part of the MA Librarianship course at the Information School, University of Sheffield.

Who has ethically reviewed the project?
This research project has been ethically reviewed via the Information School’s ethics review procedure.

Contacts for further information
Any questions about the project may be sent to the researcher, Ms Rachel Davies (email: lip10rbd@shef.ac.uk).
Alternatively participants may contact the dissertation supervisor, Ms Barbara Sen at Sheffield University Information School (b.a.sen@shef.ac.uk).

If you decide to participate in this research project you will be given a copy of this information sheet to keep and a copy of your signed consent form.

Thank you for your interest in this research study.
Appendix 2c. Consent form for interviewees

Consent Form for Participants in Interviews

Research Project
Overdue Books at Leeds University Library: Why students return books overdue and what the library can do about it

Researcher Rachel Davies (r.b.davies@leeds.ac.uk)

Consent to participate in the above named research project

1. I confirm that I have read the information sheet explaining the above research project, and that I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.

3. I understand that my participation in this study will be confidential and that my interview data will only be accessible to the researcher. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials: a pseudonym will be used for any quotations or excerpts from interview transcripts and no identifying details will be used.

4. I understand that my interview will be recorded and transcribed by the researcher for the purpose of producing an accurate record of the interview, and that only the researcher will have access to the recordings.

5. I give my consent to take part in this research project.

Name of participant                      Signature                  Date

Name of researcher                      Signature                  Date
Appendix 3a. Copy of survey distributed to library users (6 pages)

Overdue Books at Leeds University Library

Purpose of the survey

This survey is part of a study carried out for an MA dissertation at Sheffield University.

The purposes of the study are:
1. To find out the reasons why books are returned overdue at Leeds University Library.
2. To evaluate the library's existing policies on overdue books.
3. To identify suggestions for the library to improve its policies on overdue books.

The study has been given ethical approval by Sheffield University Information School.

If you have any questions about the survey or the study, please contact Rachel Davies (r.b.davies@leeds.ac.uk).

All responses are anonymous, and you can withdraw from the study at any time. Please return this survey to a return box in the library.

Consent to participate in this survey

Please tick Yes if you consent to participate in the survey.

Yes □
No □

Q1. About you

What type of library user are you?
Undergraduate student □
Postgraduate student □
University staff □
Other (please state) □
Q2. Overdue library books

Have you ever kept a university library book past its due date (so that the book became overdue)?

Yes □
No □

Q3. Reasons for books becoming overdue

If you have had overdue library books in the past, what was the reason?

Tick any that apply.

- I forgot to return the book □
- I did not realise the book was overdue □
- I forgot to renew the book □
- I had lent the book to somebody else □
- I couldn’t get to the library □
- I tried to renew the book but couldn’t □
- I had lost or misplaced the book □
- Personal circumstances (e.g. illness) □
- Other (please give reason) □

Q4. Your feelings about overdue books

How do you feel if your library books become overdue?

Please write in your answer here.
### Q5. Your experience of overdue books

Please read the following statements and tick whether you agree or disagree.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I understand the library's rules about overdue books.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I avoid borrowing library books in case they become overdue.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal circumstances often prevent me from returning/renewing books on time</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I always try to return library books on time in case somebody else needs them.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It doesn’t matter to me if my library books become overdue.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I really need a library book I will keep it, even if it becomes overdue.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The library makes it easy to return or renew books on time.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get annoyed with myself if my library books are overdue.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get annoyed with the library if my books are overdue.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Please rate the library's ways of helping you to return or renew books on time. How effective do you think each method is?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Very effective</th>
<th>Sometimes effective</th>
<th>Not effective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Email reminders when books are due back</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blocking users from borrowing when they have very overdue books</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blocking users from renewing when they have very overdue books</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shorter loan periods for popular books (e.g. High Demand)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24-hour book return slots at Edward Boyle Library</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charging fines for overdue books</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online renewals system</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Automated telephone renewal system</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q7. What else could the library do to help?

Please rate the following ideas for other ways the library could help you to return/renew books on time. How effective do you think each idea would be?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Idea</th>
<th>Very effective</th>
<th>Somewhat effective</th>
<th>Not effective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Text message reminders when books are due back</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Put more books in High Demand section</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make more books reference-only</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make more books available online</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charge higher fines</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reward system for people who return books on time</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allow renewals even when books are very overdue</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only charge fines on books which are recalled by somebody else</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fines Amnesty Week when any book can be returned without fines</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended loans over holidays (e.g. Christmas, Easter)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q8. Any other comments

Please add any comments you would like to make about overdue library books.

The survey is now complete. Thank You!

*Please return this survey to a return box in the library.*
Appendix 3b. Alterations to survey questions following the pilot.

Q6 was deleted as it was thought to be overly simplistic and too similar to Q5 which included the statements “I get annoyed with myself if my books become overdue” and “I get annoyed with the library if my books become overdue”. [see below]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q6. Responsibility for overdue books</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In your opinion, whose responsibility is it to make sure that your library books are returned/renewed on time?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is my own responsibility ☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is the library’s responsibility ☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please write in your answer) ☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following statements [see below] were omitted from the list of options for Q7 as library managers felt that blocking users from entering the library or accessing e-resources was unrealistic and not something which would be done at Leeds University. Alternative suggestions were included in the final survey, such as longer vacation loans, increased fines, and only charging fines on recalled books. These suggestions were approved by library managers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q7. What else could the library do to help?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Please rate the following ideas for other ways the library could help you to return/renew books on time. How effective do you think each idea would be?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Block users with overdue books from entering the library ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Block users with overdue books from accessing library e-resources (e.g. databases) ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 4. Copy of interview questions

1. What do you think are the main reasons that library users return their books overdue?

2. We [library staff] already do various things to try and help users to return books on time. How effective do you think our existing overdues policies are? How could we improve?

3. Some of my ideas for encouraging returns on time include:

   Text message reminders when books are due back
   Move more books into High Demand
   Make more books reference-only
   Make more books available online
   Charge higher fines
   Reward users who return their books on time
   Allow renewals even when books are very overdue
   Only charge fines on recalled books
   “Fines Amnesty Week” when any book can be returned without fines
   Longer loans over vacations

   What do you think about these ideas? Any pros/cons?

4. Can you suggest any other ways we might help users return their book on time?

5. Anything else you would like to add about overdues at Leeds University Library?
Appendix 5. Guide to existing overdues policies at Leeds University Libraries

Borrowing
Borrowing rights depend on user type. Postgraduates and academics can borrow 25 items, undergraduates 15 items, and external users (e.g. SCONUL members) 4 items.
Users will be blocked from borrowing when one or more of their existing loans is more than 3 days overdue, or as soon as a High Demand Collection item is overdue. Borrowing is also blocked when the user’s fines exceed the maximum limit of £50 for postgraduates and academic staff, or £30 for undergraduates and external users.

Renewals
Renewals can be done online, by automated telephone renewal or in person.
Users will be blocked from renewing all of their loans if any items are more than 3 days overdue or if a High Demand Collection item is overdue. Renewals will also be blocked if the user’s existing fines are over the maximum limit (as above).
The online and phone renewal systems do not explain the reason for the block; the user is advised to contact the library if this occurs. At this stage, the renewal block can be overridden by a staff member, or will be automatically removed once the overdue items have been returned.

Fines
Overdue fines are charged at the following rates:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Loan type</th>
<th>Charge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Standard loan</td>
<td>30p per day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-day loan</td>
<td>40p per day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-day loan</td>
<td>50p per day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-day loan</td>
<td>£1 per day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 hour loan</td>
<td>50p per hour</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reminders
Automated email reminders are sent to all library users prior to the due date and after the item becomes overdue. Once an item is more than 60 days overdue, an invoice is generated and sent to the user by post.
If an item is recalled (i.e. reserved by another library user), the borrower is notified by email and usually given 7 days to return the book.

High Demand Collection (HDC)
High Demand Collection items are available for loan periods of 3 days, 1 day, or 4 hours (depending on the item). They cannot be renewed or recalled.