AN EXPLORATION OF THE USE OF REFLECTIVE PRACTICE BY LIBRARY AND INFORMATION STAFF TO SUPPORT THEIR EVERYDAY PRACTICE AND CONTINUING DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

**Background.** Reflective practice is recommended in several professional fields, for example, health and education. Reflective skills are seen as potentially useful for continuing professional development (CPD) which ensures professionals remain up to date in practice. The benefits of, and barriers to, reflective practice, and the extent to which it occurs, in the library and information sector are currently unknown.

**Aims.** The study aimed to explore the use of reflection by library and information staff to support their everyday practice and continuing development, and to identify the benefits of, and barriers to, reflective practice.

**Methods.** A questionnaire was developed based on themes emerging from the literature and was pre-tested by a small group. The amended questionnaire was sent to eleven library and information staff mailing lists, and to two individuals, representing a range of employment sectors. 424 responses were received, though the response rate varied for each question.

**Results.** Most respondents (92%, out of 423 respondents) identified themselves as reflective practitioners, and around half (52%, out of 363 respondents) engaged in reflective writing. Commonly cited benefits of both reflective practice and reflective writing were ‘learning from significant incidents’, ‘CPD’ and ‘identification of gaps in skills and knowledge’. Commonly cited barriers were ‘lack of time’, ‘lack of motivation’ and ‘not supported by organisational culture’. Statistical testing showed a significant link between receiving training in reflective writing and engaging in reflective writing. A number of additional themes emerged from the data including, conflicting attitudes towards the terms relating to reflection; the link between reflection and personality; and the skills required for reflective practice.

**Conclusions.** It is concluded that reflective practice and reflective writing are valuable tools for library and information staff, particularly for professional development. Organisational barriers to reflective practice should be identified and addressed. Training in reflective writing is recommended. Employers and professional bodies have a key role to play in the facilitation of reflective practice.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Definitions

The terms ‘reflection’ and ‘reflective practice’ are ill defined and understood. Reflection involves stepping back to consider what you are doing and why. It can occur before, during or after action (Bengtsson, 1995). Reflective practice occurs when the outcome of the reflection informs future activities, leading either to validate or improve current practice (Chapman, Dempsey and Warren-Forward, 2009; Moon, 2007). It is associated with educational experiences and with continuing professional development (CPD) (Black and Plowright, 2010).

Reflective writing is one method of documenting reflections, either for personal use or as evidence for others. It may be used to assess student progress (e.g. Wetmore, Boyd, Bowen and Patillo, 2010) or to monitor professional development (Chapman, Dempsey and Warren-Forward, 2009).

1.2 Reflective practice in the professions

Schön (1995) identified reflection as a professional activity, the means by which professionals access tacit knowledge, which is otherwise difficult to describe. Many professional decisions rely on implicit knowledge which is not necessarily derived from empirical evidence (Chapman, Dempsey and Warren-Forward, 2009). Reflection is a means to access this knowledge and make it explicit. Reflective practice enables professionals: to develop specialist knowledge through experience; to be aware of the values which inform their practice; to be able to deal with complex situations; and to demonstrate accountability (Thompson and Thompson, 2008). The danger of not reflecting on practice is that professionals operate routinely and unquestioningly, avoiding areas of complexity and failing to make informed decisions (Schön, 1995).
Consequently, many professional bodies, for example, the General Medical Council (2012) and the Department for Education (2012), recommend reflective practice.

1.3 Reflective practice in the library and information sector

Within the library and information sector, staff work with many conflicting demands in a rapidly changing context. They are subject to dynamic external influences including government policy, technology and client expectations. Reflective practice may help staff to deliver an effective and accountable service, which is responsive to complexity.

The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals [CILIP] highlights reflective practice as a method of CPD (CILIP, 2012). CILIP offers a framework of professional awards for library and information staff at all levels of their career, which are: Certification, Chartered membership, Fellowship and Revalidation. Individuals applying for CILIP awards must provide evidence of professional competence, in part by reflective writing (Watson, 2010).

1.4 Research questions

To what extent is reflection utilised by staff in the library and information sector to support everyday practice and continuing development?

How is reflection used and what are the perceived benefits of, and barriers to, reflective practice?

1.5 Aims and objectives of the research

Overall aim: To explore the use of reflection by library and information staff to support their everyday practice and continuing development.

Objectives:

- To ascertain if library and information staff use reflection.
• To identify and explore the ways that reflection is used in the library and information sector.
• To explore the value of reflection as a professional tool for library and information staff.
• To identify and explore the benefits and rationale for using reflection in the library and information sector.
• To identify and explore the barriers to using reflection in the library and information sector.
• To make recommendations for best practice within the library and information sector.

1.6 Structure of the dissertation

Following this introduction, a literature review is presented in Chapter 2, providing a background to this research. Chapter 3 outlines the research methods and gives the rationale for their use. Chapter 4 illustrates the results of the research by descriptive and inferential statistics, followed by a thematic analysis of the qualitative data. A discussion of the results occurs in Chapter 5, including the significant outcomes in relation to the research objectives. Chapter 6 concludes by outlining key research findings; research limitations; implications for practice; and suggestions for future research.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The range of literature on reflection and reflective practice includes conceptual and theoretical writing which contribute to its definition and description (Black and Plowright, 2010; Booth, 2010; Bengtsson, 1995; Schön, 1995). A number of small research studies have explored reflective practice (Richards, Mascarenhas and Collins, 2009; Day, 2000; Tsangaridou and O’Sullivan, 1997), and in particular reflective writing (Sen, 2010; Edwards, Cleland, Bailey, McLachlan and McVey, 2009; Martin, 2003). Other studies and personal accounts deal with alternative methods of reflective practice such as group work, discussions and drawing (Tokolahi, 2010; Simpson and Trezise, 2011; Thunberg, 2011). Some papers review the findings of previous studies (Ruth-Sahd, 2003).

Studies have been carried out with students (Wetmore, Boyd, Bowen and Pattillo, 2010; Sanders and McKeown, 2007) and others based in the workplace (Nikolou-Walker, 2007; Martin, 2003; Langer, 2001; Rigano and Edwards, 1998). Some accounts note the role of reflection in research (Ortlipp, 2008; Johnson, 2001; McCormack, 2001).

The main themes from the literature are summarised and discussed below. These include: the benefits of, and barriers to, reflective practice; ethical considerations; and recommendations to facilitate reflective practice.

Health and teaching professions are well represented in the literature, but other professions are less evident. Relatively little research has been carried out in the library and information sector.
2.2 Reflection

Several writers have noted a lack of clarity in the use of the term ‘reflection’ (Chapman, Dempsey and Warren-Forward, 2009; Moon, 2007; Bengtsson, 1995). For some, this undermines the claims for its value (Mackintosh, 1998). It is important to understand the different aspects of the term and to define it in the context in which it is used. Black and Plowright (2010: 246) give a useful definition of reflection:

“Reflection is the process of engaging with learning and/or professional practice that provides an opportunity to critically analyse and evaluate that learning or practice. The purpose is to develop professional knowledge, understanding and practice that incorporates a deeper form of learning which is transformational in nature and is empowering, enlightening and ultimately emancipatory”.

Reflection occurs during action, separate from action or as an action in itself (Bengtsson, 1995). It is a conscious or unconscious process (Chapman, Dempsey and Warren-Forward, 2009). It is looking back, looking at the self, or contemplating something to understand it better (Bengtsson, 1995).

Reflection is a way of learning from experiences by creating fresh knowledge for future use (Watson, 2010). ‘Critical reflection’ is a combination of self-reflection and inquiry, a process whereby a person examines their belief system and its impact on their practice (Larrivee, 2000). ‘Analytical reflection’ is a process enabling professionals to make better judgements and decisions (Koufogiannakis, 2010). One aspect of reflection is the creation of distance between the self and the action taken, in order to view the self with greater clarity (Bengtsson, 1995).

Reflection is prompted by particular events, especially those which make the individual feel uneasy (Ruth-Sahd, 2003), or which are felt to be failures or successes (Ghaye, 2005). Reflection can occur in relation to day-to-day events (micro-reflection) or to longer periods of time (macro-reflection) (Tsangaridou and O’Sullivan, 1997).
Black and Plowright (2010) propose that reflection is three-dimensional, comprising the learning or practice experience; the reflection on it; and the subsequent development of understanding and practice.

Reflection can be done at an individual, group or organisational level (Richards, Mascarenhas and Collins, 2009; Ghaye, 2005; Rigano and Edwards, 1998).

Schön (1995) proposes that professionals reflect during practice as they deal with complex and unique situations, in shifting environments, to which they must apply their specialist knowledge. He calls this ‘reflection-in-action’. He acknowledges that reflection could occur after action, referred to as ‘reflection-on-action’. Wilson (2008) argues that reflection-on-the-future is an essential part of reflective practice, so that practice can be improved. This involves imagining possible scenarios if different courses of action were taken, which helps in decision-making and planning, and is necessary for the creation of novel solutions. Booth (2010) describes five stages, where reflection can occur in practice, including reflection before action, a planning stage; reflection for action, where options are researched and considered; and ‘re:action’, on-going reflection to consider if the action remains the best option.

Reflection involves the questioning of beliefs and attitudes (Chapman, Dempsey and Warren-Forward, 2009). Larrivee (2000) argues that beliefs and assumptions determine how people interpret different situations and the examination of these can lead to consideration of alternative interpretations and responses. The process of reflection can lead to the achievement of insight (Chapman, Dempsey and Warren-Forward, 2009; Schön, 1995); enlightenment, (Bengtsson, 1995); and liberation (Larrivee 2000).

Reflection is related to CPD, which can be thought of as professional learning combining research and reflection (Koufogiannakis, 2010).

Although reflective thinking is a recent skill in evolutionary terms, and not universally practiced, it gives individuals the opportunity to make decisions with reference to
personal values, ethics and the cultural context, rather than being driven by emotion and instinct (Gelter, 2003).

2.3 Reflective practice

Reflective practice is the use of reflection to improve future practice (Moon, 2007). It involves the evaluation of experiences (CILIP, 2012).

Reflection is linked with practice development and can be used with a problem-solving approach to uncover unconscious ways of acting, allowing the exploration of different interpretations and responses (Larrivee, 2000).

Reflection is aligned to evidence based practice (Booth, 2010) and with professional competence (Bengtsson, 1995).

Although reflection is linked to learning from mistakes, learning can also occur by reflecting on successes and ‘adequate’ experiences (Ghaye, 2005).

Professionals can use reflection to: assess their own practice and competence (Bengtson, 1995); demonstrate their participation in CPD (Watson, 2010); link theory with practice (Ruth-Sahd, 2003); promote learning and make better decisions (Rigano and Edwards, 1998); explore their values (Gardner, 2009, Greenwood, 1998); keep up to date with changing technology and practice (Chapman, Dempsey and Warren-Forward, 2009); and improve individual and group performance (Richards, Mascarenhas and Collins, 2009). Effective leaders reflect on the practice of others within, and external to, their organisations (Day, 2000).

Reflexivity is considered important in qualitative research, whereby the researcher exposes their personal attitudes, views and responses to the research material and processes, and addresses personal bias (Ortlipp, 2008; Johnson, 2001). Reflective
researchers show the development of their understanding through the research process, enabling others to judge the quality of their research (Stenbacka, 2001).

2.4 Reflective writing

The most common method of reflection represented in the literature is reflective writing. This can be in the form of a journal, which can be completed any time, regularly or irregularly. It can be paper or electronic, comprising entries of varying lengths. It can be used to record reflections following a training course or a personal interaction or to explore a critical incident. The writer is guided by questions such as: “What happened and why? How do I feel about it? What have I learnt from it from it?” (Chapman, Dempsey and Warren-Forward, 2009: 168). Written reflections can include imaginary dialogue, allowing writers to imagine the perspectives of others and to question themselves (Hughes, 2009).

The skill involved in reflective writing requires practice to be beneficial. Reflection must be of sufficient depth, as superficial reflection leads to superficial learning (Moon, 2007). Reflective writing should involve some analysis and evaluation of events, including the perspectives of others. It should also include lessons learned and plans for future action based on the reflection (Watson, 2010). Moon (2007) outlines different levels of reflective writing, from superficial, descriptive accounts to deeply analytical accounts, which recognise emotional components to events, and demonstrate a recognition that things could be done differently. Chapman, Dempsey and Warren-Forward (2009) propose a model for reviewing reflective writing which looks for evidence of depth. Deeper reflection leads to better outcomes, such as self-development and personal empowerment (Sen, 2010).

Reflective writing is used to assess and monitor the competency of professionals. Writing a reflective journal is an effective method of CPD for health professionals required to demonstrate that their skills are kept up to date (Chapman, Dempsey and Warren-Forward, 2009). Written reflection can help to improve and extend practice
(Edwards, Cleland, Bailey, McLachlan and McVey, 2009). It can be used to analyse business practices (Martin, 2003) and to explore individual and team performances (Richards, Mascarenhas and Collins, 2009). Professionals can use reflective writing to assess and improve their own effectiveness (Shepherd, 2006).

Reflective writing is sometimes used as a means to assess students (Sen, 2010; Roberts, 2009; Moon, 2007; Sanders and McKeown, 2007; Hubbs and Brand, 2005; Nikolou-Walker and Garnett, 2004). This may affect what is written (Roberts, 2009; Moon, 2007; Mackintosh, 1998), as the writer knows their work will be graded. Reflective writing may also be reviewed externally when it is part of a professional portfolio (Chapman, Dempsey and Warren-Forward, 2009).

Researchers use reflective writing to demonstrate transparency in the qualitative research process (Ortlipp, 2008) and explore personal connections to the research topic (McCormack, 2001).

Reflective writing is a skill which needs time to develop, and repeated practice, to become a habit (Sen, 2010; Watson, 2010; Rigano and Edwards, 1998).

2.5 Other methods of reflection

Other methods described in the literature include personal accounts of drawing (Tokolahi, 2010); reflective conversations (Simpson and Trezise, 2011); student peer support groups (Bold, 2008); workshops (Gardner, 2009; Bergmark, Ghaye and Alerby, 2007); team coaching sessions (Richards, Mascarenhas and Collins, 2009); workplace group exercises (Langer, 2001); and ‘dialog cafés’ (Thunberg, 2011).

Written journals can be enhanced by drawings and photographs (Shepherd, 2006). Drawings provide a dynamic and flexible medium to express complex situations, allowing new insights to emerge (Tokolahi, 2010).
Creative activities can stimulate reflection by facilitating the sharing of personal experiences and opinions (Bergmark, Ghaye and Alerby, 2007). However, the use of multi-media technology did not enhance the reflective skills of information systems students, in a study by Holland and Purnell (2012). So it is important to select the appropriate creative medium to facilitate effective reflection.

Conversations with colleagues can aid reflection. Koufogiannakis (2010) suggests that colleagues meet in pairs to discuss their reflections on critical incidents. Shepherd (2006) participated in reflective conversations with others engaged in similar work. Simpson and Trezise (2011) describe structured ‘learning conversations’, and argue that conversations with others can be more useful in reflection than working alone. Collin and Karsenti (2011) propose that verbal interaction is a key aspect of reflective practice whether it occurs during group discussions or between a student and their tutor. ‘Conversation communities’ can enable people to articulate their beliefs; share practices; increase their skills in reflection; and increase their ability to become innovative (McCormack and Kennelly, 2011).

Working in groups can enhance reflective practice (Richards, Mascarenhas and Collins, 2009) and help to integrate staff into workplaces (Langer, 2001). This may occur in ‘dialog cafés’ set up to promote discussion of important issues thereby facilitating reflective learning (Thunberg, 2011).

Peer support groups encourage reflection on practice and deeper learning (Bold, 2008). Communities of practice, where professionals learn through their observations of, and interactions with, others can be beneficial if critical reflection is facilitated (Ng and Tan, 2009). These communities can occur in the virtual world, allowing collaboration with peers and enabling both personal and social reflection to take place (Sanders and McKeown, 2007). Shared reflective blogs allow valuable group interaction (Boulton and Hramiak, 2012).
2.6 The benefits of reflective practice

Individuals, teams and organisations can experience the benefits of reflective practice. For individuals, reflective practice can lead to increased self-awareness (Sanders and McKeown, 2007; Ruth-Sahd, 2003); increased self-esteem (Langer, 2009; Ruth-Sahd, 2003); increased happiness (Rosenberg, 2010); clarification of thoughts and ideas (Sanders and McKeown, 2007); increased understanding (Sanders and McKeown, 2007; McCormack, 2001); and new insights (Larrivee, 2000). Reflective practice can enable the individual to: learn from experience (Moon, 2007; Ruth-Sahd, 2003); assess their own competence (Bengtsson, 1995); take stock (Sanders and McKeown, 2007); identify problems (Richards, Mascarenhas and Collins, 2009); decide on the next step (Sanders and McKeown, 2007; Bengtsson, 1995); find solutions (Richards, Mascarenhas and Collins, 2009); make positive changes (Tsangaridou and O’Sullivan, 1997) and teach others (Bengtsson, 1995). Through reflection professionals can reveal their values (Tokolahi, 2010; McCormack, 2001) and source of their motivation (McCormack, 2001). Reflective practice can enhance professional development (Ruth-Sahd, 2003; Tsangaridou and O’Sullivan, 1997) and provides an important link between theory and practice (Ruth-Sahd, 2003). It can lead to personal empowerment (Gardner, 2009; Ruth-Sahd, 2003; Tsangaridou and O’Sullivan, 1997) and emancipation (Ruth-Sahd, 2003; Tsangaridou and O’Sullivan, 1997).

Some of the literature indicates a link between reflective practice and an increase in critical thinking (Day, 2000; Tsangaridou and O’Sullivan, 1997; Ruth-Sahd, 2003). However, a study by Wetmore, Boyd, Bowen and Pattillo (2010) did not find a significant link between reflective blogging and an increase in critical thinking skills amongst dental hygiene students.

The benefits of reflective practice for teams and organisations include effective (Day, 2000) and transformational leadership (Rosenberg, 2010); the development of a learning culture (Langer, 2001); better teamwork (Richards, Mascarenhas and Collins, 2009); the development of innovations in small businesses (Martin, 2003); increased quality of service and fewer complaints (Langer, 2001); more flexible and responsive staff.
(Tsangaridou and O’Sullivan, 1997); improved responses to critical situations (Richards, Mascarenhas and Collins, 2009); and increased employee motivation to work towards the achievement of organisational outcomes (Langer, 2001). Sen (2010) notes that library organisations can benefit from the employment of reflective managers, who have greater awareness of self and the complexities of the work context.

2.7 The benefits of reflective writing

Reflective writing is described in the literature in terms of benefits to individuals, though it may also benefit the service they provide. Reflective writing acknowledges and assists personal development (Langer, 2009; Bergmark, Ghaye and Alerby, 2007). It enables individuals to identify personal strengths (Roberts, 2009; Bergmark, Ghaye and Alerby, 2007); explore beliefs and attitudes (Chapman, Dempsey and Warren-Forward, 2009); identify areas for development (Edwards, Cleland, Bailey, McLachlan and McVey, 2009; Roberts, 2009; Bergmark, Ghaye and Alerby, 2007); training needs (Edwards, Cleland, Bailey, McLachlan and McVey, 2009); and steps to improve practice (Langer, 2009).

Written reflections provide a record of progress and achievements (Roberts, 2009). Individuals can record and reflect on critical incidents (Larrivee, 2000); identify issues affecting practice (Larrivee, 2000); identify barriers experienced at the interpersonal and political level (Shepherd, 2006); offload stress (Larrivee, 2000); express thoughts and ideas (Sanders and McKeown, 2007); acknowledge feelings (Langer, 2009; Moon, 2007; Sanders and McKeown, 2007); explore unresolved conflicts (McCormack, 2001); and explore successes and mistakes (Langer, 2009). Some find it beneficial to focus on positives (Bergmark, Ghaye and Alerby, 2007), however some find this less helpful, as it does not lead to action and change (Shepherd, 2006).

Writing can increase awareness of situations and experiences (Sen, 2010), enabling the exploration of different perspectives (Moon, 2007). It can help individuals to see the link between past events, present situations and possible future scenarios (Sen, 2010) and to
develop connections between external events and internal processes (Hubbs and Brand, 2005). Looking back over journal entries can reveal repeated patterns, which may otherwise go unnoticed (Larrivee, 2000) and lead to deeper reflection (Black and Plowright, 2010).

Reflective accounts can expose tacit processes, making them visible to others (Hubbs and Brand, 2005) or to the self (Shepherd, 2006). Written reflection can increase understanding of work roles (Roberts, 2009) and assist in the development of new roles (Edwards, Cleland, Bailey, McLachlan and McVey, 2009).

Written reflection can allow progress to be judged externally (Hubbs and Brand, 2005). It can demonstrate professional competence (Ghaye, 2007). It can be beneficial to learning (McKinney and Sen, 2012; Moon, 2007; Shepherd, 2006), but when it is a course requirement some students experience it as a chore without learning benefits (George, 2002).

Reflective writing can support decision-making (Sen, 2010); increase skills (Edwards, Cleland, Bailey, McLachlan and McVey, 2009); increase confidence (Langer, 2009; Roberts, 2009); increase positive feelings about work (Langer, 2009); and lead to improved practice (Rigano and Edwards, 1998). Where professionals improve their practice by written reflection, this can benefit their clients, contributing to increased well being (Jones, 2010). In qualitative research, it can reveal the complexities of the research process thereby demonstrating transparency (Ortlipp, 2008).

### 2.8 The benefits of other reflective methods

Bold (2008) found that student peer support groups, set up to encourage critical reflection on practice, resulted in some students taking a more objective view of work situations; gaining a wider perspective; increasing in confidence in workplace discussions; and improving their ability to justify decisions.
Critical reflection in a staff workshop (Gardner, 2009) resulted in staff seeing things from a different perspective. Additionally they saw the potential to support each other in bringing about change. Bergmark, Ghaye and Alerby (2007) report the importance of group reflection to improve practice. Langer (2001) found that staff group reflection led to increased co-operation and agreement, an openness to change and an increase in constructive attitudes. Team reflections led to shared understandings and increased team cohesion, in a study of elite athletes (Richards, Mascarenhas and Collins, 2009).

Thunberg’s (2011) study of ‘dialog cafés’ found that these resulted in increased staff motivation, a sense of involvement in management decisions and a more positive working environment.

Reflective conversations were found to be useful in exploring the links between theory and practice (Simpson and Trezise, 2011). Reflective drawing led Tokolahi, (2010) to deeper insights and a reduction in stress.

2.9 The barriers to reflective practice and reflective writing

Barriers can be personal, for example a lack of aptitude towards reflection, or external, for example, an adverse organisational culture. Roberts (2009) found that there are some ‘natural reflectors’, who are predisposed to reflection, but others find it difficult and are not inclined to reflect unless required to. Ruth-Sahd (2003) notes that personal characteristics may hinder the process of reflection, concluding that reflection may be better for some than others. Mackintosh (1998) notes that not all nurses are good at either doing, or acting on, reflection. Additionally, a barrier for some may be the negative psychological impact resulting from reflection on critical incidents.

Lack of motivation is a barrier, which may be caused by people failing to see the value of reflection (Roberts, 2009; Ruth-Sahd, 2003).
Where reflection is part of classroom learning it may be inhibited by the power relationship between student and assessor (Ruth-Sahd, 2003).

The prevailing culture may act as a barrier. Reflection can be at odds with target-driven cultures (Ghaye, 2005). Small business cultures may dislike acknowledging mistakes, preferring to focus on successes (Martin, 2003).

Time is a barrier to reflective writing (Otienoh, 2009; Martin, 2003; Ruth-Sahd, 2003; George, 2002). A lack of conviction about the value of reflection can result in unwillingness to commit to it (Chapman, Dempsey and Warren-Forward, 2009). This is related to the perception that it can be hard to see the outcomes of reflection (Otienoh, 2009).

Some lack familiarity with reflective techniques and lack confidence in writing (Sanders and McKeown, 2007); others find it difficult to put thoughts and feelings into written words (Black and Plowright, 2010); and, where writing is assessed, non-native English speakers may be at a disadvantage due to literacy issues (George, 2002).

Recording personal and sometimes painful emotions can be a barrier, particularly if the writing is to form part of an assessment (Ghaye, 2007). Similarly issues of confidentiality can impede writing for nurses (Mackintosh, 1998). Cammack (2012) concludes that reflective practice should have a positive focus on skills rather than deficits.

Otienoh (2009) noted a number of barriers to reflective writing identified by teachers in East Africa. These included: lack of training in reflection; negative feedback regarding their reflective writing during training, resulting in a lack of confidence; lack of supportive structures; and lack of motivation, related to low morale.
2.10 Ethical considerations of reflective practice

Some ethical issues arise when students are required to produce reflective writing as part of their coursework. There is potential for conflict if material from a reflective journal is used to determine a student’s suitability to complete a course of study (Hubbs and Brand, 2005). Ghaye (2007) notes the tension between the need to reflect deeply enough for course requirements and yet to maintain personal privacy when exploring painful feelings. He highlights the concern that, in professional practice, reflective writing can be subject to legislation concerning the public right of access to information.

In nurses’ reflective writing it is important to maintain confidentiality and to act appropriately if bad practice is recorded (Mackintosh, 1998).

2.11 Recommendations to facilitate reflective practice

Individuals should be supported in order to foster reflective practice (Sen, 2010; Roberts, 2009; Rigano and Edwards, 1998; Tsangaridou and O’Sullivan, 1997), especially during group sharing of both failures and successes (Thunberg, 2011). It is particularly helpful to have management support (Langer, 2001) and involvement (Thunberg, 2011). Networks and communities of practice can increase the effectiveness of reflection (Edwards, Cleland, Bailey, McLachlan and McVey, 2009; Day, 1993).

Reflective partnerships can assist, for example, professionals can meet in pairs to discuss reflections on critical incidents (Koufogiannakis, 2010); or enlist the help of a critical companion (McCormack, 2001).

Guidance is also important (Bold, 2008; Grant, 2007), especially for reflective writing (Chapman, Dempsey and Warren-Forward, 2009; Moon, 2007; Rigano and Edwards, 1998). In the classroom, tutors must be able to teach the value of reflection (Ruth-Sahd, 2003). This increases its effectiveness (George, 2002).
Guidelines for writing are recommended to ensure that professionals become better reflective practitioners (Chapman, Dempsey and Warren-Forward, 2009). It is particularly important to give specific guidelines to students and staff if reflective writing forms part of coursework (Moon, 2007). Lectures and workshops on reflective writing can be a starting point for students (Sen, 2010). On-going support for writers offers encouragement and is a vital element in the reflection process (Sen, 2010). Support groups and personal mentors can fulfil this function (Rigano and Edwards, 1998).

In reflective group work it is essential to establish trust, cooperation (Thunberg, 2011) and cohesion to encourage people to be honest (Martin, 2003). In learning situations the environment must be empowering to facilitate active participation (Richards, Mascarenhas and Collins, 2009) and, at the same time, safe and open (Ruth-Sahd, 2003). McCormack and Kennelly (2011) identify connection, safety and engagement as the three essential features for the success of a ‘conversation community’.

The organisational culture should be supportive of reflective practice (Nikolou-Walker, 2007). Networks should be established within and between organisations to ensure that learning is supported and shared (Day, 1993). Workplace cultures can enhance the reflective process by being open to the learning process, and refraining from apportioning blame, should admissions of failure occur (Ghaye, 2005). Within organisations, reflective group work should be followed up in order to maintain motivation and credibility (Thunberg, 2011).

**2.12 Reflective practice in the library and information sector**

CILIP (2012) recommend the use of reflection as part of CPD. Reflective practice is described as evaluating rather than describing what has occurred and it could be said to underpin other CPD activities listed by CILIP, such as networking, learning a skill and teaching others. Reflection is a way of learning from experiences to create fresh
knowledge for future use (Watson, 2010). Reflective writing forms a key part of the evidence required from applicants for CILIP qualifications (Watson, 2010).

A systematic review of the literature on reflective practice in the library and information sector (Grant, 2007) found few published accounts and concluded that the extent to which library and information science (LIS) professionals utilised reflection was unknown. Quantifiable outcomes of reflection in relation to LIS practice were difficult to identify. The review concludes:

“Further research is recommended to investigating the, as yet, unknown proportion of the profession which engages in some form of reflection; how reflective activity has changed or influenced current or future practice; and whether reflection leads to measurable service improvements?” (Grant, 2007:164)

Perryman (2008:55), in a critique of the above review concurred that “…a study of the use of reflective practice in LIS would be beneficial to the profession…”

Reflection has been incorporated into the educational content of Higher Education (HE) LIS courses in recent years. Sanders and McKeown (2007) studied the role of reflection in relation to action learning with students of library science. The reflective element of the course was valued by students and helped them to engage with their coursework, clarify their thoughts and ideas and monitor their progress. In another study, students of librarianship identified several benefits of reflective writing, including professional development and an increased awareness of situations and experiences, leading them to believe that reflection would be a useful skill in the workplace (Sen, 2010). The use of a digital reflective portfolio with another group of LIS students was developed to prepare them for the workplace and ensure that they had key professional skills for the future. This aimed to increase awareness of their learning needs and goals both on the course and in their post-graduation development (Hallam and McAllister, 2008). The students were noted to gain confidence in working in a digital environment, both individually and collaboratively.
Reflection is linked to evidence-based library and information practice. Hallam and Partridge (2006) describe a curriculum focussed on teaching reflective practice skills, as these are essential for evidence-based information professionals. They argue that the culture of evidence-based practice must be developed beyond the academic sphere, into LIS workplaces, and encouraged by professional bodies. School librarians need to be accountable and able to demonstrate their contribution to pupil achievements by using evidence and reflection (Loertscher, 2009).

Several studies focus on information literacy (IL) and the role of reflection. LIS professionals need to be information literate and able to teach IL, both formally and informally. McInney and Sen (2012) found that reflective writing could be used to assess the development of IL skills amongst business intelligence students, and that reflective writing could lead to deeper learning. Bruce (2004) argues that if students are encouraged to reflect whilst learning IL skills they will be more able to transfer these skills to a wider context. Reflection is also essential for teachers of IL (Whitworth, 2012; Jacobs, 2008) in order to ensure that they respond effectively to changing needs and issues. Student reflections on IL skills, used in relation to learning outcomes, can help teachers to improve the content of IL courses (McKinney and Sen, 2012). LIS professionals can help clients to search for and use information appropriately by incorporating reflection into the process (Hughes, Bruce and Edwards, 2006).

Academic librarians are increasingly required to support Research Data Management in HE institutions. As they develop in this area they need opportunities to reflect on their learning and its application to their own context and practice (Cox, Verbaan and Sen, 2012).

Library and information staff reflections have become more evident in online blogging. An online professional development tool aimed at LIS professionals, known as cpd23, invites them to complete practical tasks, using a combination of Web 2.0 applications and traditional methods, and to reflect on them via a blog (Birkwood, 2011). Blogs are
said to be the “…perfect tool for communicating the evaluating part of the reflective practice process. Blogs are a great way to share your thoughts.” (wigglesweets, 2012).

Rooney-Browne and Alcock (2009) concur that writing an individual blog can be a useful tool for reflection, and can allow collaboration and discussion with a network of similar professionals in a virtual community. Powers (2008) argues that the immediacy of online debates, conducted via library blogs, made them more useful than published codes and scholarly literature in addressing contemporary ethical issues arising from practice.

2.13 Conclusion

Reflection is a professional skill which can enhance practice and contribute to learning and CPD. It can be carried out at individual, group or organisational level and can lead to changes in practice. Reflective writing is the most common method of reflection represented in the literature. It can be used to gain personal insights, to demonstrate competency, to assess students and in the research process. Other methods of reflection include reflective conversations, group work and drawing.

There are benefits of reflective practice for individuals, teams and organisations. These include learning from experience, linking theory to practice and making positive changes to practice. This can result in more effective teams and motivated staff.

Different methods of reflection yield particular benefits. Writing can increase awareness, provide a record of progress and allow deeper exploration of incidents and situations. Group reflection can prompt awareness of other perspectives and enhance teamwork.

Barriers to reflection include lack of motivation, adversely organisational culture, lack of time, poor writing skills and personality type.
Ethical considerations include the maintenance of confidentiality and the making of judgements about what is written and the practice it describes.

Recommendations include the provision of support and guidance, from peers and management, and the development of an organisational culture which supports reflection.

In the library and information sector, reflection has been linked to professional education and development, evidence based practice, IL and research data management. Although the extent to which LIS professionals use reflection is unknown, there is evidence from the literature to suggest that online blogging is one method which allows individual and collaborative reflection to take place.
Chapter 3: Research Methods

3.1 Research paradigm

This research was influenced by both deductive and inductive paradigms. The intention was to gather evidence of the use of reflection amongst library and information professionals to establish the extent to which it is used, and explore the benefits of, and barriers to, reflective practice. The survey method generated quantitative and qualitative data. This enabled the researcher to quantify aspects of the sample and to explore opinions, feelings and experiences related to reflective practice.

3.2 The survey

The survey method used was a questionnaire. Questionnaires are advantageous in exploring attitudes as they can be completed anonymously and avoid the participant being influenced by the interviewer (Powell and Connaway, 2004). Both open and closed questions were used. Closed questions are easier to analyse but can be restrictive, whilst open questions allow fuller responses but are more difficult to analyse. Using both closed and open questions is beneficial as the two complement each other, gaining the advantages of each (Powell and Connaway, 2004). The questionnaire was designed to gather quantitative data, by using fixed response questions, and qualitative data, by inviting further comments. Questions were designed after an initial reading of subject-related literature.

A focus group assisted in the questionnaire design. It consisted of Librarianship students at the University of Sheffield, who were asked the benefits of, and barriers to, reflection, in a session facilitated by the research supervisor. The results of their discussions were made available to the researcher and these confirmed that the checklists in the questionnaire were sufficiently comprehensive. Focus groups are useful in developing research tools, as they can generate a range of responses to the research topic in a short
space of time (Powell and Connaway, 2004). The dynamics of focus groups allow beliefs, values and attitudes to be brought out (Punch, 2005). One limitation is that people may be unreliable in their self-reporting of their beliefs and actions (Wellington and Szczerbinski, 2007). Another limitation is that they can be subject to bias if the facilitator is known to the group (Wildemuth and Jordan, 2009). As the facilitator of the focus group was one of their course tutors this may have prevented the students from being completely honest.

The questionnaire was administered through an online survey tool. Electronic surveys are appropriate for use where the sample population has Internet access and the corresponding digital skills (Hank, Jordan and Wildemuth, 2009; Powell and Connaway, 2004). This was thought to be the case for the sample population.

Electronic surveys are inexpensive; allow the rapid collection of data; and are flexible in that the respondent can complete them in their own time (Hank, Jordan and Wildemuth, 2009). The results of online surveys are recorded electronically, reducing the risk of data input errors (Greenlaw and Brown-Welty, 2009). Electronic survey tools allow researchers to design well-presented questionnaires, which are more likely to be completed (Wellington and Szczerbinski, 2007).

The research tool was pre-tested by a group of Librarianship students at the University of Sheffield, most of whom had experience of working in the library and information sector, and by a retired librarian known to the researcher. Pre-testing is recommended in order to establish ease of use and to identify any problematic questions. Pre-test samples should be representative of the group to be studied (Powell and Connaway, 2004). A number of minor alterations were made to the questionnaire as a result. See Appendix 5.

The electronic version of the survey was pre-tested by two people who confirmed there were no technical difficulties.
The survey included the research aim, an overview of the questionnaire’s structure and definitions of terminology. Questions were organised in a logical, accessible order to encourage participation. Some questions allowed only one response to be selected and others allowed multiple responses. Questions relating to the benefits of, and barriers to, reflective practice and reflective writing comprised a checklist of possible responses, designed to include a wide range of options. Free text boxes were provided for further comments. It is important to give respondents the opportunity to provide further information, as this allows unexpected data to emerge (Hank, Jordan and Wildemuth, 2009).

A filtering system was used with some questions so that respondents who answered in a specific way were directed to the next appropriate section, missing out questions which did not apply to them. This is recommended so that people do not have to answer irrelevant questions (Powell and Connaway, 2004). The opening questions were designed to be quite broad, with more specific questions forming the main part of the survey. Demographic questions were placed at the end of the survey as these require less effort from respondents (Hank, Jordan and Wildemuth, 2009). See Appendix 6.

3.3 The sample

A purposive sample of self-selecting respondents from a number of targeted groups was used. Purposive sampling is ‘...sampling in a deliberate way, with some purpose or focus in mind’ (Punch, 2005:187). The sample was drawn from a number of groups of library and information professionals, subscribing to JISCMail\(^1\). Several of these groups, representing different sectors and interests within LIS, were contacted and their members invited to participate in the survey. The groups included chartered library and information professionals; teachers of IL; healthcare librarians; public libraries; library and information professionals concerned with children’s services; and research support librarians. Since one of the purposes of JISCMail is to support research (JISCMail, 2013), it was felt that the survey invitation was congruous with the aims of the service.

\(^{1}\) The National Academic Mailing List Service
Mailing lists are advantageous in reaching survey participants as large numbers of potential subjects can be contacted at once. The researcher can select lists which are likely to include the targeted survey population. However, sample size cannot be determined due to fluctuating group membership (Hayslett and Wildemuth, 2004).

The use of JISCMail lists has some limitations, as the membership may not be representative of the library and information profession. It could be argued that the lists’ members, as active participants in an online professional community, may be more inclined to participate in reflective practice than the wider population of library and information workers. They may also be more likely to be professionally qualified, whereas a large number of LIS staff are not, and this may have a bearing on their attitudes and practice.

Two of the researcher’s personal contacts, working in public and academic libraries, also volunteered to participate in the survey.

3.4 Timescale
The survey was emailed to selected groups and individuals on 3rd December 2012, with a closing date of 22nd December 2012. A reminder was sent on 13th December 2012. Reminders are advisable to increase response rates (Hank, Jordan and Wildemuth, 2009). This timescale was considered adequate as Web survey participants tend to respond quickly (Hayslett and Wildemuth, 2004) and, in this case, 424 responses were obtained within the timeframe.

3.5 Data analysis methods
Numerical results from the survey were entered into an Excel spreadsheet to produce charts to present the data, using descriptive statistics. Tables were used where these were more suitable to show the data. Significance testing was carried out in relation to some of the data to determine if there was a significant link between reflective practice and
training; and reflective writing and training. Since the data collected was nominal, the Chi squared test \( (X^2) \) was selected to test for significance.

Qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis. This method was chosen as it attempts to present a detailed account of complex data. The advantages of this approach are that it can highlight similarities and differences in the data and allows for unanticipated results. The approach is limited by being more descriptive than interpretive and it can lose the continuity of individual accounts (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

The researcher spent time familiarising herself with the data by reading it through several times. All the data from free text areas of the survey was analysed together and coded in chunks according to the subject matter. This process was repeated to ensure all data was included. Repeated patterns or phrases were noted, as were conflicting opinions representing differences within the findings. The codes were organised into themes, which corresponded to some of the themes from the literature. The list of themes was examined and amended to ensure it was a true representation of the data.

**3.6 Ethics**

Ethical approval was received in accordance with the University of Sheffield Research Ethics policy. The Information School classified the research project as ‘low risk’.

The first page of the survey stated the overall aim of the study and indicated that it was being carried out as part of an MA in Librarianship at the University of Sheffield. It was explained that participation in the research was voluntary and that completion of the survey indicated consent for the data to be used in the research. Survey participants were informed that the data would be anonymised prior to processing and analysis, and that it would be stored safely and destroyed appropriately on completion of the project. Contact details of the researcher and her supervisor were provided in case of further questions.
The surveys were completed anonymously so it was not possible to identify participants, except where they voluntarily provided their contact details to offer further assistance with the research. This information was not seen by anyone other than the researcher. Care was taken to ensure that the data presented in the results did not contain any identifying details. Printed data was stored safely and electronic data was stored on a password-protected computer.

A participant information sheet and consent form were prepared for interviewees. See Appendices 2 and 3. As interviews were not carried out (see Section 3.7) these were not used.

3.7 Changes to the original plan

It was intended to interview volunteers from the sample, in a second phase of the research. However, the amount of qualitative data obtained from the questionnaire was sufficient to meet the research aims. Therefore the second phase of the proposal was not carried out.

3.8 Summary

A questionnaire was used to gather quantitative and qualitative data relating to the use of reflection in the LIS sector, and survey participants were selected from a purposive sample. The results were presented using descriptive and inferential statistics. The qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis. These results are presented in Chapter 4.
Chapter 4: Results

The results will be presented in two sections. Section 4.1 will outline the quantitative data using descriptive and inferential statistics. Section 4.2 will outline the main themes emerging from an analysis of free text responses.

4.1 Quantitative data

4.1.1 The sample

The sample was drawn mainly from library and information staff subscribing to JISCMail. See Section 3.3.

424 people responded to the survey. The response rates to each individual question varied, partly because some respondents chose not to answer some questions and partly because the survey design directed respondents to different sections as a result of their responses. The response rate for each question will be indicated to give a clearer picture.

4.1.2 Demographic data

The highest number of respondents to the survey, 168 (49%), was from the HE sector. The number and percentage of respondents from a range of sectors are displayed in Figure 1.
Figure 1. Responses to Q16: In which sector are you employed? (n=342)

Survey respondents had been employed in the library and information sector for varying periods as indicated in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Responses to Q17: How long have you been employed in the library and information sector? (n=346)
4.1.3 Reflective practice

Question 1 asked respondents if they considered themselves to be reflective practitioners. Of 423 respondents, 389 (92 %) identified themselves as reflective practitioners, including those who answered ‘sometimes’. See Figure 3.

![Chart showing responses to Q1](chart.png)

**Figure 3. Responses to Q1: Do you consider yourself to be a reflective practitioner? (n=423)**

Question 2 asked respondents if they consciously spent time reflecting on their professional practice. This question received 423 responses and 384 of them (91%) answered either ‘yes’ or ‘sometimes’. See Figure 4.
Figure 4. Responses to Q2: Do you consciously spend time reflecting on your professional practice? (n=423)

Question 3 asked respondents if they consciously determined how the outcome of their reflection would affect their current or future practice. This question was answered by 421 people and, out of these, 352 (84%) answered either ‘yes’ or ‘sometimes’. See Figure 5.
Figure 5. Responses to Q3: Do you consciously determine how the outcome of this reflection will affect your current or future practice? (n=421)

When asked to identify the benefits of reflective practice, survey respondents were asked to select all that applied from a list of twenty-eight benefits. Of 359 responses, the three most commonly cited benefits were: ‘learning from significant incidents’, selected by 316 respondents (88%); ‘CPD’, selected by 304 respondents (85%); and ‘identification of gaps in skills and knowledge’, selected by 290 respondents (81%). See Figure 9.

Question 5 asked respondents to select all that applied from a list of fourteen barriers to reflective practice. The most commonly cited barriers to reflective practice, out of 350 responses, were: ‘lack of time’ (89%), selected by 311 respondents; ‘lack of motivation’, selected by 160 respondents (46%); and ‘not supported by organisational culture’, selected by 139 (40%). See Figure 10.

Out of 361 respondents, 141 respondents (39%) had received training in reflective practice and 220 respondents (61%) had not. See Figure 11.
4.1.4 Reflective writing

The next part of the survey dealt with reflective writing. Out of 363 respondents, 190 respondents (52%) said they engaged in reflective writing and 173 respondents (48%) said they did not. See Figure 6.

![Bar chart showing 190 respondents engaged and 173 did not](image)

**Figure 6. Responses to Q8: Do you engage in reflective writing? (n=363)**

Of the 190 respondents who did reflective writing, the least popular format was paper only, used by twenty-two respondents (11.6%). An electronic format was used by eighty-three respondents (43.7%) and eighty-five respondents (44.7%) used both paper and electronic formats.

Question 10 asked whether those who did reflective writing kept it private, made it public or shared it with specific people. The responses are shown in Figure 7.
Figure 7. Responses to Q10: Is your reflective writing private, public, shared with specific individuals? (n=191)

Question 11 asked respondents why they undertook reflective writing. This question was answered by 189 people and 138 of them (73%) did reflective writing for their own purposes. The responses are shown in Figure 8.
Figure 8. Responses to Q11: Why do you undertake reflective writing? (n=189)

Question 12 asked people to select the benefits of reflective writing and was answered by 301 respondents. The three most common benefits of reflective writing, identified from a list of twenty-eight benefits, were: ‘CPD’, selected by 219 respondents (73%); ‘learning from significant incidents’, selected by 217 respondents (72%); and ‘identification of gaps in skills and knowledge’, selected by 200 respondents (66%). See Figure 9.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Reflective practice</th>
<th>Reflective writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuing Professional Development</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning from significant incidents</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning from training or educational opportunities</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification of gaps in skills and knowledge</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification of personal strengths and weaknesses</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification of goals</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing knowledge</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing understanding</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linking theory and practice</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving planning of future actions</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving professional judgements</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving critical thinking</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solving dilemmas</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achieving perspective</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achieving clarity</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expression of emotions</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress management</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding the perspective of others</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving working relationships</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving professional practice</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification of need to change</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catalyst for change</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal empowerment</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emancipation</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-development</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appreciation of achievements</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing experiences with others</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>51.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrating professional practice to others</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 9. Responses to Q4: Do you consider any of the following to be benefits of engaging in reflective practice? (n=359) & Q12: Do you consider any of the following to be benefits of engaging in reflective writing? (n=301).
Question 13 asked respondents to select barriers to reflective writing. 319 people responded. The three most common barriers to reflective writing were: ‘lack of time’, selected by 292 respondents (91.5%); ‘lack of motivation’, selected by 154 respondents (48%); and ‘not supported by organisational culture’, selected by 103 respondents (32%). See Figure 10.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers</th>
<th>Reflective practice</th>
<th>Reflective writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of time</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of knowledge</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of guidance</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of training</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of skill</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of experience</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of motivation</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerns about confidentiality</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No perceived benefits of reflection</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative impact on self-esteem</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unwillingness to focus on emotions</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unwillingness to admit mistakes</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of repercussions</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not supported by organisational culture</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 10. Responses to Q5: Do you consider any of the following to be barriers to engaging in reflective practice? (n=350) & Q13: Do you consider any of the following to be barriers to engaging in reflective writing? (n=319).

Out of 339 responses, the majority of respondents, 241 (71%), had not received training in reflective writing. See Figure 11.
Figure 11. Responses to Q6: Have you ever had any training in reflective practice? (n=361) & Q14: Have you ever had any training in reflective writing? (n=339).

4.1.5 Significance testing

Significance testing was conducted on some of the data using the Chi squared test ($\chi^2$), to explore the influence of training on reflective practice and reflective writing.

Firstly, significance testing was carried out with regards to the link between training and reflective practice. The number of survey respondents who had received training in reflective practice was 141. Of these, 136 (96%) answered ‘yes’ or ‘sometimes’ to question 1: ‘Do you consider yourself to be a reflective practitioner?’ and five (3.5%) answered “no”. 220 respondents had not had training in reflective practice. Of these, 204 (93%) answered ‘yes’ or ‘sometimes’ to question 1, and sixteen (7%) answered ‘no’. Using the Chi squared test, the relationship between training and reflective practice was not found to be significant.
Next significance testing was carried out with regards to the link between training and reflective writing. The number of survey respondents who had received training in reflective writing was ninety-eight. Of these, eighty-two (84%) answered ‘yes’ to question 8: ‘Do you engage in reflective writing?’ and sixteen (16%) answered ‘no’. 241 respondents had not had training in reflective writing. Of these, ninety-six (40%) answered ‘yes’ to question 8 and 145 (60%) answered ‘no’. Using the Chi squared test the relationship between receiving training in reflective writing and engaging in reflective writing was found to be significant.

It was intended to carry out significance testing in relation to reflective practice and length of employment in the library and information sector. The percentages and number of respondents who answered ‘yes’, ‘no’ or ‘sometimes’ to question 1: ‘Do you consider yourself to be a reflective practitioner?’ in relation to the number of years they had been employed in the LIS is displayed in Figure 12. However the Chi squared test could not be used with this data since some of the expected frequencies were less than five.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of time employed in sector</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;5 years (n=43)</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>60.5%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-10 years (n=86)</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15 years (n=60)</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20 years (=53)</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-25 years (n=40)</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;25 years (n=64)</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 12. Responses to Q1: Do you consider yourself to be a reflective practitioner? & Q17: How long have you been employed in the library and information sector.**

It was also intended to carry out significance testing in relation to reflective practice and the sector of employment. The percentages and number of respondents who answered ‘yes’, ‘no’ or ‘sometimes’ to question 1: ‘Do you consider yourself to be a reflective practitioner?’ in relation to the sector in which they were employed is displayed in Figure 13. The Chi squared test could not be applied to this data since some of the expected frequencies were below 5.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th></th>
<th>No</th>
<th></th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public (n=61)</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School (n=14)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher education (n=168)</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further education (n=35)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charity (n=5)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial (n=2)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal (n=4)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientific (n=2)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial (n=1)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent/Private (n=5)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government (n=5)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health (n=40)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 13. Responses to Q1: Do you consider yourself to be a reflective practitioner? & Q16: In which sector are you employed?

4.1.6 Summary

Most respondents considered themselves to be reflective practitioners, at least some of the time. Just over half engaged in reflective writing. The most commonly cited benefits of reflective practice and reflective writing were ‘learning from significant incidents’, ‘CPD’ and ‘identification of gaps in skills and knowledge’. The most commonly cited barriers to reflective practice and reflective writing were ‘lack of time’, lack of motivation’ and ‘not supported by organisational culture’. The relationship between receiving training in reflective writing and engaging in reflective writing was found to be significant.


4.2 Thematic analysis of qualitative data

Several questions in the survey gave respondents the opportunity to add further comments. In particular, after being given lists of possible benefits of, and barriers to, reflective practice and reflective writing, from which respondents could select all that applied, they could also add further benefits and barriers in their own words. Respondents were also asked to give any other comments about reflective practice and reflective writing and to expand on the reasons they did reflective writing. The data from all these responses was examined together using thematic analysis. The themes which emerged were: use of the terms relating to reflection; personality; value of reflective practice; benefits of, and barriers to, reflective practice and reflective writing; organisational culture; training and education; skills; methods; and recommendations.

4.2.1 Use of the terms relating to reflection

The use of terms such as ‘reflection’, ‘reflective practice’ and ‘reflective writing’ triggered a response in several respondents. Some viewed the terms neutrally, whilst others had a negative reaction to them. There were varying levels of awareness of the terms.

For some, the terms were seen as jargon, which some respondents viewed neutrally:

“Seems a new term for an old practice.”

Others had a negative reaction to the terms:

“Even hearing the terms sends a shiver down my back…”

Others felt reflective practice was difficult to define, which could be problematic:

“I think RP means so many different things to different people.”

Conversely, one respondent found that using too strict a definition was itself a barrier:

“I find the idea that reflection has to be done in a specific way for it to ‘count’ to be really irritating and a barrier”
Others expressed the view that one could be a reflective practitioner without being aware of it as a specific term:

“Some people may engage in RP but not consciously - I think many people would say that they ‘learn from their mistakes’ but wouldn’t necessarily call this reflective practice.”

For a few respondents ‘reflective writing’ was a new term:

“I’ve never done it or heard of it before so can’t comment on the benefits.”

A few revealed that they had little knowledge of reflective practice:

“I have to admit I don’t know much about it.”

4.2.2 Personality and reflective practice

Reflection was related to personality types, with some respondents stating that it was a natural skill and others stating that they found it difficult. Personality could also determine reflective style.

Some made the connection between personality and the ability to reflect:

“The ability to think reflexively is largely dependent on the possession of certain personality characteristics – so it is something that is very difficult [sic] for those who lack such features to pick up or develop.”

Many people referred to reflection as ‘instinctive’ or ‘natural’:

“It is the conscious processing of what we all do naturally anyway…”

Conversely, others expressed reflective practice in terms of difficulties:

“I find it difficult to be reflective and it is not something I enjoy.”

One respondent made the point that one’s personality may determine the right reflective style:

“I think it has the potential to help many of us but each person has to find one style that suits them!”
4.2.3 The value of reflective practice

Certain positive terms were used repeatedly to describe reflective practice. However, its centrality to professionalism was difficult for some.

Several described reflection as central to their practice, using the term ‘key’:

“...reflection (as part of evaluation) is key for most activities to actually prove valuable and lead to improvements in the future.”

Related terms used were “necessary”, “vital” and “essential.”

Other comments related to the worth of reflection:

“...The time taken away from the ‘day job’ is invaluable in making sense of things.”

One comment referred to the power of reflective practice:

“Reflecting on issues one has dealt with is a much more potent tool than any third-party training initiative.”

However, the centrality of reflection as a professional tool presented a difficulty for some:

“...can be very tedious, especially after completing Chartership portfolio where reflective writing was key.”

4.2.4 Benefits of reflective practice and reflective writing

4.2.4.1 Benefits to the individual

Some commented that reflection enabled them to gain perspective on their current situation and practice:

“Good way of assessing things - to stand back from it all and analyse in a thinking and emotional way.”

This specifically helped some to explore their role and position:

“...clarification of fit within organisation.”
For another respondent reflection was beneficial in highlighting and accepting the barriers to change:

“Appreciating the constraints of change, the limitations of professional roles, the role of departmental politics, the awareness of one [sic] position and its limitations…”

For another it gave them a “global perspective.”

Reflective practice and reflective writing were noted to be beneficial in analysing situations and procedures:

“Helps to evaluate what you have witnessed.”

Reflective writing could help in checking the progress of work assignments:

“Very important for project work to track phase development…”

Some made the link between reflection and memory:

“I try to do some reflection as part of my practice after each course I’ve been on – it helps me to remember what I learnt…”

One respondent described the act of writing in terms of its beneficial effects:

“I find it therapeutic to write things down, mostly on a personal level, but I have found it to be the same when used in a work context in order to reflect on a particular incident.”

Another noted that writing “…does give the chance for deeper reflection and more critical assessment than reflection on the hoof.”

Other personal benefits were “…self clarification and definition…a way to know where you are at and any directions one may want to take…”

Written reflection helped in applying for courses and jobs:

“Production of a record showing progress in reflective writing and the development of skills related to this… can then be used to illustrate said skills in Chartership, job interviews etc.”
4.2.4.2 Benefits to the team

Reflective practice helped some to model good practice:

“Setting an example to others.”

The same point was made for reflective writing:

“By sharing, leading by example, and helping others to understand what reflective writing is.”

Some mentioned the usefulness of reflective practice in the coaching or mentoring situation:

“I have started to reflect after coaching sessions I have been attending recently and can see the benefit of both planning before the session and reflecting afterwards.”

This was also seen as a benefit of reflective writing:

“To help people I am mentoring.”

Some used reflective writing to educate others within their service:

“To increase other staff’s knowledge.”

4.2.4.5 Benefits to the organisation

Several respondents noted that reflective practice could help to improve the services they were providing:

“Improving my services to students and staff.”

Another benefit was to highlight good practice:

“Reflection is a useful tool for identifying best practice and striving for excellence in professional activities.”

Reflection was also noted to help in facilitating innovative practice across teams and organisations:

“Changing current practices (innovating practice so that it can be rolled out to others).”
Written reflection helped to formulate ideas and devise plans:
   “…writing up the notes helps to frame my thoughts and cues me to record my
   ideas for implementation of what I learnt.”

Another cited a benefit in the development of workplace policies:
   “Policy creation requires specific analysis of problems, capabilities of the
   workforce, and identification of purposeful ways forward (around or to solve the
   problem).”

Finally, reflective writing could be used to promote service provision:
   “…can always be used to highlight the range of activities ongoing within your
   library service.”

4.2.5 Barriers to reflective practice and reflective writing

4.2.5.1 Lack of time

For some, demanding work schedules left little time for reflection:
   “Conflict between what needs doing now, and time for reflection is difficult to
   manage.”

Related to this was the emphasis in some roles for rapid learning in a fast-changing
environment:
   “Learning curves for anyone entering the service are also off the scale…At that
   level of skill acquisition, reflective practice is internalised more than externalised
   because of the time vs skill acquisition curve.”

Others noted that time was a barrier even though they recognised the potential benefits
of reflection:
   “I know that I would benefit from setting aside time to consciously reflect on
   what went well/badly but don’t seem to be able to find the time. The day job gets
   in the way!”

A related barrier was fatigue:
   “Tiredness! I sometimes feel guilty, as if I should be doing more direct day to
day work!”

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4.2.5.2 Additional barriers to reflection

One respondent implied that without a requirement to reflect for a specific purpose, it was difficult to feel motivated:

“I appreciate the benefits of reflection, but I generally do not feel motivated to reflect unless I am directed to reflect for CPD or my appraisal.”

A few mentioned that being a lone professional was a barrier:

“Working as a sole librarian in a school - requires effort to maintain professional connections and experience.”

One respondent noted that reflection could lead to personal difficulties when problems could not be resolved:

“Can make you spiral if you can’t sort out an issue. Esp [sic] if it recurs week after week.”

Another found that the documentation and training associated with reflection was overly complicated and tedious:

“Needs to be really simple to be effective and most of the training and paperwork involved is too complex and boring.”

4.2.5.3 Barriers to writing

Reflective writing could lead to negative feelings:

“Reflection can be uncomfortable, personally and professionally…”

Reflective writing for professional awards was a barrier for one respondent in terms of the specific format required and the perceived lack of confidentiality:

“(I) find it somehow contrived when forced to put it in a standard presentation for Chartership or Revalidation. These CILIP activities are not confidential so writing is constrained and not fully reflective.”

The act of putting something into writing could feel risky for some:

“…once something is in writing, I would imagine that some people would be uncomfortable that it may be read by others, or used as proof against you…”
One person described a lack of discernment as a barrier to reflective writing:

“Lack of clarity at times in knowing precisely what the causal issue is that needs examination and resolution.”

For another, futility was a barrier to reflective writing for them:

“It’s a bit pointless, unless you can’t clarify thoughts without writing them down.”

4.2.6 Reflective practice and organisational culture

4.2.6.1 Non-supportive organisational cultures

Several commented that their workplace did not support reflection:

“It is not discussed or encouraged professionally or within the organisation.”

Some respondents feared that their employers and/or colleagues would disapprove of reflective practice:

“Some employers see this as just inactivity and it is not encouraged.”

Some employers were selective in their facilitation of reflective practice:

“I think a barrier to formal reflective practice i.e. putting time a side [sic] to write is often not given to low level library staff and is only encouraged with those undertaking chartership, ACLIP or other formal qualifications.”

Where reflective practice was not widespread within an organisation it could result in conflict:

“…not everyone does or is able to do it in my organisation which causes issues when I’m making the effort but other people directly involved with my work aren’t!”

Some respondents were aware of the risks of admitting mistakes which may lead to repercussions:

“especially in a period of continued staff cuts, it feels a risk to admit what hasn’t gone well.”
Some noted cultural barriers to changing practice as a result of reflection:

“…there is always a pressure to conform to local cultures and behaviours that mean that reflective practice doesn’t always revolve into action.”

Some workplaces gave support to reflective practice but in a limited way:

“…we are encouraged to reflect on our training, but rarely on our continuing personal performance, despite annual reviews – these are very target orientated.”

Some respondents practiced reflection at work despite not being asked to by their employers:

“I am not required by my organisation to produce reflective writing, but sometimes incorporate reflective material into reports and documents that I produce.”

One respondent indicated that reflective practice itself could be utilised negatively by some organisations:

“So much of reflective practice has become how to communicate professionally which means in the politically correct language of the library and managemeetees [sic] so that all is positive, effective, while elephants in the corners roam lost and truth is never spoken!”

4.2.6.2 Supportive organisational cultures

In contrast, some reported positively that reflective practice was integral to, or at least supported by, their workplace:

“I suppose the confidence to challenge our institutional norms was empowering… partly because my new ideas were welcomed and seen to improve our service.”

A number of people reported that reflection formed part of their annual appraisals or professional development planning:

“My library requires us to complete a Professional Development Plan every few years in order to avail of training – I find the time to do it because it is necessary, but then I always find it a useful exercise once I start.”
Others incorporated reflections into regular meetings:
“…I have monthly reviews with my manager where we reflect formally on tasks undertaken and to come.”

One respondent described a process of guided reflection undertaken by team members:
“As a team we use peer observation where the observer guides the reflection of the observed. This can be verbal or written reflection but usually both. The written allows for deeper reflection. The guide ensures that all stages of the reflective process are explored.”

Several commented on the fast pace and rapid rate of change in their workplaces. Although this was identified as a barrier by one respondent, see Section 4.2.5, others saw reflective practice as a means to ensure effectiveness in such contexts:
“In this fast-paced technology-driven environment, I find it most helpful personally and professionally to reflect on changes in practice that could be (or have been) initiated and consider the implications for growth on a personal as well as professional level.”

**4.2.7 Reflective practice training and education**

Many had been introduced to reflective practice and reflective writing whilst undertaking a course. These included undergraduate and postgraduate courses in teaching, education, management, and library and information science.
“T’ve recently undertaken a Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education, much of which deals with reflective practice and involved the creation of a portfolio, complete with reflections on teaching practice.”

Preparation for CILIP awards provided an introduction to, and for some, the impetus for, reflection:
“My main motivation for reflecting on my professional experiences has been my progression towards achieving chartered status.”
The CILIP mentorship system contributed to an increased perception of the value of reflection:

“As a CILIP mentor I have gained a better understanding of the importance of reflective practice in the last few years.”

For one respondent, participation in an on-line professional development course aimed at library and information staff had enabled them to establish reflection as part of their practice:

“…Also taking part in CPD23 has helped me to continue this practice which I feel is very worthwhile.”

Different views were stated about the importance of training. Some thought it necessary:

“Essential to have training in order to make it constructive and effective.”

Others doubted whether it was needed:

“A professional will reflect on their practice whether they have received ‘Training’ or not.”

A variety of comments were received highlighting the relative value of training courses they had attended. Some had found training useful:

“I attended a workshop on reflective practice held by CILIP…earlier this year. I found it very useful as I am undertaking Chartership this year…”

Others found the training they had received to be of limited benefit:

“The training I had in reflective practice was about three years ago and was only a morning session, so there wasn’t sufficient time to deepen reflection [sic] on reflection, so to speak!”

Several people expressed a need for training to improve their own reflective practice and to help them guide others to reflect:

“I would appreciate it if a course on reflective writing were held in North West England, as this is an area I would like to develop but I have been unable to identify [sic] a suitable training opportunity.”
4.2.8 Skills associated with reflective practice and reflective writing

Several people commented on the skills needed for reflection, which some found difficult to acquire. It could also be difficult to ascertain whether one had acquired them adequately. One person commented that the skills involved in reflective writing needed practice:

“While reflective writing comes naturally for some, I felt that I had to work on my technique, style and method, which certainly differs from practitioner to practitioner.”

Others expressed uncertainty about their general skill level in reflection:

“How do you know that you are reflecting effectively on your practice rather than just going through the motions?”

4.2.9 Methods used to reflect

Written reflection was used by many respondents and took the form of a diary or learning record, which may have been private or shared with others:

“I keep notes myself, either in Evernote or a paper journal. I try to keep a log of my achievements and feelings, and share them at the appropriate time e.g. a team meeting.”

Others published their reflections online:

“I find having a blog helps clarify thoughts.”

One advantage of this was that this resulted in helpful responses from others:

“Publishing it to a blog can result in useful comments.”

Many people discussed their reflections informally with colleagues and used networking as part of the reflective process:

“I also share ideas with colleagues and staff at other institutions which I find an excellent way of being reflective.”
4.2.10 Recommendations to facilitate reflective practice

A few made suggestions for the promotion of reflective practice within the library and information profession. One commented on the need for formal training:

“I believe librarianship would benefit from training in reflective practice forming part of our professional qualifications etc (it wasn’t when I qualified, but maybe it is now).”

Further comments indicated that reflection should become a professional requirement in order to integrate it into regular practice:

“I do think it should be more built into our processes and there is no formal requirement to do this, when in fact it must raise standards and help us be better at our jobs.”

One person noted that management support would assist in the practice of reflection:

“I usually reflect on my performance as a matter of course. It would be useful if my organisation/senior management actively encouraged such development.”

4.2.11 Summary

The main themes emerging from the qualitative data indicated: there are different reactions to the terms relating to reflection; the ability to reflect may be related to personality type; many find it a valuable practice; reflection can be beneficial to the individual and their service; barriers include lack of time and lone working; organisational culture can influence the extent to which reflective practice occurs; training can provide an effective introduction to reflective practice, as it is important to develop appropriate skills; methods of reflection used include diaries, blogs and discussions; management and professional support were ways to promote reflective practice.

This concludes the results section, a discussion of which will continue in Chapter 5.
Chapter 5: Discussion

In this section the outcomes of this study will be discussed in relation to five of the research objectives, which are:

- To ascertain if library and information staff use reflection.
- To identify and explore the ways that reflection is used in the library and information sector.
- To explore the value of reflection as a professional tool for library and information staff.
- To identify and explore the benefits and rationale for using reflection in the library and information sector.
- To identify and explore the barriers to using reflection in the library and information sector.

The final objective, stated below, will be discussed in Chapter 6:
- To make recommendations for best practice within the library and information sector.

5.1 Do library and information staff use reflection?

Responses to questions in the survey about the use of reflection, whilst indicating that it was widely used, revealed some contradictions which may show that some respondents have a limited understanding of reflective practice. The vast majority of respondents (92%) considered themselves to be reflective practitioners, but fewer (84%) said that they consciously determined how the outcome of their reflection would affect their current or future practice. This is surprising, since being a reflective practitioner encompasses conscious reflection on practice, with a view to validating or improving practice. Perhaps this difference is due to lack of agreement about the terms related to reflection, which is highlighted in the literature (Chapman, Dempsey and Warren-Forward, 2009; Moon, 2007; Bengtsson, 1995). Issues around the use of terms relating
to reflection also emerged from this study, with some respondents reporting that it was difficult to define, or that the definition was either too specific or not specific enough. See Section 4.2.1. A few respondents commented that they had not heard of reflective practice before, though this does not rule out the possibility that they were reflective. So, although most respondents saw themselves as reflective practitioners, some of them did not consciously use reflection to inform their practice, which illustrates a lack of clarity regarding the definition of reflective practice. A small minority (8%) did not identify themselves as reflective practitioners.

5.2 How do library and information staff use reflection?

Although the majority of respondents considered they were reflective practitioners only about half engaged in reflective writing, one of the most widely represented methods in the literature (Sen, 2010; Chapman, Dempsey and Warren-Forward, 2009; Moon, 2007). Of those that did write reflectively most used an electronic format, either as well as a paper record (45%), or instead of it (44%). Since Information Technology is central to the sector, it is unsurprising that staff within the library and information professions would use electronic records.

Just over half of the reflective writers (55%) kept their accounts private, contrasting with a quarter (24%) who made their writing public, and just under half (46%) who shared their reflective writing with specific individuals. Most respondents (73%) did reflective writing for their own purposes; a third (32%) did so for CILIP qualifications; and a similar number (31%) for their workplace. Respondents identified a number of ways that they used their written reflections, including: writing reports; preparing for appraisals and job applications; recording the outcomes of training they had attended; checking progress of assignments; devising plans; educating others; and promoting services. Most of these examples of the use of reflective writing are concurrent with those identified in the literature relating to recording progress and achievements (Roberts, 2009); assisting personal development (Langer, 2009; Bergmark, Ghaye and Alerby, 2007); enhancing learning (McKinney and Sen, 2012; Moon, 2007; Shepherd, 2006); and teaching others
(Bengtsson, 1995). However, the use of reflective writing in the promotion of services was not explicitly found in the literature, which tended to focus on outcomes for the individual.

Respondents who published their reflections in online blogs reported that it was useful in clarifying thoughts, in reflecting on initiatives and in gaining helpful responses from others. This response concurs with Powers (2008), who highlighted the function of library blogs in conducting professional debates; and with Sanders and McKeown (2007), who found that virtual communities of practice were beneficial to personal and social reflection.

The other reflective method identified by respondents was discussion with colleagues, either formally or informally. This was often done through electronic mail and sometimes with colleagues from other workplaces. Reflective conversations are recommended in the literature as potentially more useful than working alone (Simpson and Trezise, 2011). The use of electronic mail for discussion is more practical for staff working as lone professionals who may find it difficult to arrange face-to-face meetings with colleagues. Some respondents incorporated reflection into their appraisals or regular reporting mechanisms.

A few reported that their workplace encouraged reflection in an embedded way so that it formed part of team meetings, training and personal development. Where this genuinely occurred it was described in positive terms, for example:

“At my organisation we’re encouraged to write reflective reports on every training event we attend to feedback to colleagues in meetings…We also engage in reflective writing as part of our annual Personal Development Review (PDR) process with our line managers…Having the culture of reflective practice embedded in our organisation helps enormously with both team and individual staff development.”
Evidence from the literature suggests that reflection can be particularly effective when it is an integral part of the organisation (Thunberg, 2011; Langer, 2001). This does not seem to have translated into practice for all organisations employing library and information staff, despite findings from studies which have shown that reflective practice can be beneficial for organisations (Sen, 2010; Langer, 2001; Tsangaridou and O’Sullivan, 1997).

To summarise, library and information staff were found to use reflection in writing and in discussions, both formally and informally. Some published their written accounts or shared them with others. Respondents seemed to benefit from organisational structures which incorporated reflective practice into the workplace culture.

5.3 Is reflection a valuable professional tool for library and information staff?

One of the themes emerging from the qualitative data was the value of reflective practice. Certain positive terms were repeatedly used to describe reflective practice. These included ‘key’, ‘vital’, ‘necessary’, ‘essential’, ‘valuable’ and ‘potent’. Although these views were not shared by all, those who had incorporated reflection into their work, and found it useful, emphasised how central it had become to their professional practice.

However, a number of respondents reported finding reflection ‘difficult’, ‘boring’, ‘pointless’ and ‘uncomfortable’. These feelings were linked to experiences of being guided to reflect in a way they found overly complicated or constraining and from reflecting alone, where issues could not be resolved and therefore no value was derived from the activity.

This division of opinion about the value of reflection could be related to experiences of it, which may have been either positive or negative. Negative experiences of reflective writing can lead to a lack of confidence and motivation (Otienoh, 2009). Alternatively it
may be related to different personalities, as some find reflection easier to do than others (Roberts, 2009).

Despite the difficulties expressed by some, most respondents linked reflection to continuing professional development (CPD) and learning from significant incidents. Further comments relating reflection to professional practice included: improving the service provided; exploring roles; accepting limitations; highlighting good practice; facilitating innovation; leading and teaching others; and developing workplace policies. So reflection was being used to develop good practice within the workplace and found, by some, to be a valuable professional tool.

Given that reflection has the potential to enhance professional practice and yet is found to be difficult by some, it is necessary to consider ways in which people could be given appropriate training, guidance and support to facilitate reflective practice more widely. Several papers have recommended this (Sen, 2010; Roberts, 2009; Bold, 2008; Rigano and Edwards, 1998). It may be that those who find reflection difficult are unaware of different methods which can be used, such as drawing, or reflecting with others, which they may find more suitable for them.

To summarise, reflective practice is a valuable professional tool, which some find easier to do than others. Training, support and guidance could help to encourage the practice more widely.

5.4 What are the benefits of reflection for library and information staff?

The most frequently cited benefits to reflective practice and reflective writing were ‘CPD’. ‘learning from significant incidents’ and ‘identification of gaps in skills and knowledge’. In addition, over seventy percent of respondents cited the following benefits to reflective practice: ‘learning from training or educational opportunities’; ‘identification of personal strengths and weaknesses’; ‘increasing understanding’; ‘improving planning of future actions’; and ‘improving professional practice’. The same
pattern emerged for the benefits of reflective writing. Within the qualitative data respondents also mentioned the role of reflection in modelling good practice; improving services; mentoring; and educating others.

These benefits are concurrent with the literature in which benefits to the individual (Sanders and McKeown, 2007) and benefits to the team (Richards, Mascarenhas and Collins, 2009) or organisation (Sen, 2010) are outlined. Bengtsson (1995) also noted the role of reflective practice in teaching others.

In summary, respondents noted benefits of reflective practice to themselves, to their teams and to their employing organisations.

5.5 What are the barriers to reflection for library and information staff?

The most frequently selected barrier to reflective practice and reflective writing was ‘lack of time’. This was followed by ‘lack of motivation’ and ‘lack of organisational support’. Several respondents mentioned the demands experienced at work, often along with decreasing resources and rapid change, which did not leave much time for reflection. One respondent stated:

“Sadly I find I don’t really have much time to do reflection anymore, what with staffing levels being reduced and workloads increasing.”

This could potentially lead to frustration for some staff who were aware that their practice would benefit from reflection but found it impossible to fit in to busy schedules. Lack of time has been identified as a barrier to reflective writing in several papers (Otienoh, 2009; Martin, 2003; Ruth-Sahd, 2003; George, 2002).

One reason for low motivation is the lack of external requirement or direction to reflect, which was highlighted by one respondent. This is in contrast to another respondent who felt restrained by the format of reflection required for CILIP Chartership. Lack of external support to reflect was less of a barrier for others, who had found the benefits of reflection for themselves and pointed out that they reflected on practice, despite not
being asked or encouraged to. Lack of external requirement to reflect may be linked to lack of motivation in people who do not see the benefits of reflection for themselves (Roberts, 2009; Ruth-Sahd, 2003). The requirement to reflect, whilst providing motivation for some, can have a negative effect if it is too prescriptive.

Lack of support for reflection from the organisational culture was a barrier which several respondents commented on. Some noted that reflective practice was not encouraged in their organisation and others felt that it would be interpreted by their colleagues or employers as wasting time. Although some respondents found reflective practice useful to facilitate learning from mistakes, others noted a reluctance to admit mistakes if the organisational culture tended to apportion blame, or where people felt their jobs were at risk. As one respondent commented:

“Some departments are rather a blame culture and don’t want to learn from mistakes.”

Even where reflective practice was supported within organisations it was sometimes limited to staff at a certain grade or to processes, such as appraisal, and so the full potential of reflection was not achieved. Also, instituting changes as a result of reflection was sometimes blocked by strong cultures of conformity, thereby decreasing the application of insights gained from the practice.

Organisational culture is recognised to be a potential barrier to reflective practice (Ghaye, 2005; Martin, 2003). This barrier could be addressed if employers understood the benefits of reflection for their individuals, teams and organisations.

Another barrier mentioned was that many library and information staff worked as lone professionals. This could be overcome if isolated professionals formed partnerships and networks to support each other in reflective practice. This was suggested by Koufogiannakis (2010) and demonstrated by Simpson and Trezise (2011).
Many respondents felt that their personality type was not conducive to reflection. In contrast many others indicated that reflection was an instinctive and natural process for them. This seems to support the idea that reflection is easier for certain personality types, as noted by Roberts (2009).

A number of respondents to the survey had been introduced to reflective practice and reflective writing whilst undertaking a course or by attending a training session. Whilst some felt training to be essential and useful, others felt it was unnecessary and of limited benefit. This study found that the link between identifying oneself as a reflective practitioner and having received training in reflective practice was not significant. However a significant relationship was found between having received training in reflective writing and engaging in reflective writing. See Section 4.1.5.

To summarise, the barriers to reflection most frequently cited by library and information staff were ‘lack of time’, ‘lack of motivation’ and ‘lack of organisational support’. Additional barriers identified were: working alone; personality type; lack of training; lack of skill; lack of experience and concerns about confidentiality.

5.6 Summary

Reflective practice is used widely within the library and information sector, though the concept is not fully understood by all. Reflective writing and reflective discussions are the most commonly used methods. Many people value reflection as a professional tool and see it as key to their practice. Others find it problematic and may benefit from support, guidance and training. The relationship between training and reflective writing is significant.

One method of reflection does not suit everyone, some may benefit from reflecting individually, others in groups. Whilst writing is a popular method of reflecting, those who find it difficult may prefer other methods.
Reflective practice and reflective writing are beneficial to CPD, to enhance learning from significant incidents and to identify gaps in skills and knowledge. The benefits extend beyond the individual to their teams and employing organisations.

The main barriers to reflective practice and reflective writing are ‘lack of time’, ‘lack of motivation’ and ‘lack of organisational support’.

Chapter 6 follows, in which conclusions from the research are outlined; recommendations for practice and future research suggested; and limitations of the study noted.
Chapter 6: Conclusions

The overall aim of this research was to explore the use of reflection by library and information staff to support their everyday practice and continuing development. The research questions were:

- To what extent is reflection utilised by staff in the library and information sector to support everyday practice and continuing development?
- How is reflection used and what are the perceived benefits of, and barriers to, reflective practice?

The research tool selected was a questionnaire, which gathered qualitative and quantitative data. The results have been presented and discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. This chapter will present the conclusions from the study, including: key findings; recommendations for best practice; limitations of the research; and recommendations for future research.

6.1 Key findings

- There were varying levels of awareness about reflective practice and different reactions to the terms relating to reflection.
- Most respondents (92%) considered themselves to be reflective practitioners.
- Around half of respondents (52%) engaged in reflective writing.
- Written reflections were mostly recorded electronically, either as well as, or instead of, a paper record.
- Fifty-five percent of the respondents who did reflective writing kept their writing private; forty-six percent shared it with specific individuals; and twenty-four percent made it public.
- Seventy-three percent did reflective writing for their own purposes; thirty-two percent for a CILIP qualification; thirty-one percent for their workplace; and fifteen percent as part of their studies.
- Some respondents engaged in reflective discussions with colleagues.
• The main benefits of reflection were: ‘learning from significant incidents’; ‘CPD’; and ‘identification of gaps in skills and knowledge’.
• Benefits were noted in relation to individuals, teams and organisations.
• The main barriers to reflection were: ‘lack of time’; ‘lack of motivation’; and ‘not supported by organisational culture’.
• Other barriers included: working alone; ineffective training; and overly prescriptive requirements for reflective writing.
• The relationship between training in reflective writing and engaging in reflective writing was found to be significant.

6.2 Recommendations for best practice in the library and information sector with regards to reflection

• Given the lack of clarity about the definition and purpose of reflective practice, it is recommended that a clear definition of reflective practice in the library and information sector be agreed.
• Guidelines should be developed in relation to reflective practice, including for reflective writing and alternative methods.
• Training, support and guidance should be provided to enable staff to find methods of reflection that are appropriate for their particular needs and suited to their personal style.
• Training in reflective writing is recommended.
• Employing organisations should facilitate reflection by allowing time to do so, and by embedding the practice within existing workplace structures, such as appraisal. New processes may need to be implemented such as systems to promote reflective discussions between staff within, or external to, the organisation.
• Organisational barriers to reflection should be identified and addressed.
• The current CILIP requirement for reflection, in relation to their framework of professional awards, could be extended to all CILIP members. This would help to establish reflective practice as a professional activity for library and
information staff and ensure that staff and employers were motivated to engage with it. If this requirement included on-going support and incorporated a variety of methods, it could increase motivation to reflect, rather than act as a barrier to it.

6.3 Limitations of the research
The sample, whilst including representation from a range of library and information employment sectors, was largely limited to the membership of JISCMAIL groups. Subscribers to such mailing lists may be more inclined to participate in reflective practice, as they have actively chosen to join a professional interest group. The proportion of professionally qualified respondents to the survey is unknown, though it is likely that the proportion would be higher than amongst the library and information workforce. This may have a bearing on their attitudes and behaviour.

The data was obtained from an electronic questionnaire. The use of other methods, such as interviews or observation, would have allowed exploration of the issues in greater depth and increased the reliability of the results.

6.4 Recommendations for future research
This research has indicated that reflection is widely used within the library and information sector. Further research is recommended to investigate the use of reflection amongst a wider range of library and information staff, including those who are not professionally qualified. Although this research found that reflective writing was used by around half of respondents, it is not known to what extent other methods of reflection are used within the sector. Future research could investigate different types of reflection and how these relate to different personality types, with a view to recommending a range of methods for the individual practitioner. This study found that people react differently to the concept of reflective practice, some viewing it positively and others negatively. This conflict could be explored in future research.
6.4 Summary

Reflective practice is widely used within the library and information sector and is beneficial to individuals, teams and organisations. The barriers to reflection should be addressed in order to facilitate the practice more effectively. Guidance, support and training are essential to this process. Employing organisations and professional bodies have a key role to play in encouraging the use of reflection in the library and information workforce. Initiatives to encourage reflective practice need to acknowledge the views of those who are resistive to it, for whatever reason.

Word count: 14,913
References


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Appendix 1
Ethics application form
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:
www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.99105!/file/Ethics-Administrators.pdf
A1. Title of research project: An exploration of the use of reflective practice by library and information staff to support their everyday practice and continuing development.

A2. Name of Student: Judith Greenall
    Department: Information School
    Email: jgreenall1@sheffield.ac.uk
    Tel.: 0114 222 2630

    Name of Supervisor: Barbara Sen

A3. Proposed Project Duration:
    Start date: September 2012
    End date: August 2013

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:

Overall aim: This study aims to explore the use of reflection by library and information staff to support their everyday practice and continuing development.

Objectives:
- To investigate the use of reflection in professional practice, including the library and information sector, by carrying out a literature review.
- To explore the value of reflection as a professional tool.
- To ascertain if library and information staff use reflection.
- To explore the ways that reflection is used in the library and information sector. For example, blogs, portfolios, appraisal process.
- To explore the perceived benefits and rationale for using reflection by those who use it.
- To explore the reasons stated for not using reflection, including barriers.
- To make recommendations for best practice within the profession.

Rationale:

Reflective practice is recommended in several professional fields, e.g. health professions. Students undertaking a Masters degree in Librarianship at the University of Sheffield are encouraged to develop reflective skills as a tool for professional development. This dissertation aims to find out how widespread the practice is amongst those working in the library and information sector. If it is identified as beneficial it could be recommended to others as a method of professional development. The research findings may enable and support reflective practice in the workplace and may indicate any barriers to its implementation.

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

- A survey of library and information staff will be carried out, using an on-line survey tool.
- The questions will cover whether staff use reflection, including why and how they use it, and any benefits and/or barriers they experience.
- Interviews will be conducted with a small number of staff in order to explore emerging issues in more depth.
- Informed consent will be required from the participants. For participants in the survey, information about the research will be given, including purpose of the project, the name and contact details of the student and supervisor, and the participants right to withdraw from the project at any time. They will not be identifiable from the survey. All of this applies to interviewees but, in addition, their consent to make an audio recording will be sought. A participant consent form will be used.

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

It is not expected that there will be any cause for harm or distress to the participants, however it is possible that, during the interviews, challenging issues may be discussed.
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)

Interviews are expected to take place off University premises in the place of work of the participant. As the participants are library and information staff working in a professional context it is unlikely that they could be threatening to the researcher.

If yes, explain how these issues will be managed.

A8. **How will the potential participants in the project be:**

i. **Identified?**

Targeting specific professional lists (e.g. JISC mail) and forums will identify potential participants.

ii. **Approached?**

Sending an invitation to take part to the identified distribution lists will be the method of approaching potential participants in the survey. A question in the survey will invite participants to the interview stage of the study. Potential participants for interviews will be approached directly via email or telephone.

iii. **Recruited?**

Provided that respondents to the survey and interviewees are people who work in the library and information sector in a professional or para-professional role, and they give their informed consent to take part, they will be recruited to the project.

A9. **Will informed consent be obtained from the participants?**

YES [ ]  NO [ ]

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](http://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?):

For participants in the survey, an explanation of the study will be given and they will be asked to indicate that they have understood and agree to take part. Completion of the survey will be understood as implicit consent. The interviewees will be given an information sheet in advance of the interview and asked to complete a consent form on the day.

A10. What measures will be put in place to ensure confidentiality of personal data, where appropriate?

The identity of survey participants will be anonymised for analysis and data processing. Any information obtained during the interviews will be checked to ensure that identifying details are removed. Data will be stored safely and destroyed appropriately on completion of the project. Electronic data will be stored on a password-protected computer. The research data will be available to the project supervisor.

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)

Not applicable.

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

YES [X]   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?

The participants’ permission to record interviews will be sought and an explanation given as to how the recordings will be used and destroyed.

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
Annex 1

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: **An exploration of the use of reflective practice by library and information staff to support their everyday practice and continuing development.**

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](http://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](http://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: **Judith Greenall**

**Signature of student:** sign here

**Date:** **25th April, 2012**
Annex 2

For Undergraduate & Postgraduate-Taught Students

**Supervisor Declaration**

(The Supervisor completes Annex 2 if s/he has classed the student’s proposed research project as potentially ‘high risk’)

The Ethics Administrator needs to receive an electronic copy of the form, and other documents where appropriate, plus a signed, dated paper copy of this Annex 2 ‘the Supervisor Declaration’.

Full Research Project Title: **insert name**

In signing this Supervisor 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](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/good)
- The above-named project will abide by the University’s ‘Ethics Policy for Research Involving Human Participants, Data and Tissue’: [www.sheffield.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/ethicspolicy](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/ethicspolicy)
- Subject to the above-named project being ethically approved I will undertake to ensure that the student adheres to any ethics conditions that may be set.
- The student or the Supervisor will undertake to inform the Ethics Administrator of significant changes to the above-named project that have ethical consequences.
- The student or the Supervisor will undertake to inform the Ethics Administrator if prospective participants make a complaint about the above-named project.
- I understand that personal data about the student and/or myself on the research ethics application form will be held by those involved in the ethics review process (e.g. the Ethics Administrator and/or reviewers) 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 and/or the student wish to appeal against the decision made, this must be done through the original department.

Name of Supervisor: **insert name**

Name of student: **insert name**

**Signature of Supervisor:** [sign here]

**Date:** **insert date**
Appendix 2
Participant information sheet
University of Sheffield
20th April 2012

Participant Information Sheet

Research Project Title:
An exploration of the use of reflective practice by library and information staff to support their everyday practice and continuing development.

Invitation
You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the following information and discuss with others if you wish. Ask for further information if you need it, or if anything is unclear. Take time to consider whether or not you wish to take part.

Aim of the project
The overall aim of the project is to explore the use of reflection by staff in the library and information sector to support their everyday practice and continuing development. It is hoped that the information gained in the study will enable the researcher to find out how widespread the practice of reflection is amongst staff in the library and information sector and to highlight any benefits and/or barriers to its use.

Why have I been chosen?
You have been chosen to take part because you work in the library and information sector.

Do I have to take part?
Participation in the research is voluntary and refusal to agree to participate will involve no penalty. You may withdraw from the research at any time without giving a reason or incurring any penalty. You will be given this consent form to keep and be asked to sign a consent form if you agree to participate.

What will happen to me if I take part?
If you agree to take part, we will arrange a convenient time for an interview to take place at your workplace. This should last no longer than an hour and will involve open and closed questions. You can refuse to answer any of the questions if you wish.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?
It is hoped that this research will benefit staff working in the library and information sector by highlighting the benefits of, and barriers to, reflective practice.
What if something goes wrong?
If you have any concerns, or wish to make a complaint about your participation in this project you should initially contact:
Barbara Sen – b.a.sen@sheffield.ac.uk

If this does not resolve your complaint you should contact the University’s Registrar and Secretary,
Tel: 0114 222 1100
e-mail registrar@sheffield.ac.uk

Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?
An audio recording will be made of the interview, which will be later transcribed in order to analyse the data. Interview recordings will be kept safely and destroyed when the research project is complete. All the information that is collected about you during the course of the research will filed safely. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications.

What type of information will be sought from me?
You will be asked for information about your role at work, length of service in the library and information sector and your views and experience of reflective practice.

What will happen to the results of the research project?
The research project is being carried out in order to fulfil the requirements for an M.A. in Librarianship and the dissertation will be available at the University library.

Who has ethically reviewed the project?
This project has been ethically approved by the Information School’s ethics review procedure, which is monitored by the University’s Research Ethics Committee.

For further information contact:

Judith Greenall by email at j.greenall1@sheffield.ac.uk
Or Barbara Sen by email at b.a.sen@sheffield.ac.uk
By telephone: 0114 222 2630
By post: Information School, Regent Court, 211, Portobello Street, Sheffield S1 4DP

You will be given a copy of this information sheet to keep along with your signed consent form.

Thank you for taking part in this project.
Appendix 3
Consent form
Title of Research Project: An exploration of the use of reflective practice by library and information staff to support their everyday practice and continuing development.

Name of Researcher: Judith Greenall

**Participant Identification Number for this project:**

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated / explaining the research project and I have had 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.

   Judith Greenall can be contacted by email at jgreenall1@sheffield.ac.uk

   Barbara Sen can be contacted by email at b.a.sen@sheffield.ac.uk

3. I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential.

   I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.

4. I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research

5. I agree to take part in the above research project.

________________________________________________________________________
Name of Participant Date Signature

________________________________________________________________________
Name of person taking consent Date Signature

________________________________________________________________________
Lead Researcher Date Signature
Appendix 4
Ethics letter of approval
Information School Research Ethics Panel

Letter of Approval

Date: 13th June 2013

TO: Judith Greenall

The Information School Research Ethics Panel has examined the following application:

Title: An exploration of the use of reflective practice by library and information staff to support their everyday practice and continuing development.

Submitted by: Judith Greenall

And found the proposed research involving human participants to be in accordance with the University of Sheffield’s policies and procedures, which include the University’s ‘Financial Regulations’, ‘Good Research Practice Standards’ and the ‘Ethics Policy Governing Research Involving Human Participants, Personal Data and Human Tissue’ (Ethics Policy).

This letter is the official record of ethics approval by the School, and should accompany any formal requests for evidence of research ethics approval.

Effective Date: 25th April 2012

Dr Angela Lin
Research Ethics Coordinator
Appendix 5
Changes to questionnaire
Appendix 5

Changes to questionnaire

A number of minor alterations were made to the questionnaire as a result of pre-testing. These were as follows:

• More explanation was added at the start about the structure of the survey.
• The definition of reflective practice was enhanced to indicate that it was something that could be done individually, in pairs or in a group.
• For questions 1, 2 and 3, an additional response of ‘sometimes’ was added to the original ‘yes’ and ‘no’.
• For questions 6 and 14, the word ‘ever’ was added, making the questions: ‘Have you ever had training in reflective practice/writing?’
• In question 17, which related to length of service, the final banding was removed and replaced by ‘over 25 years’.
Appendix 6
Questionnaire – final version
This research is being carried out as part of an MA in Librarianship at the University of Sheffield. The aim is to explore the use of reflection by library and information staff.

Section 1 is concerned with reflective practice in general. Section 2 focusses on reflective writing. Definitions are given at the start of each section.

Although the questions for each section are similar and, in some cases the same, this is to ascertain if there are different views on, and experiences of, different types of reflection.

The survey should take between 10 and 20 minutes to complete.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. By completing the survey you give your consent for the data collected to be used in the research. The identity of survey participants will be anonymised for analysis and data processing. Data will be stored safely and destroyed appropriately.

If you have any questions please contact:

Judith Greenall: jgreenall1@sheffield.ac.uk
or Barbara Sen: b.a.sen@sheffield.ac.uk
Reflective practice is an activity undertaken by professionals to enable them to deal with complex situations by evaluating actual or possible events or scenarios to gain insight and learn from experience. This could involve the individual thinking alone about some aspect of their practice, or it may take place within a group discussion with colleagues or be part of a dialogue with another person.

1. Do you consider yourself to be a reflective practitioner?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Sometimes

2. Do you consciously spend time reflecting on your professional practice?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Sometimes

3. Do you consciously determine how the outcome of this reflection will affect your current or future practice?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Sometimes
4. Do you consider any of the following to be benefits of engaging in reflective practice? (Select all that apply)

- Continuing Professional Development
- Learning from significant incidents
- Learning from training or educational opportunities
- Identification of gaps in skills and knowledge
- Identification of personal strengths and weaknesses
- Identification of goals
- Increasing knowledge
- Increasing understanding
- Linking theory and practice
- Improving planning of future actions
- Improving professional judgements
- Improving critical thinking
- Solving dilemmas
- Achieving perspective
- Achieving clarity
- Expression of emotions
- Stress management
- Understanding the perspective of others
- Improving working relationships
- Improving professional practice
- Identification of need to change
- Catalyst for change
- Personal empowerment
- Emancipation
- Self-development
- Appreciation of achievements
- Sharing experiences with others
- Demonstrating professional practice to others

Other (please specify)
5. Do you consider any of the following to be barriers to engaging in reflective practice? (Select all that apply)

- Lack of time
- Lack of knowledge
- Lack of guidance
- Lack of training
- Lack of skill
- Lack of experience
- Lack of motivation
- Concerns about confidentiality
- No perceived benefits of reflection
- Negative impact on self-esteem
- Unwillingness to focus on emotions
- Unwillingness to admit mistakes
- Fear of repercussions
- Not supported by organisational culture

Other (please specify)
6. Have you ever had any training in reflective practice?
   - Yes
   - No

7. Please give any other comments about reflective practice.
Reflective writing is a way of recording reflections, which can be paper or electronic, and can be completed regularly or irregularly. It should involve analysis and evaluation of events from different perspectives and include plans for future actions resulting from the reflection.

8. Do you engage in reflective writing?

☐ Yes
☐ No
9. What form does this reflective writing take?
- Paper
- Electronic
- Paper and electronic

10. Is your reflective writing
- Private?
- Public?
- Shared with specific individuals?

11. Why do you undertake reflective writing?
- To fulfill the requirements of your workplace
- To fulfill the requirements of your course of study
- To fulfill the requirements of a CILIP qualification
- For your own purposes

Other (please specify):

[Box for entering text]
12. Do you consider any of the following to be benefits of engaging in reflective writing? (Select all that apply)

- Continuing Professional Development
- Learning from significant incidents
- Learning from training or educational opportunities
- Identification of gaps in skills and knowledge
- Identification of personal strengths and weaknesses
- Identification of goals
- Increasing knowledge
- Increasing understanding
- Linking theory and practice
- Improving planning of future actions
- Improving professional judgements
- Improving critical thinking
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- Identification of need to change
- Catalyst for change
- Personal empowerment
- Emancipation
- Self-development
- Appreciation of achievements
- Sharing experiences with others
- Demonstrating professional practice to others

Other (please specify)
13. Do you consider any of the following to be barriers to engaging in reflective writing?
(Select all that apply)

- Lack of time
- Lack of knowledge
- Lack of guidance
- Lack of training
- Lack of skill
- Lack of experience
- Lack of motivation
- Concerns about confidentiality
- No perceived benefits of reflection
- Negative impact on self-esteem
- Unwillingness to focus on emotions
- Unwillingness to admit mistakes
- Fear of repercussions
- Not supported by organisational culture

Other (please specify)
14. Have you ever had any training in reflective writing?
- Yes
- No

15. Please give any other comments about reflective writing.
Section 3 Demographic information

16. In which sector are you employed? (Please select the main area of employment)

- Public
- School
- Higher education
- Further education
- Charity
- Prison
- Commercial
- Legal
- Scientific
- Financial
- Independent/Private
- Government
- Health
- Local studies
- Patent and trademark
- Aerospace and defence

Other (please specify)
17. How long have you been employed in the library and information sector?

- Less than 5 years
- 5-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 16-20 years
- 21-25 years
- over 25 years

18. Would you be willing to participate in a face-to-face or telephone interview to discuss reflective practice in more depth?

- Yes
- No
19. Please provide your contact details below, including name, telephone number, email address and county.
Thank you very much for participating in this research.
Appendix 7
Access to dissertation
Access to Dissertation

A Dissertation submitted to the University may be held by the Department (or School) within which the Dissertation was undertaken and made available for borrowing or consultation in accordance with University Regulations.

Requests for the loan of dissertations may be received from libraries in the UK and overseas. The Department may also receive requests from other organisations, as well as individuals. The conservation of the original dissertation is better assured if the Department and/or Library can fulfill such requests by sending a copy. The Department may also make your dissertation available via its web pages.

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**Name**  
Judith Greenall

**Department**  
Information Studies

**Signed**  
J. Greenall  
**Date**  
6.8.13

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**Department**

**Signed**  
**Date**

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