Overdue Books and Library Fines at the University of Sheffield: Student and Staff Perspectives

A study submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MA Librarianship

at

THE UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD

by

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September 2014
Abstract

Background
Libraries have limited resources and so must try to ensure fair and equitable access to those resources. They do this by adopting policies that encourage the return of books on time and the circulation of stock to all users. However, some of the measures used are unpopular with users and there is little evidence in the literature as to what is effective.

Aims
This study aimed to investigate the attitudes and opinions of students and staff at the University of Sheffield towards overdue books and library fines. It examined the reasons why students return their library books late, whether current library policies are effective and opinions on suggested improvements to current policies.

Methods
The study followed a mixed methods approach. An online survey of students was developed based on the instrument from a previous study. 79 responses were received. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five members of library staff.

Results
The most common reasons for returning books late reported were forgetfulness, being unable to get to the library and still needing to use the book. The students felt that current library policies were coherent and clear. Automatic weekly renewal of books was popular. Fines were not popular but were largely perceived as fair because they are only charged on requested books. Several possible improvements to current policies were assessed and evaluated. These included: purchasing more e-books; using text message reminders; and a rewards scheme for users who return their books on time.

Conclusions
As a result of the study findings, some recommendations have been made for the University of Sheffield library. These were to purchase and promote e-books where possible, to investigate using text message reminders for overdue books and to consider implementing a rewards scheme. Further research might focus on the issue of overdues and library fines in other UK university libraries.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor Barbara Sen for her advice and support.

Thanks are due to Alison Little, Lynn Sykes and Maria Mawson at the University of Sheffield Library for their assistance. I also wish to thank the students and library staff who took the time to answer my questions.

Finally, thank you to my family, who have supported me and provided endless cups of tea throughout my studies.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This research project investigates the attitudes of the students and staff of the University of Sheffield towards overdue books and library fines in academic libraries. A mixed methods approach is used, comprising an online survey of students and semi-structured interviews with library staff. This approach allows both user and staff perspectives on the issue to be considered when drawing conclusions. This chapter introduces and examines the context of the research. The research aims and objectives are then set out.

1.2 Research background

Although a few academic libraries have become “bookless”, the vast majority are hybrid and still provide a range of both physical and electronic resources to their users (“Bookless library opened by new US university,” 2014). The number and availability of e-resources is constantly expanding but studies have found that many users do still prefer print resources, especially for books and textbooks (Daniel & Woody, 2013; Woody, Daniel, & Baker, 2010; Zha, Li, & Yan, 2012). As such, academic libraries must continue to meet the needs of these users.

However, academic libraries can struggle to make print copies of books available to their users. There are lots of students who are often competing for the same books at the same times. Constraints on budgets and space mean it is not feasible for libraries to buy multiple copies of many books. University libraries in the UK have been affected by the global recession and many have experienced budget cuts or budget stagnation (Jubb, 2010). Many academic libraries also have “big deal” subscriptions for their e-resources: this means that when budgets are tight it is much easier to cut funding for the print collection rather than start complicated license negotiations for e-journals (Jubb, 2010). Academic libraries are forced by these economic constraints to focus on sharing resources and ensuring equitable access for all their users (McMenemy, 2010). Measures to ensure that library books are returned on time have to be employed.

There is a concern in academic libraries that today’s students have increased customer service expectations of libraries and the resources they should provide (Mosley,
This is considered especially the case for students from England, Wales and Northern Ireland since the rise in undergraduate student fees in 2012 (Bates & Kaye, 2013). UK academic libraries need to be sensitive to any factor that could affect the perception of their services, as revealed through assessment measures like the National Student Survey. UK academic students are often less willing to purchase core textbooks than their US counterparts and so access to these resources can become an issue for university libraries (Jubb, 2010).

Academic libraries are thus under pressure to share out access to finite resources effectively to meet user expectations. One measure often employed by libraries is to fine users who return their books late. However, this is naturally unpopular with users and can be stressful to enforce for staff who simply want to ensure fair circulation of material for all library users. The issue of academic library fines has more recently attracted negative publicity in the media (Beard, 2009; Buchanan, 2013; “Universities collected £50m in library fines, figures show,” 2012). In addition to the general unpopularity of fines, the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) announced in February 2014 that the common practice of universities withholding graduation until outstanding debts (including library fines) are paid may be illegal (Office of Fair Trading, 2014). This was the result of a complaint from the National Union of Students and was discussed widely in the national and student press (BBC News, 2014; Moors, 2014; NUS News, 2014; Walker, 2014). Academic libraries have had to consider the issue of overdues policies and specifically their policies on library fines in response to the OFT announcement.

Despite the importance of these issues to library users and the day-to-day running of libraries, there is little literature on the issue of overdue books and library fines. Only one previous study of the issue in UK academic libraries could be found, a study by Davies of the attitudes of students and staff at the University of Leeds (2012). The present study is modelled on Davies’ research to allow for comparison and hopefully contribute to the wider picture of the issue of overdues and library fines at academic libraries in the UK. It is hoped that this will help to address the gap in the literature and benefit both library users and staff.

1.3 The University of Sheffield context

This research has been carried out at the University of Sheffield, a Russell Group university with 25,664 students in the 2013/14 academic year (The University of Sheffield, 2004).
2013). The university charges undergraduates the maximum allowed £9000 a year in tuition fees. The university library has five library sites, 3 on-campus and 2 off-site, with a sixth library opening in September 2015 (The University of Sheffield Library, 2014b). Soon after the OFT announcement, the library organised a focus group and survey of students asking about their attitudes to overdue books and fines (The University of Sheffield Library: Librarians’ Blog for Social Sciences, 2014): students were asked if they would prefer students with overdue books to be fined, blocked from taking out more material, or both of these options. The University library has also relatively recently implemented a new library management system (Ex Libris Alma) which allows books to be automatically renewed unless requested. This functionality had not been available with their previous library management system. Library staff are currently investigating how to change overdues policy with the aim of reducing fines as much as possible while maintaining circulation, with the eventual aim of achieving “zero fines” (A. Little, personal communication, July 2, 2014). This is also the current aim of another member of the White Rose consortium of libraries, the University of York (The University of York Library, 2014). A study of student and staff attitudes towards overdue books and library fines at the University of Sheffield is therefore timely and could help evaluate current measures and make recommendations for improvements.

Although this research is modelled on Davies’ (2012) study, there are some differences due to the overdues policies in place at the University of Sheffield Library being different from those that were in place at the University of Leeds in 2012. Currently at Sheffield, books are automatically renewed unless another patron requests them. If the item is requested, the book is recalled by the library. If a recalled item is not returned on time, fines then accrue at the rate of £2 a day and users are blocked from borrowing more items once they reach a limit of £20. Email reminders are sent out two days before an item becomes overdue and if an item is requested by another user. Email summaries of students’ accounts are sent out weekly and display the due dates of all items. A “dynamic loan” system is in place so that requested books are automatically loaned for shorter periods to meet demand (The University of Sheffield Library, 2014a).
1.4 Research aims and objectives

This study aims to investigate the attitudes and opinions of students and staff towards overdue books and library fines in academic libraries. The research aims and objectives closely mirror those of Davies (2012) in her research to allow for comparison.

To achieve the research aims, the following research objectives were identified:

1. To identify why library users return items late
2. To find out users’ feelings and opinions on overdues
3. To ascertain student and staff attitudes to current overdues policy
4. To ascertain student and staff attitudes to possible changes to the University of Sheffield’s overdues policy
5. To compare student and staff attitudes on overdues to allow for an overarching perspective on the issue

1.5 Structure of dissertation

This dissertation takes the structure of six chapters including this introduction. In Chapter 2, the literature around the issue of overdues is reviewed, including the reasons why users return books overdue and attitudes towards policies to prevent this. Chapter 3 is concerned with the methodology used in this study and discusses the rationale for the methods chosen as well as practical issues such as research ethics approval. In Chapter 4, the findings of the research are presented. The fifth chapter analyses and discusses these results in relation to the research aims and objectives laid out here in Chapter 1. Finally, Chapter 6 briefly summarises and draws conclusions from the research, identifying areas for further research.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

There is very little literature on overdues and library fines in academic libraries in the UK (Barber, 2005; Davies, 2012). Recent research has mainly come from the US and Canada (Armour, 2012; Harris, Obrig, & Lyons, 2011; Reed, Blackburn, & Sifton, 2014; Rupp, Sweetman, & Perry, 2010; Sung & Tolppanen, 2013). There are several studies from Nigeria (Ajayi & Okunlola, 2005; Edewor, 2010; Emojorho, 2004; Udoumoh & Okoro, 2007) and other developing countries (Bhatt, 2011; Murugathas, 2009). Other research has focused on library fines in general (McMenemy, 2010; Mitchell, 1988) or on the issues faced by public libraries (Burek Pierce, 2006; Hansel & Burgin, 1983; Jerome, 2012; Sifton, 2009).

There are a few studies that analyse circulation data to see if overdues policies are effective (Hansel & Burgin, 1983; Shontz, 1999; Sung & Tolppanen, 2013). Most research has used surveys to investigate library users and their attitudes to overdues (Alao, 2002; Anderson, 2008; Murugathas, 2009; Udoumoh & Okoro, 2007) and their attitudes towards library fines in particular (Adomi, 2003; Ajayi & Okunlola, 2005; Anderson, 2008; Bhatt, 2011; Edewor, 2010). The views of library staff are rarely considered in the literature, although some studies do mention staff feedback anecdotally. Apart from the research by Davies at the University of Leeds, only one study has sought staff input as part of their research methodology (Davies, 2012; Reed et al., 2014). Some recent studies have used a mixed methods approach combining analysis of circulation data and feedback from users (Wang, Ke, & Lu, 2012) or staff (Reed et al., 2014).

2.2 Libraries and overdues policy

All libraries need a policy in place to deal with the problem of overdue materials (Adomi, 2003). Libraries have a duty to provide fair and equal access to their resources (Jerome, 2012; McMenemy, 2010). Policies need to reduce the numbers of books that are returned overdue as a way to increase the availability of resources to all users (Mitchell & Smith, 2006, p.1).

The economic downturn has worsened circulation issues in some academic libraries as library users are less able to afford to buy core textbooks or pay fines (Ajayi & Okunlola, 2005, p.185). Nonetheless, it is broadly agreed that in many academic libraries circulation
of physical stock is falling rapidly, due to the increasing use and number of online resources (Mosley, 2004; Reed et al., 2014; Rupp et al., 2010). There is widespread consensus in the literature that what librarians want most is library stock returned (Mitchell, 2000; Mitchell & Smith, 2006; Mosley, 2004; Reed et al., 2014; Rupp et al., 2010). However, users have increased expectations of customer service in libraries which affects the measures libraries can take in dealing with overdue items (Mosley, 2004). This is the case in UK academic libraries where the increase in student fees is also thought to have increased expectations.

The lack of evidence available to librarians seeking to reduce their overdue rates is a common area of discussion (Anderson, 2008; Hansel & Burgin, 1983; Mitchell & Smith, 2006). Trying new methods and policies is difficult while still running a library (Mitchell, 1988, p.88). It is difficult to compare data between institutions as policies at different libraries vary greatly (Anderson, 2008, p.27). Reed, Blackburn and Sifton (2014) suggest that more research should be done to evaluate policies so as to support evidence-based librarianship (p.6). Consulting users and library staff when formulating circulation policy is recommended (Mosley, 2004, p.13).

### 2.3 Library users and overdues

There are many case studies in the literature that investigate why users return library items overdue. Davies (2012) is the only study from an academic library in the UK and reports that the main reason identified is forgetfulness. This is supported by a study in New Zealand, which also found that still needing the item in question was the second most common reason (Anderson, 2008). Other studies found that still needing the item was the most common reason for returning books late (Alao, 2002; Murugathas, 2009).

Alternative reasons for returning items late include: illness (Alao, 2002); not being at university (Alao, 2002; Anderson, 2008); and not understanding the renewal process (Anderson, 2008; Murugathas, 2009). Additionally, Anderson suggests having misplaced/lost the item and being reluctant to face library staff (2008, p.63). Survey respondents may not be honest about their reasons, especially if it would portray them negatively. Adomi (2003) argues that many users return items late due to “greediness or lack of consideration for others” (p.20).

Users’ feelings in relation to overdue items and fines vary but there are common themes. Annoyance is reported as the main emotion users experience by Anderson (2008). The author highlights that it is unclear whether this annoyance is directed at themselves or
towards the library (p.99); this issue is also mentioned by Davies (2012). Other frequent responses are guilt, worry and stress (Ajayi & Okunlola, 2005; Davies, 2012; Jerome, 2012). There are some users who are not concerned about overdues or fines but they are considered a minority (Ajayi & Okunlola, 2005; Anderson, 2008; Davies, 2012).

2.4 Methods to maintain circulation

2.4.1 Fines

Using fines to encourage the return of overdue items is the most common method reported. Library fines are a “global phenomenon” used in all library sectors (Bhatt, 2011, p.407). In UK academic libraries, a survey found that over 96% used fines (Barber, 2005) although this survey is now dated. Fines provide an incentive to return library materials on time and so ensure circulation (McMenemy, 2010). However, their use is controversial (Reed et al., 2014, p.275) and there is little evidence they are actually effective (Bhatt, 2011, p.407). Library users see fines as a way for libraries to make money and this is very unpopular (Beard, 2009; Edewor, 2010; “Universities collected £50m in library fines, figures show,” 2012). Fines are also unpopular with many library staff who do not want to be seen as “book cops” (Reed et al., 2014, p.276).

An area of discussion is whether fines are cost-effective. The increasing use of e-resources has reduced circulation of physical items at many libraries, which has led to a drop in fines revenue (Reed et al., 2014, p.276). A fines system can cost a lot to administer, especially if the fines are only small amounts (Eberhart, 1999, p.75). Some studies have reported that their fine systems had actually been running at loss (Mitchell, 2000; Mosley, 2004).

There is debate as to whether fines are ethical (Jerome, 2012; Mitchell, 1988). McMenemy (2010) argues that fines encourage users to be “community-minded” and that they enable equitable access to library resources (p.80). Others worry that fines are a “barrier to access” and that a library should not impede access to information (Reed et al., 2014). Library fines disproportionately affect the less wealthy and could be considered a barrier to widening participation in institutions such as universities (Barber, 2005).

User attitudes to fines are frequently investigated with mixed results. Fines are often portrayed negatively in the mainstream and student media (BBC News, 2014; Buchanan, 2013; Moors, 2014). Davies (2012) investigated student attitudes at the
University of Leeds and found that although fines were disliked, 51% thought that they were effective in preventing overdues (p. 34). Generally, library users do feel that library fines are effective (Ajayi & Okunlola, 2005; Anderson, 2008; Bhatt, 2011; Murugathas, 2009). However, it is difficult to generalise from these studies as to wider user attitudes towards fines; policies vary so much that it may be a specific policy that is unpopular as opposed to fines per se. However, there does seem to be a broader theme in the literature that while users dislike paying fines they do still think they are effective in general.

There is disagreement as to whether fines are effective at reducing the rates of overdue items. Overdues rates may be affected by fines but also other aspects of circulation policy such as loan periods (Mosley, 2004, p. 13.) It has been demonstrated that if fines are too low they will not act as a deterrent (Adomi, 2003; Bhatt, 2011); many users are willing to pay fines if they still need the item (Edewor, 2010). A recent study of the effectiveness of library fines in academic libraries analysed circulation data from two similar US universities, one who used fines and one who did not: fines only had a significant effect on staff users (Sung & Tolppanen, 2013).

2.4.2 “Zero Fines”

Some studies have reported on libraries that have moved to a minimal or “zero fines” system (Mitchell, 2000; Mosley, 2004; Reed et al., 2014; Rupp et al., 2010). The precise policy used varies but generally fines are only charged on items that have been overdue for a set period e.g. 30 days. After this period, users are charged the replacement cost for the item and a processing fee (Reed et al., 2014; Rupp et al., 2010). This method has been recommended as popular with users (Mosley, 2004; Reed et al., 2014). A recent survey of large research universities in the US found that eighteen out of thirty one respondents did not charge overdue fines for standard loan material (Armour, 2012). Previous studies have found that removing fines has only a small or no effect on return rates but this effect was deemed acceptable due to the increased user goodwill (Reed et al., 2014; Rupp et al., 2010). However, these studies did not formally collect user feedback so the evidence is only anecdotal.

2.4.3 Alternative methods

Making it easier for users to renew items is recommended, especially online (Alao, 2002). Automatic renewals for items that have not been requested by other users is
effective and fairer: users are not charged for forgetfulness but only for depriving other users (Anderson, 2008; Davies, 2012). Promoting e-resources where they are available can help take the pressure off physical circulation but this will not suit all users (Davies, 2012, p.61). Increasing the length of loan periods is recommended where automatic renewal is not possible (Shontz, 1999, p.83). Library accounts can be blocked when charges are incurred. Users can be blocked from renewing, borrowing further items, accessing e-resources or even accessing systems such as university registration (Mitchell & Smith, 2006; Rupp et al., 2010). Overdues systems can be set up which use points instead of fines; users get points on their account for returning items late and are blocked for a period of time if they accrue too many (Barber, 2005). Unsurprisingly, punitive methods like these are often unpopular with users (Alao, 2002, p.296).

Fines amnesties have been recommended: during the amnesty, library items can be returned and any fines will be waived (Sifton, 2009, p.2). Another possibility is a “Food bank” scheme where students can pay off fines by donating items for a local charity (Harris et al., 2011). A system of positive reinforcement was trialled by Mitchell and Smith (2006) where users who returned books on time were entered into a prize draw for gift vouchers. The authors report that the scheme was popular with users but no effect on overdues rates was shown.

Reminder notices are an effective method to encourage returns (Mitchell & Smith, 2006; Murugathas, 2009). Reminders are usually sent by email but SMS text reminders are suggested as a possible way to encourage returns (Davies, 2012, p.62). Some academic libraries already use text reminders and they have proven popular (Anderson, 2008; Wang et al., 2012). Studies in academic libraries in the UK have shown that users want and expect these sorts of services from their library (Paterson & Low, 2011; Walsh, 2010). A study in Taiwan of circulation data found that students who signed up for text reminders had significantly reduced rates of overdue items and that their average fine was reduced (Wang et al., 2012).

Making users aware of overdues policy is widely agreed to be important (Adomi, 2003; Ajayi & Okunlola, 2005; Murugathas, 2009). Library staff need to make sure that users understand the system (Adomi, 2003, p.24). New library members should be informed of these policies during inductions (Ajayi & Okunlola, 2005, p.192) and policies should be publicised to users to reinforce knowledge (Davies, 2012, p.62).
2.4.4 Psychological considerations

Library staff need to be aware when creating circulation policies of the psychological effects of their choices (Mitchell, 1988, p.88). A study of daycare centres in Israel found that when fines were introduced for collecting children late the rates of late collection actually rose (Gneezy & Rustichini, 2000). This is attributed to the fine being seen as a price for a service, where previously being late was a selfish act against the daycare workers. In a similar way, library fines could be seen by users as a hire charge for extended use (Barber, 2005, p.61). This effect is decreased if fines are large (Lin & Yang, 2006) but this would be unpopular with users. Anderson (2008) surveyed students at a New Zealand academic library and 62.33% said that they saw fines as a punishment and not as a “hire charge” (p.108). However, there may be a difference in how students report feeling and how they actually behave.

Another consideration for library staff is that any library policies need to be effective but also acceptable to a majority of their users. People tend to obey social norms (Lin & Yang, 2006). A tipping point can be reached where as more people violate a rule it becomes more acceptable to do so (Holmås, Kjerstad, Lurås, & Straume, 2010). Therefore libraries must be careful to maintain the support of most users to enable the system to work. Unpopular rules will be very difficult to enforce (Shontz, 1999, p.84).

2.5 Conclusions

There is relatively little literature about overdue library books and little evidence for librarians to draw upon. Most research is survey based and looks at user attitudes; there has also been some analysis of circulation data to evaluate policies. The views of library staff have rarely been considered and interviews have been seldom used. Research is mainly from America or Nigeria and coverage of other areas is sparse. Davies’ study in 2012 is the only recent research into overdues in UK academic libraries. There is a clear gap in the literature for further research into overdues and fines in UK academic libraries, especially into user and staff attitudes as this could assist library staff in creating effective policies.
Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Mixed methods

This research followed the mixed methods approach used by Davies (2012) to allow for some comparison between the two sets of results. Mixed methods research collects and combines both qualitative and quantitative data, allowing the researcher to use “all the tools of data collection available” to gain insight into the research problem (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p.12). In this study, quantitative data was collected by means of a survey of University of Sheffield students and qualitative data was collected by means of semi-structured interviews with University of Sheffield library staff.

Using more than one research method can allow the researcher to gain “a more complete understanding of a research problem” (Cresswell, 2014, p.19) and can be used to develop an “holistic account” of an issue (Cresswell, 2014, p.186). This makes it an appropriate methodology for this study as it seeks to understand the perspectives of both library users and library staff on the issue of overdues and library fines. Using multiple research methods allows for triangulation of the data, as the limitations of one method can mitigate against those of the other, and vice versa (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p.8).

Pragmatism as a research paradigm underpins this study. Pragmatism focuses on the research question and the outcome rather than the specific methods to be used (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p.41). It can integrate both qualitative and quantitative research (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p.13) and so enables a “pluralistic approach” (Cresswell, 2014, p.11). This worldview allows more than one research method to be used and at different times if necessary (Cresswell, 2014, p.10). Pragmatism is practical and ultimately focused not on a particular view of the world but with “what works” for a given situation (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p.41).

This study employs a convergent mixed methods design (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p.77). Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected at the same time but separately; the data were also analysed separately. The results were then compared and interpreted to highlight similarities and tensions which allowed a deeper understanding of the research question.

It is frequently found in the literature that a mixed methods approach entails using qualitative and quantitative methods on the same population (Cresswell, 2014, p.15). Following Davies’ methodology (2012) necessitated applying a quantitative method to one
population (students) and a qualitative method to another population (staff). This is an acceptable methodology when the researcher is “trying to synthesize information on a topic from different levels of participants” (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p.180), as is the case in this study. Using different methods on two different samples makes it more difficult to compare data directly but still adds to the depth and richness of the data as a whole.

Using two research methods within one study raises the issue of where the balance between the two methods will fall. With this study, the survey was always likely to have more participants than the interview stage and this was in fact the case. However, this is not a limitation of the mixed methods approach. Different sample sizes between the methods is acceptable because the “intent of the data gathering” is different for each method (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p.184).

3.2 User surveys

An online survey was created using Google Forms. An email with a link to the survey was sent out to students at the University of Sheffield using a pre-existing student volunteers mailing list. Participants had to be logged in with a University of Sheffield email address before they could complete the survey.

A survey was used as it is an appropriate method when seeking to “understand the views of participants in an entire population” (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p.8). An online survey was used as it is an appropriate tool for surveying large populations (Ekman, Dickman, Klint, Weiderpass, & Litton, 2006); there were 25,644 students at the University of Sheffield in the 2013/14 academic year (The University of Sheffield, 2013). The benefits of online surveys are that they are cheap, quick, efficient and can store data automatically, reducing the time needed for data entry (Sue & Ritter, 2007, p.7).

An online survey is completed by the participant on their own, which means that responses cannot be influenced by the researcher as in face-to-face questionnaires (Gillham, 2000, p.8). It also allows “greater anonymity” for the participants than other methods (Pickard, 2013, p.224) which means they are more likely to feel comfortable to give honest answers (Sue & Ritter, 2007, p.5). An online survey was also the most practical choice as there was already a mailing list to recruit participants. All students are automatically signed up to this mailing list with their student email account, although they can opt out. This was a quick and easy way to access a large number of students.
Surveys do have several limitations. Low response rate can be an issue with all questionnaires (Pickard, 2013, p.208). “Survey fatigue” can set in, especially with frequently surveyed groups such as university students (Porter, Whitcomb, & Weitzer, 2004). There is a risk of “response bias”, where only people with strong views on an issue are likely to participate; this could lead to unrepresentative results (Cresswell, 2014, p.162). It is possible that one individual could respond multiple times or that people outside the desired population could complete the questionnaire (Pickard, 2013, p.222). As the researcher is not present, explanations of questions cannot be given if participants are unclear. An online survey also limits your sample to those who have access to the internet (Pickard, 2013, p.223). However, online access is not generally an issue for students. Similarly, the survey was piloted to ensure questions were clear and it was expected that students at a UK university would have sufficient English language skills.

The survey used was a modified version of Davies’ paper survey (2012); alterations were made due to the different overdues policy in place at the University of Sheffield and to introduce ideas found in the literature. This survey was piloted with postgraduate students from the researcher’s course at Sheffield, who covered a range of ages and nationalities. Eight surveys were completed and no issues were raised with the clarity or wording of the questions. Pilot results were then excluded from the final data. Demographic, behavioural and attitudinal questions were asked in a variety of formats (yes/no, agree/disagree, multiple choice) to sustain the interest of respondents (Pickard, 2013, p.210). Two open questions were also included to allow for richer, more descriptive data to be collected (Pickard, 2013, p.219).

The survey was sent out to all students who were signed up the Sheffield student volunteers mailing list. A self-selecting sample produces poorer data as the sample may not be representative (Cresswell, 2014, p.158). However, it is quick, practical and can work well in mixed methods research (Sue & Ritter, 2007, p.6). The survey was sent out on 04/07/14 and was accessible for two weeks. The timing was not ideal as term had finished and many undergraduate students had already gone home. Students who had just finished their courses would have had to pay off their library fines before they could graduate; this could have influenced some responses. Negative media coverage of library fines in relation to the Office of Fair Trading announcement last year (Walker, 2014) could also have influenced responses. These issues need to be considered when interpreting the results.
3.3 Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with University of Sheffield library staff. Interviews are often used in library and information science research as they allow rich qualitative data to be collected (Pickard, 2013, p.205). The semi-structured interview uses a set of core questions but the interviewer is free to probe and ask follow up questions if necessary; this sort of interview is useful when investigating “complex issues” and people’s perceptions and opinions (Barriball & While, 1994, p.330). Semi-structured interviews rely on the skill of the interviewer and their ability to develop a rapport with the interviewee (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). An interview is not a natural setting so there is a risk that the interviewer may influence the interviewee’s responses (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p.190). The responses of library staff may also have been affected by the negative media coverage of library fines and the Office of Fair Trading announcement (Walker, 2014). This was considered when interpreting the results.

The study was carried out with the permission of library management. Changes were made to the introductory emails for the survey and interviews at their request to make it clear that this was not a library project but a piece of external research. Changes to the wording of the survey were also suggested and carried out. These changes were superficial and have not appeared to negatively affect the study. Library staff were recruited for interview using a mailing list for customer service library staff; an email was sent to selected academic library staff by a library staff member.

A pilot interview was carried out to check the clarity and flow of the questions and to test recording equipment. The pilot interview was not included in the final results. The core questions for the interviews covered the same topics as the student survey. As suggested by Davies (2012, p.21), questions were emailed to participants in advance to allow them to prepare if they wished. Interviews were recorded and then transcribed by the researcher.

3.4 Research ethics

The topic of library overdues and fines is not a particularly sensitive one. However, as Pickard (2013) states, any questions about a person’s perceptions and behaviour may possibly have an adverse effect on participants (p.93). All participants were informed of the subject and purpose of the study before taking part. They were all over eighteen and no
compensation was offered for participation. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. It was emphasised that this study was not an official project by the library but a piece of research for an MA dissertation.

Students completing the survey were given information about the research before starting. They gave their consent by ticking the consent box before being shown the first question. Contact details for the researcher were provided if participants had any questions about the research; no questions were received. Responses were anonymous: no identifying information was collected at any stage. A limited amount of demographic information was collected but not enough for participants to be identifiable. Respondents were informed that they could close the browser at any time and their responses would not be stored. Only the researcher had access to the survey data on a password protected Google Drive and laptop.

Interviewees were emailed the ethics form before the interviews to read over. They were also informed of the purpose of the research and given the core questions they would be asked. Just before the interview, they were given an ethics form to read over and were asked to sign the consent form. Interviews were carried out in private rooms and recorded. All interviews were confidential: no names or identifying details were recorded and none were used when presenting the results. Recordings and transcriptions were only accessible to the researcher on a password protected laptop.

This research was approved by the Information School Research Ethics Panel at the University of Sheffield and was classed as low risk (see Appendix 1 for ethics documentation).

### 3.5 Data analysis

Survey responses were automatically stored in a Google Form. This data was exported to Microsoft Excel and SPSS for analysis. Tables, charts and graphs were created using the quantitative data. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise the data. It is not strictly possible to use inferential statistics to generalise from the data as a convenience sample was used (Cresswell, 2014, p.158). However, statistical tests were used to check for possibly significant relationships. Responses from open questions were summarised and coded by theme.

Interview recordings were transcribed by the researcher. Responses to each question were grouped together so that they could be compared. The answers were
analysed and interpreted, highlighting common themes and areas of divergence. The themes from Davies’ analysis informed this process (2012) and further themes emerged from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
Chapter 4: Results

The results section is divided into two parts: user survey and staff interviews. Detailed analysis and discussion of these results is presented in Chapter 5. All percentages used in these results have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

4.1 Results of user survey

The online user survey was available for students to complete from 04/07/14 to 18/07/14. 80 responses were received, of which 79 were usable.

Q1. What type of library user are you?

![Figure 1. Type of Library User (table)]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type Of Library User</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All respondents answered this question (n=79). Results are shown in Figures 1 and 2. Results do not reflect the student body at the University of Sheffield: in the 2013/14 academic year, 71% of student at Sheffield were undergraduate (The University of Sheffield, 2014b). Undergraduate students are underrepresented in this sample, possibly due to the timing of the survey after the exam period. This needs to be noted when interpreting the results.
Q2. Are you a full-time or part-time student?

All respondents answered this question (n=79). Results are shown in Figures 3 and 4. 86% of respondents were full-time students and 14% were part-time. The student body at the university is 87% full-time and 13% part-time so the sample does reflect the student body (The University of Sheffield, 2014b).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Student</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>79</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q3. Are you a home (UK) or international student?

All respondents answered this question (n=79). Results are shown in Figures 5 and 6. 75% of respondents were home students and 25% were international. This reflects the student population at the University of Sheffield: 76% are home status students and 24% are international students (The University of Sheffield, 2014a).

Q3. Are you a home (UK) or international student?

All respondents answered this question (n=79). Results are shown in Figures 5 and 6. 75% of respondents were home students and 25% were international. This reflects the student population at the University of Sheffield: 76% are home status students and 24% are international students (The University of Sheffield, 2014a).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Status</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Home (UK)</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q4. Have you ever kept a library book past the date it was due back (so that the book became overdue)?

All respondents answered this question (n=79). Results are shown in Figures 7 and 8. The majority of respondents (65%) had kept a library book past its due date.

**Figure 7. Have you ever had an overdue library book? (table)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 8. Have you ever kept a library book past the date it was due back?**

- Yes: 35%
- No: 65%
These results were further broken down for each demographic group identified in Question 1 to 3 (Figures 9 to 11).

**Figure 9. Have you ever had an overdue library book (UG/PG)? (table)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>51</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 10. Have you ever had an overdue library book (FT/PT)? (table)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>51</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 11. Have you ever had an overdue library book (Home/Int)? (table)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Home (UK)</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>51</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The rates were broadly similar for all demographic characteristics apart from a higher rate for part-time students (91%). As the survey used convenience sampling, it is not strictly possible to generalise from these results as to a relationship between demographic characteristics and having had overdue books. However, an “approximate measure of significance” can be obtained (Davies, 2007, p.133). Fisher’s Exact Test was used to see if there was a statistically significant difference. No statistical significance was found for undergraduates/ postgraduates (p=0.348) or for Home/International students (p=0.787). Using Fisher’s exact test for full-time and part-time students gives a P-value of 0.086. This is statistically significant at p<0.1. Bearing in mind the small sample size and non-probability sampling used, there seems to be a significant relationship between whether a student is full-time or part-time and whether they have had an overdue book.
Q5. If you have had overdue library books in the past, what was the reason?

54 respondents answered this question. Three respondents who said they had never had an overdue in Q4 also answered this question accidentally. Respondents could tick more than one answer so the number of responses (n=150) is greater than the number of respondents. The responses are presented in Figures 12 and 13.

Figure 12. Reasons for overdue books (table)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I forgot to return the book</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I forgot to renew the book</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I couldn’t get to the library</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I did not realise the book was overdue</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I still needed the book</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I tried to renew the book but couldn’t</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal circumstances (e.g. illness)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I had lent the book to somebody else</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I had lost or misplaced the book</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I kept the book to prevent anyone else from using it</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most common given reason for returning books late was forgetfulness: forgetting to return the book (57%) and forgetting to renew it (48%). Forgetting to renew has been included because automatic renewal was only recently introduced. 48% reported being unable to get to the library and 46% did not realise their book was overdue. 37% reported that they still needed the book. 17% had tried to renew the book but the renewal failed. 17% reported that personal circumstances had caused their overdue books.

Three respondents ticked the “Other” option. One blamed procrastination, one was not in Sheffield and the other had not an overdue. The least common reason was having lent the item to a friend (2%).
Figure 13. Reasons for overdue books (graph)

![Reasons for Overdues Graph]

**Q6. How do you feel if your library books become overdue?**

80% of respondents (n=63) answered this question. Comments were coded and then grouped into categories (Figure 14). Comments that could fit into more than one category were counted multiple times (Buckingham & Saunders, 2004, p.142).

Figure 14. Feelings about overdue books: summary of responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotions about overdues (other than annoyance)</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annoyance about overdues</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments about fines</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments about fairness</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral towards overdues</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Categories are discussed further below.
Emotions excluding annoyance

Emotions about overdues were negative. Annoyance occurred frequently (35% of respondents) and was treated as a separate category. 60 responses mentioned other emotions. Details are shown in Figure 15.

Figure 15. Emotions about overdues (table)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotion</th>
<th>Example quotes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guilt</td>
<td>“Guilty.”</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Guilty, as I know it can affect whoever needs the book next.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worry</td>
<td>“It's quite anxiety provoking.”</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I worry about the fines.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frustration</td>
<td>“…frustrating.”</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Irritated, the fines are ridiculous.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad</td>
<td>“Bad.”</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I feel bad and try if I can to return the book…”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress</td>
<td>“I would feel very stressed first…”</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Stressed.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>“Bad and embarrassed. Perhaps a generational thing.”</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Scared.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I would feel uncomfortable…”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>“Angry, frustrated, anxious, desperate.”</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I would be angry with myself because it is very expensive and it would be my own fault.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panic</td>
<td>“Panicky and embarrassed.”</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I would panic.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disappointed in self</td>
<td>“I regard it as another symptom of my not keeping on top of things / being disorganised!”</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Disappointed that I have not returned or renewed the book....”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are several areas of intersection between these categories. For example, those who reported feeling guilty may have felt so due to disappointment in themselves. Emotions about overdues are hard to separate from emotions about fines. Guilt is the most
reported emotion, suggesting that many respondents feel returning books late is unethical (Davies, 2012, p.29).

**Annoyance**

Annoyance was the second most common theme in the answers to question 6 (n=22). Details are shown in Figure 16.

**Figure 16. Annoyance about overdue books (table)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Annoyance</th>
<th>Example Quotes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Annoyed at self</td>
<td>“Guilty, annoyed with myself.”</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Annoyed that I let myself forget that I had books out.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annoyed about recalls</td>
<td>“I feel annoyed and harassed by libraries getting on my back to return books just for the sake of it.”</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“…librarians sometimes refuse to understand emergencies that could cause me to leave the city, being unable to return the book at the time requested.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annoyed (general)</td>
<td>“Annoyed.”</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Guilty, annoyed.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annoyed by fines</td>
<td>“Annoyed as you then have to pay a fine.”</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Annoyed because of the expense.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annoyed (other)</td>
<td>“Annoyed if it was accidental…”</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Annoyed as there were only a few copies and it was a core text book.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annoyed but accepting</td>
<td>“…I think it’s just a cost I have to accept, annoying, but not a disaster.”</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of respondents were annoyed at themselves (n=10). Four respondents were annoyed about recalls, either because they could not get to the library or still needed the book. Two respondents were specifically annoyed by fines.
Fines

There were 17 comments about fines. Details are shown in Figure 17.

Figure 17. Comments about fines (table)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect of Fines</th>
<th>Example Quotes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unhappy with fines in general</td>
<td><em>Not that bothered, apart from the fines</em>...</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Annoyed that I have allowed myself to incur a fine.</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td><em>...the fine will only be x amount, I think it’s just a cost I have to accept...</em></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fines are too high</td>
<td><em>Irritated, the fines are ridiculous.</em></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fines are fair</td>
<td><em>I would be angry with myself because it is very expensive and it would be my own fault.</em></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Responses were generally negative about fines. Fines were unpopular even with respondents who were otherwise unconcerned about overdues.

Fairness/Unfairness

There were 16 responses that referred to fairness or unfairness. 14 of these felt that the system was fair and many specifically mentioned concern for other patrons who need the book. Only two respondents stated that overdues could be unfair.

Neutral/Miscellaneous

12 neutral comments about overdues were made: for example, “not that bothered”. Three of the neutral comments were qualified with respondents saying they were neutral unless they accrued a fine.

12 comments fell into the miscellaneous category. Ten of these were giving a specific reason for why their book had become overdue in the past e.g. unable to get to the library. Two respondents specified that they had never had an overdue book.
Q7. What is your experience of overdue books?

All respondents selected an answer for every statement (n=79). Details are shown below in Figure 18.

Figure 18. Experience of overdues (table)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I always try to return library books on time in case somebody else needs them</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand library rules about overdue books</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The library makes it easy to renew books</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get annoyed with myself if my library books are overdue</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I really need a library book I will keep it, even if it becomes overdue</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal circumstances often prevent me from returning books on time</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I avoid borrowing library books in case someone requests them and they become overdue</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get annoyed with the library if my books are overdue</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It doesn’t matter to me if my library books become overdue</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

87% of respondents indicated that they always try to return a book in case someone else needs it and 86% report that they understand the library rules about overdues. 84% agree that the library makes it easy to renew books. There were a relatively high number of undecided responses (11%) to this statement, which is surprising as books are renewed automatically unless recalled. 78% of respondents get annoyed with themselves if their library books are overdue. Only 14 respondents felt annoyed with the library if their books became overdue, and 10 of these respondents also reported feeling annoyed with themselves.

Around two-thirds (60%) of respondents said they would not keep a library book late, even if they still needed it. 27% of respondents indicated that personal circumstances had prevented them from returning books on time and 22% said that they avoided
borrowing books in case they are requested. 4% of respondents were unconcerned if their books became overdue. This suggests that overdues are an emotive issue, which is supported by the free-text responses from Q4 (see Figure 14).

Q8. How effective do you think these methods of help are?

79 respondents answered this question though some did not provide a rating for every method. Details are shown below in Figure 19.

### Figure 19. Effectiveness of methods (table)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Very effective</th>
<th>Sometimes effective</th>
<th>Not effective</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Automatic weekly renewals for books that have not been requested</td>
<td>67 86</td>
<td>8 10</td>
<td>3 4</td>
<td>78 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email reminders when books are due back</td>
<td>67 85</td>
<td>8 10</td>
<td>4 5</td>
<td>79 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended vacation loans</td>
<td>57 72</td>
<td>20 25</td>
<td>2 3</td>
<td>79 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly borrowing statement email</td>
<td>46 58</td>
<td>26 33</td>
<td>7 9</td>
<td>79 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blocking users from borrowing other books once they reach a certain amount of fines on their account</td>
<td>45 57</td>
<td>21 27</td>
<td>13 16</td>
<td>79 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blocking users from renewing requested books</td>
<td>43 55</td>
<td>24 31</td>
<td>11 14</td>
<td>78 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24-hour book return</td>
<td>42 53</td>
<td>21 27</td>
<td>16 20</td>
<td>79 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charging fines for overdue books</td>
<td>38 49</td>
<td>31 40</td>
<td>9 12</td>
<td>78 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shorter loan periods when books are heavily requested</td>
<td>33 42</td>
<td>33 42</td>
<td>13 16</td>
<td>79 100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Automatic weekly renewals were rated the most effective method (86%) followed by email reminders (85%). Fewer respondents rated extended vacation loans as very effective (72%). There was less support for weekly borrowing statements, although a majority of respondents still rated it as very effective (58%). Blocking users from borrowing other books was rated very effective by a similar 57% of respondents.

Just over half of respondents (55%) rated blocking users from renewing requested books as very effective. 24 hour book return received the highest number of not effective
responses (20%) but was still rated as very effective by the majority of respondents (53%). Fines were rated very effective by less than half of the respondents (49%). Shorter loan periods when books are heavily requested was rated the least effective method.

**Q9. What else could the library do to help?**

All respondents answered this question (n=79). Details are given below in Figures 20 and 21.

Making more books available online was rated the most effective method, with 71% of respondents rating it very effective. The majority of respondents thought text message reminders would be very effective (59%). Almost half of respondents stated that a reward system would be very effective (48%). Creating a High Demand section was rated as very effective by 47% of respondents and blocking users with overdues from taking out more books by 43%. Opinion was divided about a fines amnesty, which was rated very effective by 39% of respondents. One-third of respondents (34%) rated making more books reference not effective. Charging higher fines was the least popular option with 39% rating it not effective.

**Figure 20. What else could the library do to help? (frequency order) (table)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Very effective</th>
<th>Sometimes effective</th>
<th>Not effective</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Make more books available online</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text message reminders when books are due back</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reward system for people who return books on time</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create a High Demand section with shorter loan periods for popular books</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q10. Any other comments

24 respondents (30%) left free-text comments. Answers were grouped into categories and analysed.

The largest group of comments were about the suggested methods from Q9 (n=17). Five respondents thought short loan periods do not provide enough time to use the material. Three respondents thought that fines should not be increased. Three respondents commented on e-books: one positively, two negatively. Two respondents commented on reference books, one requesting more reference copies and the other saying that they were “a waste of time.” Blocking users from taking out more books split opinion, with one comment that it was unfair and another recommending it. One respondent commented positively about text message reminders. Another respondent worried that fines amnesties could be abused by users.

13 comments were suggestions for ways of managing overdues. Of this group, six respondents wanted the library to buy more copies of key books. Other suggestions included: staff phoning users; a longer two-week loan period; recalling all books on an
account when one becomes overdue; having overdue books lead to losing marks on assignments; and an app for tablets and smartphones.

Seven comments related to fines. Three of these comments were negative, with two arguing that fines were unfair on less well-off students. Two comments stated that fines should at least not be increased. Two respondents felt that fines should be increased.

Six respondents mentioned that personal circumstance such as being on placement could cause overdues.

Four positive comments about the library were made, with three specifically mentioning automatic renewal. One respondent stated “I think automatic renewals are wonderful, I wish that they’d existed through my whole (lengthy) university career, rather than just the last year or so!”
4.2 Results of staff interviews

Interviews with five University of Sheffield library staff were carried out in July/August 2014. Questions were designed to cover the same topics as the student survey. Responses are summarised in question order below.

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

Interviewees felt that users returned books late because they still needed them. Most interviewees thought that students felt pressure to meet deadlines and that they had to have a specific book to do this. These users were understood to be willing to pay fines if necessary. All interviewees felt that students in this situation were more concerned about their own needs than those of others. One interviewee wanted to stress that this was not necessarily “malicious”.

A majority of interviewees identified forgetfulness as a factor. Many staff mentioned that students are busy, so “library books are not top of their agenda” as one interviewee put it. It was also felt that students could be disorganised. Some staff thought that forgetfulness was less plausible because email reminders are sent out. However, one interviewee stated that many students did not check their emails while another thought that users received so many emails from the university that they deleted them.

Some library staff stated that users return books overdue because they are physically unable to get to the library. One interviewee described books being brought with users overseas and also left behind in Sheffield. This was linked with forgetfulness by staff. Students on placement were also mentioned as an issue: one interviewee described how “…we had students who were going on placements in hospitals and they just could not physically get to the library…”

A few users were thought to return books late because they had worked out how to play the system. For example, if a request is placed on their book and there are multiple copies, some students know to wait and that eventually another copy may fill the request. Other users do not know the rules; this was considered especially the case for first year undergraduate students. Other reasons given for overdue books included lending books to friends, illness, bereavement, and losing the book.
2. How do you think library users feel about their overdue library books?

All interviewees felt that overdues were an emotive subject. Two main emotions were identified: guilt and annoyance. Opinions varied as to the proportion who felt guilty about their overdue books, with some staff members thinking it was most users. Staff thought that some users did feel guilty as they were often apologetic, especially when they knew someone else was waiting for the book.

Annoyance was the other main emotion identified by all interviewees. Users were considered to be annoyed at the library. One interviewee described how “they think we’re just being jobsworths, trying to get the books back off them.” Interviewees felt that some library users thought the rules shouldn’t apply to them. Many staff thought library users did not appreciate that staff just wanted the books back.

Annoyance at fines specifically was mentioned: “people obviously don’t like paying fines, do you? Who would?” Concern about fines was considered a more common emotion than concern about overdues per se. Some interviewees described interactions with users who had reacted very strongly, even becoming aggressive. However, these were felt to be very rare occurrences.

Many of the interviewees identified that a distinct third group of library users did not have an emotional reaction to overdue books and were unconcerned. It was felt that users “just don’t think” about the consequences. “Malicious” users were considered to be a minority.

3. Libraries already do various things to try and maintain circulation and help users to return books on time. How effective do you think these methods are?

Automatic renewal of books unless they are requested was considered very effective and popular with users. Several staff mentioned that it was fairer not to penalise students for forgetfulness. However, there were some concerns that it makes users “lazy”. Some interviewees described students assuming that their books will keep being renewed for as long as they need them. This causes issues when books do have to be returned.

Online renewal was considered to have been replaced by automatic renewal but was still considered very effective. One interviewee stressed that although making it easier for users to renew books was good it did not help get books back. Phone renewals were seen by interviewees as obsolete.
The weekly borrowing statement email and reminder emails were mentioned as an effective way to keep users up to date. Many staff thought the reminder receipts issued when books are loaned could also be effective at helping students keep track of due dates. However, it was felt that many users did not look at or keep hold of receipts. The importance of educating users and explaining the library’s rules was emphasised by some interviewees. Inductions were considered a good place for this but issues included lack of time and patchy attendance. Education about the reasons for policies was identified as an issue.

Buying e-books where possible was considered very effective. One interviewee mentioned that e-books generally are purchased if available. However, interviewees noted that e-books are not always available or user-friendly. Interviewees stated that some people prefer physical copies of the books and so e-books were needed in conjunction with physical copies. Buying more physical copies of books was mentioned as effective; as one librarian commented “having better availability is always going to solve your problems of availability, isn’t it?” Increased student fees were mentioned as having affected expectations. One interviewee expressed frustration with academic staff who did not tell the library what books they would be recommending. Another interviewee noted that buying more copies was not a sustainable solution.

Interviewees considered blocking users from renewing books generally effective as it gives users an incentive to return books. Some felt that it would only be effective if users were blocked from borrowing as well as renewing. Fines were agreed to be unpopular with students. Many staff also disliked fines. Most interviewees felt that only fining for recalled books was more “justified”. One interviewee mentioned reading about the Gneezy and Rustichini (2000) study and thought that some users did see fines as a price for keeping books. It was also mentioned that fines were unfair as they affected less well-off students disproportionately. However, it was frequently stated that some sort of incentive to return books was needed.

4. What do you think about these ideas for encouraging returns?

Interviewees were given the same list of suggestions from Question 9 of the user survey. Results are summarised in Figure 22.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Text Message Reminders</td>
<td>Quick and easy</td>
<td>Students feel “bombarded” by communications from the university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Convenient</td>
<td>Most students have smartphones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>People don’t always check emails</td>
<td>Cost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Harder to ignore”</td>
<td>Would need to integrate with library management system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Already used at doctors, dentists etc.</td>
<td>Need to have up to date contact info</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Could have text reminders as option as well as email</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Demand Section with shorter loan periods</td>
<td>Dynamic loan system already reduces loan periods on requested books, no need for separate section</td>
<td>Demand fluctuates through year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Used to have separate section and it was unpopular with students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make more books reference only</td>
<td>Always a copy available</td>
<td>Not all students have time to sit in library e.g. part-time students, people on placements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Doesn’t solve circulation issues but helps to be able to direct users to a reference copy in meantime</td>
<td>Reference copies often can’t be found—either in use somewhere in building, missing or have been hidden by users.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make more books available online</td>
<td>Lots of students prefer e-books</td>
<td>Some users prefer physical books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24/7 access</td>
<td>Not always user-friendly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Multiple people can use at once</td>
<td>Not all books available as e-books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reduces pressure on physical collection</td>
<td>Doesn’t solve problem of circulation of physical books for those who want them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charge Higher Fines</td>
<td>Can be effective</td>
<td>Very unpopular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Good idea if only on requested books</td>
<td>Higher student fees make this less defensible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gives incentive to return books</td>
<td>Unfair on less well-off students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Damages image and reputation—“I can imagine the headlines in the student newspaper.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not effective on those who are willing to pay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Contentious issue”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Dangerous”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method</td>
<td>Pros</td>
<td>Cons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rewards system for people who return on time</td>
<td>Good idea, students could get printer credit or vouchers for the café</td>
<td>Returning books should be the “norm” anyway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Culture of rewards is widespread in shops, could have a sort of “library clubcard”</td>
<td>Sends wrong message</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“…you get more with sugar than you do with vinegar.”</td>
<td>Could be seen as patronizing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not sure how it would work/be administered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fines Amnesty Week</td>
<td>Good for relationship between library and students</td>
<td>Doesn’t get books returned when they are needed, only eventually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Good because just want books back anyway, don’t want to fine</td>
<td>Some libraries might rely on fines income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brings people back in to the library, can use it as an opportunity</td>
<td>If people know an amnesty is coming, they will wait to return books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>to explain system</td>
<td>Sends out wrong message</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Block users from taking out more books and</td>
<td>Good because do need an incentive to return books</td>
<td>Quite harsh, may be valid reason why user has an overdue book and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>renewing once they have an overdue item</td>
<td>More fair to less well-off students than fines</td>
<td>needs to take out another one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More likely to work because it affects users’ studies</td>
<td>If no fines, users might just take out all the books they need for a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gives opportunity for contact with library at early stage, allows</td>
<td>assignment at once and so won’t be affected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>user education</td>
<td>More likely to affect students who are on campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>24/7 opening-what if library user needs to take a book out and can’t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>during unstaffed hours? No one to help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Blocking access to resources is negative message for library to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>send out</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

Making it as easy as possible for students to manage their accounts was recommended. One interviewee felt that students often thought they needed specific items when other resources could fulfil the same need and that improved information literacy training from academics and librarians could address this.

Some librarians expressed their dislike of fines, noting that they considered them ineffective as well as unpopular. However, they felt that some incentive was needed to make users return books. They were hopeful that the new system of “zero fines” and
blocking accounts would prove effective. One interviewee thought that a combination of blocking accounts and library fines would be more effective.

One interviewee stated that the library could use “nudge theory” to influence library users’ behaviour. They gave the example of displays at doctors’ surgeries saying how many hours have been lost to missed appointments; this is said to greatly reduce the rates of missed appointments. The interviewee felt that similar methods could be used on library displays.

6. Are there any other comments you would like to add?

Two interviewees gave further comments. One interviewee wanted to emphasise that library staff did not want to fine users. The other interviewee stressed that library staff wanted to help: “...if you contact us, there’s a lot we can do [to help].”
Chapter 5: Discussion

The results of the user survey and staff interviews are analysed with reference to the research objectives of the study and the literature discussed in Chapter 2.

5.1 Why library users return items late

**Objective 1: To identify why library users return items late**

The results of the user survey indicate that forgetfulness is the most common reason that users return library books late, with 57% of respondents reporting that they had forgotten to return a book and 48% forgetting to renew. Forgetfulness was also one of the main reasons mentioned by staff in interviews. This reflects the findings of Anderson’s (2008) study of an academic library in New Zealand which found that forgetfulness was the most reported reason for overdues. Davies (2012) study at the University of Leeds found that forgetfulness was the most common reason, with more users forgetting to renew (67%) than forgetting to return books (53%). The rate of forgetting to renew was the lower of the two at Sheffield; the introduction of automatic weekly renewal may have made forgetting to renew a non-issue. Staff understood that students were busy and that it was easy to forget. However, it was also felt that students were often disorganised. Many students were thought not to check their emails for reminders, despite 85% of respondents to the user survey rating email reminders as very effective. Not checking reminders could explain the 46% of respondents who said they had returned a book late because they did not realise the item was overdue.

The second most common reason reported by users was being unable to get to the library (48%). It may be that some of the respondents who selected this option had the same issues as other respondents who selected “personal circumstances” e.g. illness, childcare issues etc. Some interviewees mentioned being unable to get to the library as a particular issue for part-time and distance-learning students. Users returning items late because they still needed the book was considered a more common occurrence by library staff. It may be that staff are underestimating the difficulties faced by students who are not on campus regularly. For example, 91% of part-time respondents had returned a book overdue which was much higher than the rate for full-time respondents (60%). Although respondents were a self-selecting sample and so not necessarily representative of the
student body, there did seem to be a statistically significant relationship between this
demographic characteristic and having had an overdue book. Alternatively, students may
be stating that they were unable to get to the library due to social desirability bias, with
students more likely to choose reasons that present them in a “favourable light”
(Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). This bias may also explain the fact that no
respondents selected the reason “I kept the book to prevent anyone else from using it.”
Some interviewees had experienced students stealing or hiding books and one interviewee
in Davies’ study (2012) mentioned this behaviour.

37% of respondents to the user survey stated they had returned a book late
because they still needed it, the third most common reason reported by users. This
respondents selected the reason “I kept the book to prevent anyone else from using it.”
Some interviewees had experienced students stealing or hiding books and one interviewee
in Davies’ study (2012) mentioned this behaviour.

37% of respondents to the user survey stated they had returned a book late
because they still needed it, the third most common reason reported by users. This
respondents selected the reason “I kept the book to prevent anyone else from using it.”
Some interviewees had experienced students stealing or hiding books and one interviewee
in Davies’ study (2012) mentioned this behaviour.

The literature is mixed on users’ reasons for returning books late. Anderson (2008)
found that still needing the item was the second most common reason after forgetfulness
whereas other studies have found that still needing the book was the most common reason
for late returns (Alao, 2002; Murugathas, 2009). Davies (2012) did not include still needing
the book as an option in her user survey, but users could select “other” and several
comments here specified still needing the book as factor. Presumably, this reason would
have been more commonly selected if it had been one of the given choices.

Although keeping books has been called a “selfish act” (McMenemy, 2010, p.78),
library staff felt that users were not generally selfish but became self-interested under
pressure; one staff member expressed that they did not think students kept books to be
“malicious”. This is supported by the user responses to Question 6 where several comments
reported guilt about having overdue books because other people were waiting. Staff
members interviewed at Leeds by Davies (2012) also felt that academic pressure and
competition for library books made users self-interested but that the vast majority were
not selfish per se.

17% of respondents reported that their book became overdue due to personal
circumstances. Illness was suggested as an example of a personal circumstance in the text.
of the survey but obviously this reason is “open to interpretation” (Davies, 2012, p.49). As mentioned previously there may be crossover with other categories here: it may be that some people answered that they couldn’t get to the library when they could have selected personal circumstances, and vice versa. This may explain how more than 17% of respondents to Question 7 (27%) agreed with the statement that “personal circumstances often prevent me from returning my books on time”. Staff interviews revealed they were aware of the various circumstances such as illness and bereavement that could affect students and made exceptions to help these students: “Obviously we’re a bit more lenient towards people in those kind of circumstances.”

5.2 Users’ feelings and opinions about overdues

Objective 2: To find out users’ feelings and opinions on overdues

Responses to Question 6 in the user survey included annoyance, guilt, worry and frustration. As respondents to the survey were volunteers they constitute a self-selecting sample and may not be representative. Users with strong views on overdue books may have been more likely to fill out the survey in the first place. However, staff interviews confirmed that emotional responses to overdue books were prevalent. As such, staff and students were in agreement that overdue books and especially library fines are an emotive issue.

Annoyance was a frequently given response to books becoming overdue. The free-text responses to Question 6 reported users’ annoyance at themselves to be the most common sub-category of annoyance, followed by annoyance at books being recalled and annoyance in general. 78% of the respondents to Question 7 agreed that they get annoyed with themselves if their book becomes overdue, while 18% stated they get annoyed at the library. 11 respondents agreed to both these statements, indicating a more general annoyance with the situation. Staff interviewees also reported that annoyance was a common response. In Davies’ study at Leeds (2012), users reported general annoyance most frequently in free-text responses followed by annoyance at self. 70% of Davies’ respondents agreed that they get annoyed at themselves if their books become overdue, while 40% stated they get annoyed at the library.

Respondents at the University of Sheffield appear to feel less annoyance at the library when their books become overdue. It is possible that automatic weekly renewal and
books being renewed unless they are requested are perceived as fairer policies by users and so they are more likely to blame themselves. As the most common reason respondents gave for their books becoming overdue was forgetfulness, users would be likely to blame themselves in that case as well. Previous studies have found that annoyance is the most common feeling in reaction to overdue books but have pointed out that it is often unclear whether users are annoyed at having overdue books or at the library fines that can result (Anderson, 2008; Davies, 2012). This was mentioned by staff interviewees who felt that annoyance was actually directed at the fines.

Emotions apart from annoyance that were reported by users in Question 6 include guilt, worry and frustration, in that order. In Davies’ study (2012), guilt was only the third most common emotion apart from the annoyance previously mentioned, after sadness and worry. It may be that guilt is more common at Sheffield because books only become overdue if requested by another user, as opposed to at the University of Leeds where users could simply have forgotten to renew. Guilt was frequently mentioned by staff interviewees who thought many students felt bad about their overdue books. One staff member specified that “they feel guilty about returning it late because they know that other students need them.” Staff had encountered users being worried but felt that this was largely in reference to fines. Previous studies have found guilt and worry to be common feelings about overdue books (Ajayi & Okunlola, 2005; Davies, 2012; Jerome, 2012).

Fines were mentioned by respondents to Question 6, with unhappiness about fines in general being the most common sub-category of comments about fines. However, there were also several comments that stated the respondents felt the library’s system was fair. This could explain the frequent feelings of guilt reported by respondents to the survey; it may be that respondents dislike fines but accept that they are in general fair because books only became overdue if another person needs the book. This contrasts with many comments from the user survey carried out by Davies (2012) which expressed frustration with the library’s policies at Leeds.

There were few neutral responses to Question 6 and only 4% of respondents agreed with the statement “It doesn’t matter to me if my library books become overdue.” Staff interviewees generally felt that only a minority of students truly did not care if their books became overdue. Similarly, Davies (2012) found that neutral comments were infrequent and only a minority of survey respondents agreed that overdue books did not matter to them. This is supported by previous studies which found that only a minority of users are “not bothered” about overdue books (Ajayi & Okunlola, 2005; Anderson, 2008).
5.3 Current methods of discouraging overdues

Objective 3: To ascertain student and staff attitudes to current overdues policy

86% of the students who responded to the survey agreed that they understand the library’s rules around overdue books. Staff interviewees generally felt that users understand the rules. One interviewee noted the exception of first year undergraduates, who may not always attend library induction sessions or remember information if they do attend. Library staff stated that it is important to reinforce this knowledge by repeating the message through a variety of different media as well as interactions at the front desk. Previous studies have stressed the importance of making users aware of the library’s policies (Adomi, 2003; Ajayi & Okunlola, 2005; Murugathas, 2009).

Most respondents (84%) agreed that the library makes it easy to renew books but 11% were undecided. Considering that the library renews all unrequested books automatically, it is difficult to see how the library could make it easier. However, automatic weekly renewal of unrequested books was the most highly rated current method of helping encourage renewal and returns. 86% of respondents rated it very effective and 10% rated it sometimes effective. The 48% of respondents who stated their book became overdue because they forgot to renew are presumably speaking about their experiences before the new system was introduced. Staff interviewees were generally very positive about automatic renewal, reporting that it had been effective and very popular with library users. However, some interviewees were concerned that some users seemed to assume that renewals would continue indefinitely and that they could keep books as long as they like. Interviewees felt that online renewals had largely been superseded by automatic renewal but that anything which helped users to manage their library accounts was beneficial. One interviewee pointed out that although making renewing easier was good it did not help to get books back when they were needed.

Email reminders were considered very effective by 85% of survey respondents to Question 8, with a further 10% rating them sometimes effective. In Davies’ study (2012) only 64% of survey respondents thought email reminders very effective. This makes it surprising that forgetfulness was the most common reason for overdue books given to Question 5 in this study and that not realising the item was overdue was given as a reason
by 46% of respondents. Previous studies have found that reminder notices are effective in reducing the rates of overdues (Mitchell & Smith, 2006; Murugathas, 2009).

When interviewed, library staff at the University of Sheffield revealed that although email reminders could be very effective they felt that many users did not check their email accounts. Some interviewees mentioned the large number of emails the university sends as a factor contributing to this. Staff felt that the weekly borrowing statement email was seen by some users in this light, although the majority of students (58%) rated it very effective. A similar concern was raised by staff interviewees in Davies’ (2012) study, with one of the Leeds library staff stating that some users saw emails from the library as “spam”. Staff suggested that the reminder receipts printed when books are issued could also be an effective way for users to keep track of their due dates without having to go online. However, it was again felt that many users did not look at or keep these notices.

Extended vacation loans were the highest rated of the suggestions made in Davies’ study (2012): 87% of respondents thought that this would be a very effective method to improve the overdues policy. As the University of Sheffield library already has extended vacation loans, survey respondents were asked to rate this as a current method. 72% rated it very effective and 25% felt that it was sometimes effective. The majority of students clearly think vacation loans are effective. The relatively high percentage of respondents who consider it only sometimes effective may be due to the fact that books can still be recalled if a request is made during the extended loan period. This could contribute to the 48% of respondents who have had a book become overdue because they couldn’t get back to the library: if students bring library books away with them over the holidays it could be requested and so become overdue. It is also worth noting that the survey sample skews more towards postgraduates than the general student body at Sheffield: this could explain the reservation about vacation loans as postgraduates tend to be on campus year-round.

Blocking users from renewing books and/or borrowing more was divisive for both students and staff. Renewals on books will only be blocked if it has been requested by another user. Blocks on borrowing currently occur when users have more than £20 of fines. Blocking renewals of requested books was rated very effective by 55% of survey respondents and sometimes effective by 31%. This lower approval rate may indicate unhappiness with books being recalled and explain the high numbers of overdues users reported being due to being unable to get to the library and still needing the book. It seems likely that in this case users have rated this method as less effective than other methods because they do not like it. Staff interviewees generally felt that a block on renewals
combined with fines was very effective as it gave users an incentive to return the books. They also felt that this was largely fair because it was only for books that another user needed. Blocks on borrowing at a certain level of fines was seen as more problematic. 57% of survey respondents rated this measure as very effective, with 27% as sometimes effective. Staff recognised that blocks were unpopular with users but again felt that an incentive to return books was needed. Some staff felt that a block on borrowing as well as renewals was needed to be effective. Staff opinion was uncertain on blocking at a certain level of fines: some felt that this could be seen as unfair on less well-off students but others felt that this was not the case as fines are avoidable.

Staff attitudes to blocks were often closely related to their attitudes to fines, which all staff recognised were unpopular with many students. Only 49% of survey respondents rated fines as very effective. Their responses could have been influenced by recent negative press coverage of the issue (Moors, 2014; NUS News, 2014). Staff felt that fines on recalled items only was much fairer and gave users an incentive to return books when they were needed. Some staff stressed that they did not want to fine people and just wanted the stock back, a point which has been emphasised in the literature (Mitchell, 2000; Mosley, 2004; Reed et al., 2014; Rupp et al., 2010). There were also concerns that fines were less effective on wealthy students who were willing to pay if they wanted to keep the book. One staff member particularly mentioned Gneezy and Rustichini’s (2000) study of late pick-up fees at nurseries and the risk that library users could see fines as a “hire charge”. This could be the case for the 34% of respondents who agreed that if they need to they will keep a book overdue.

Shorter loan periods for heavily requested books was rated the least effective method with 42% of users rating them very effective and 42% sometimes effective. This may be because of the previously discussed issues people have in returning books when they are requested. 22% of respondents to Question 7 stated that they avoid borrowing books in case they are requested which suggests that short loan periods could be a barrier for some users. Staff in Davies’ study (2012) reported concerns that this was particularly the case for part-time and distance-learning students. Interviewees for this study were keen to stress that more physical copies and the e-version of heavily requested books are purchased where possible to alleviate these issues.
5.4 Suggested methods for discouraging overdues

Objective 4: To ascertain student and staff attitudes to possible changes to the University of Sheffield’s overdues policy

The most effective suggested method with students who responded to the survey was purchasing more online books, with 71% rating this idea very effective and 25% sometimes effective. This could benefit the fifth of respondents who reported that they avoided borrowing books in case they were requested. More e-books was popular with Davies’ (2012) survey respondents as well, with 79% rating them this very effective. Staff interviewees were enthusiastic about this method but felt that it did not solve the issue of circulation for those users who still wanted a physical copy.

Text message reminders were rated very effective by 59% of users and sometimes effective by 35%. These results reflect a previous study which found that students were positive about text reminders being used by libraries in this way (Walsh, 2010). Staff interviewees were positive about this method as it is quick and convenient and some thought students may be more likely to read a text message than an email. A previous study reported that text message reminders reduced the rate of overdues for students who signed up for them (Wang et al., 2012). Some staff felt that most students have smartphones and so can access emails as easily as texts but students not checking emails had been raised as an issue. Other staff concerns were cost and whether an SMS system could integrate with the Library Management System.

A rewards system for users who return books on time was rated very effective by 48% of respondents but rated not effective by 18%. Similar percentages were found by Davies (2012). Sheffield staff interviewees were divided with some very positive and others not at all. One interviewee was very keen on rewards as it is a positive way to reinforce good behaviour and stated “I think you get more with sugar than you do with vinegar”. Other staff raised the point that returning books on time should be the “norm” and that rewarding for this would send the wrong message. A previous study of a rewards scheme found that it did not decrease the rate of overdues but was popular with users (Mitchell & Smith, 2006).

Creating a High-Demand section with shorter loan periods was fairly popular with users but not at all so with staff. 47% of survey respondents rated this idea as very effective.
and 42% as sometimes effective. However, responses to Question 8 of the survey rated short loan periods for heavily requested items as the least effective of current library policies. Staff were uniformly negative about this idea. They felt that the library’s current dynamic loan system was better as it responded to demand in real time. Some also recalled that the library used to have a High-Demand section and it was removed as it had been so unpopular with staff and students.

Blocking users once any item on their account becomes overdue was rated very effective by 43% of users but not effective by 20%. However, 80% of users did think this method would be at least somewhat effective. Staff generally thought that this method would be effective as it provides an incentive to return requested books. Interviewees mentioned that the library was planning to trial this method along with “zero fines” and most were hopeful that it would be effective. Blocks were considered fairer than fines as they do not penalise less well-off students more. Previous studies have shown this method to be very popular with users although no reduction in the rates of overdues has been shown (Mitchell, 2000; Mosley, 2004; Reed et al., 2014). Some staff were concerned that without fines users would just take all the books they needed for an assignment at once and so get round the rules.

A fines amnesty week was rated very effective by 39% of survey respondents but not effective by 24%. Staff felt that this would be good for the relationship between staff and students and help to get long-term overdues back to the library. Fines amnesties have been advocated as a way to get stock and lapsed library users back into the library (Sifton, 2009). It has also been recommended that fines could be waived in return for food items for a local food bank (Harris et al., 2011). However, some staff were concerned that people might wait to return overdues if they knew an amnesty was coming and that this method does not help get books back when they are needed, just eventually.

More reference only books was rated very effective by only 19% of users, although 47% rated it sometimes effective and a comment in response to Question 10 specifically requested more reference books. Staff emphasised that generally there were reference copies for high use books and one interviewee stated that it was helpful to be able to direct users to a reference copy if no other were available. However, staff felt that reference books were only helpful for students who are regularly on campus and that even then reference books were often unavailable as they were in use, hidden or missing.

Charging higher fines was rated the least effective of the suggested methods. 39% of survey respondents rated higher fines as not effective and 19% rated them very
effective. Several comments in response to Question 10 stated that fines should not increase. It is not surprising that punitive measures would be unpopular with users; users may have rated this measure as ineffective because they dislike it. Obviously if fines were not inconvenient they would not be effective (Holmås et al., 2010). Some staff interviewees felt that higher fines would be effective and provide an incentive to return books. However, the majority of staff did not want higher fines as it would be very unpopular with users and bad for the library’s image. Another factor was that fines were considered unfair on less well-off students; one interviewee mentioned that this was less defensible with the rise in student fees. Conversely, some staff also felt that there would always be some students who were willing to pay fines and so fines were not effective.

One staff suggestion for an improvement to overdues policy was improved information literacy training for students about the range of resources available. Another staff member felt that the library could use “nudge theory” to influence behaviour and cited the use of displays in doctors’ surgeries about the time lost to missed appointments. Almost half of the suggestions made by users were for the library to purchase more books. Staff had emphasised in interview that this was done where possible. However, libraries only have limited money and space so this is not always a viable solution (Jerome, 2012). Other user suggestions included: staff phoning users with overdues personally; a longer two week standard loan period; recalling all books from an account once an item goes overdue; and an app for tablets and smartphones to help users manage their accounts.
Chapter 6: Conclusions

The conclusions have been based on the findings from the user survey and library staff interviews as discussed in the previous chapter. Conclusions are discussed within the context of the research objectives laid out in Chapter 1.

6.1 Objective 1
To identify why library users return items late

The user survey and library staff interviews indicated that forgetfulness was the most common reason why users return library books late. This included forgetting to renew and return books, as well as failing to realise that a book has become overdue. Being unable to get to the library was recognised as an issue, especially for part-time students or those on placement. Another common reason for overdues was that the user still needed the book, with many users being willing to pay fines to keep a book in this case. Some students have personal circumstances which cause them to return their books late, such as illness or bereavement.

6.2 Objective 2
To find out users’ feelings and opinions on overdues

Overdue books in general are agreed to be an emotive issue. The emotions associated with overdues were generally negative, with annoyance being the most common response. Emotions about overdues are difficult to separate from emotions about fines specifically. Staff felt that annoyance was mostly experienced about fines. Guilt was another common reaction. This could be due the fact that books only become overdue if another library user has requested them. Worry and stress were also commonly reported. Only a minority of users feel neutral about overdues and fines.

6.3 Objective 3
To ascertain student and staff attitudes to current overdues policy

Automatic weekly renewals of books unless they have been requested was very popular with both students and library staff. Most users agreed that the library makes it
easy for them to renew their books. Most also agreed that they understand the library’s policies about overdues. Email reminders were popular with users and staff, despite the fact that forgetting was the most common reason given for returning books late. Blocking renewals or borrowing once the user has accrued a certain amount of fines was considered effective by users and staff. It is possible that some users rated it as not effective due to the difficulty of returning requested books, which could explain the high number of overdues attributed to being unable to get to the library. Fines were not popular with most users but staff felt that they provide an incentive to return books. Concerns were raised that fines penalised less well-off students disproportionately. Short loan periods for requested books were the least popular current method with users, again possibly due to the difficulty they experience returning requested books. However, staff felt they were effective and fair as the dynamic loan system only shortened loan periods when it was necessary.

6.4 Objective 4

To ascertain student and staff attitudes to possible changes to the University of Sheffield’s overdues policy

There was agreement between students and library staff about some suggested methods. Purchasing more online books and using text message reminders were popular with both staff and students. A rewards system for users who return books on time was considered effective by users; some staff felt that returning on time should be the “norm” and were concerned rewards would send the wrong message. Creating a High Demand Section was rated fairly effective by users but staff revealed that this method had been used in the past and had proven unpopular. Blocking users’ accounts once a book becomes overdue was only considered fairly effective by users but staff were more positive. Staff felt that blocks gave users an incentive to return books and were fairer than fines on less well-off students. Purchasing more reference books and charging higher fines were not popular with users or staff. Staff suggestions included improved information literacy training to teach students about the range of available resources and using “nudge theory” to influence students’ behaviour.

6.5 Objective 5

To compare student and staff attitudes on overdues to allow for an overarching perspective on the issue
Student and staff perspectives on overdues and library fines were compared throughout the discussion and analysis of results in Chapter 5. Staff understand the different reasons why library users return books late and have a good grasp of their feelings and opinions about overdues. There were some differences of opinion but also areas of agreement about current and suggested methods of dealing with overdues. Staff felt that users did not recognise that library staff were there to help and just wanted books back to ensure fairness.

6.6 Limitations of research

The survey was limited by the relatively small sample size of the survey, especially when compared to the student body at the University of Sheffield. The respondents were self-selecting, leading to a convenience sample. Furthermore, the sample was not representative of the student body of Sheffield as it contained a higher proportion of postgraduate students. All respondents were also from one particular institution. These limitations mean the results cannot be generalised to the student population as a whole. A larger sample size may have been obtained if the survey had been sent out earlier in the year before undergraduates finished for the summer. Response bias may have affected the survey as those with strong opinions may have been more likely to respond, skewing the results.

Only a small number of staff interviews were carried out and a larger sample would have allowed for a more comprehensive view of the staff perspective.

6.7 Recommendations for managing overdues at the University of Sheffield Library

The following recommendations are made as a result of this research:

- E-books should be purchased and their use promoted where possible to ease the pressure on the physical collection. New e-book purchases could be promoted on the library website, on plasma screens in the library or on social media. This would also have the effect of showing students where money is being spent, which could
increase satisfaction. Signs could be placed near popular texts in the library informing users of the online version, with QR codes to link straight to the e-book.

- The library should explore using text message reminders for overdue books. Students consider this an effective suggestion and text reminders may be able to reach students where email is failing to. Practical considerations include the cost and how to integrate an SMS system with the library management system.
- The library could explore introducing a rewards scheme for users who return books on time. For example, students with no overdues all semester could be entered into a prize draw.

6.8 Suggestions for further research

This study was limited in sample size and focuses on only one institution. It would be informative to conduct a larger study with a sampling method that allowed results to be generalised to confirm this study’s findings. In view of the announcement by the OFT that current fines policies may be illegal (Office of Fair Trading, 2014), further study of the issue of overdues and library fines at UK academic libraries would be timely. More research that actually analyses circulation data could provide evidence to support librarians in evaluating and updating overdues policies.

Total word count: 14,705
Bibliography


# Proposal for Research Ethics Review

The University of Sheffield.

## Appendix 1 - Ethics documentation

### Students

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<td>Postgraduate (Research) – PGR</td>
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### Staff

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### Project Title:

**Overdue books and Library Fines at the University of Sheffield**

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### Principal Investigator (PI):

*(student for supervised UG/PGT/PGR research)*

Sarah B Wilson

**Email:** sbwilson1@sheffield.ac.uk

### Supervisor:

*(if PI is a student)*

Barbara Sen

**Email:** b.a.sen@sheffield.ac.uk

### Indicate if the research:

*(put an X in front of all that apply)*

- Involves adults with mental incapacity or mental illness, or those unable to make a personal decision
- Involves prisoners or others in custodial care (e.g. young offenders)
- Involves children or young people aged under 18 years of age
- Involves highly sensitive topics such as ‘race’ or ethnicity; political opinion; religious, spiritual or other beliefs; physical or mental health conditions; sexuality; abuse (child, adult); nudity and the body; criminal activities; political asylum; conflict situations; and personal violence.

Please indicate by inserting an “X” in the left hand box that you are conversant with the University's policy on the handling of human participants and their data.
Part B. Summary of the Research

B1. Briefly summarise the project’s aims and objectives:
(This must be in language comprehensible to a layperson and should take no more than one-half page. Provide enough information so that the reviewer can understand the intent of the research)

Summary: Dealing with overdue library books can be stressful for students and library staff. Fines are very unpopular with students; library staff want books returned so that there is fair access for all library users. The project aims to investigate the reasons why students at the University of Sheffield return their library books late. The project also aims to examine how effective current University of Sheffield Library policies on overdue books are at encouraging students to return books on time, e.g. emailing notices when books are about to become overdue, fining students when books actually do become overdue. Finally, the project aims to investigate if these policies could be improved to help students avoid fines and increase the timely return of books. The project could be beneficial for students and library staff by investigating ways to help students avoid fines and also ensuring that library books circulate freely so that all the students who need to can access them.

B2. Methodology:
Provide a broad overview of the methodology in no more than one-half page.

Overview of Methods: The project will use two different methodologies: a survey of students and interviews with library staff. An online questionnaire will be sent out via a university mailing list. All students who are signed up to the ‘Volunteer’ mailing list will be invited to take part in the survey. Library staff will be interviewed face-to-face; the interviews will be recorded and then transcribed by the researcher. The questions asked in both the survey and the interviews will cover the same general topic areas: attitudes to overdue books, attitudes to current library policies and possible improvements to these policies.

If more than one method, e.g., survey, interview, etc. is used, please respond to the questions in Section C for each method. That is, if you are using both a survey and interviews, duplicate the page and answer the questions for each method; you need not duplicate the information, and may simply indicate, “see previous section.”
C1. **Briefly describe how each method will be applied - Survey**

**Method (e.g., survey, interview, observation, experiment):**

The research will use a web-based survey of students at the University of Sheffield on the topics of overdue library books and fines.

**Description – how will you apply the method?**

An online questionnaire will be created using Google Forms. The link to this survey will be sent out by my supervisor to the student-volunteers mailing list at the University of Sheffield. All students who subscribe to this mailing list will be invited to take part. The survey will be available online for two weeks from the date it is sent out. The information sheet will be presented and informed consent obtained via a yes/no question at the start of the survey. All responses will be anonymous as no personal or identifiable data will be recorded. The first section will ask for non-identifying information in order to create a demographic profile of all those who respond (Undergraduate/Postgraduate students; Full Time/Part Time; Home/International). The second section will ask about the participant's experiences (if any) of overdue books. The third section will ask participants to give their assessments of current library overdue policies and possible improvements. There will be a mixture of closed and open questions.

**About your Participants**

C2. **Who will be potential participants?**

Potential participants will be any students at the University.

C3. **How will the potential participants be identified and recruited?**

The potential participants will be sent an email by my supervisor via the University’s student-volunteers mailing list (student-volunteers@lists.shef.ac.uk).

C4. **What is the potential for physical and/or psychological harm / distress to participants?**

Participating in this research should cause no greater harm than participating in everyday life. The subject of the research is not generally considered sensitive or distressing. However, it could possibly be considered as such by some participants as library fines tangentially relate to money. Survey respondents
will be informed of the subject matter before starting the survey and also told that they can withdraw from the survey once they have started simply by closing the browser.

C5. Will informed consent be obtained from the participants?

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If Yes, please explain how informed consent will be obtained?

The Information Sheet/Consent Form will be the first part of the survey and will provide all of the information about the project. This includes the information that no identifying data will be recorded and that all data will be stored securely. An email address will be supplied for further information if a participant has questions that are not answered on the Information Sheet. Participants will need to indicate that they fully understand the research in which they will be engaged by answering a Yes/No question before proceeding with the rest of the survey.

If No, please explain why you need to do this, and how the participants will be de-briefed?

C6. Will financial / in kind payments (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants? (Indicate how much and on what basis this has been decided)

No compensation or honoraria will be provided.

About the Data

C7. What data will be collected? (Tick all that apply)

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C8. What measures will be put in place to ensure confidentiality of personal data, where appropriate?

All responses will be anonymous as no identifiable information will be recorded at any stage.

C9. How/Where will the data be stored?

The data will be exported from a Google spreadsheet to the researcher’s laptop for analysis. This laptop is password protected and only accessible to the researcher.

C10. Will the data be stored for future re-use? If so, please explain

The data will be destroyed after analysis, the report is submitted and the mark is received.

About the Procedure

C11. 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)? If so, please explain how it will be managed.

There are no personal safety issues involved with this part of the project as there is no contact between the researcher and the participants.
**C1. Briefly describe how each method will be applied- Interviews**

**Method (e.g., survey, interview, observation, experiment):**

The research will use face-to-face interviews with library staff at the University of Sheffield on the topics of overdue books and library fines.

**Description – how will you apply the method?**

The researcher has obtained permission from the Head of Customer Services at the University Library to contact library staff via an internal staff mailing list. I anticipate that not all those contacted and invited to participate will do so as the interviews will have to be in participants’ free time; I still hope to interview at least five staff members. The email will contain a description of the project and those who respond to the email will be invited to take part in an interview. The questions that will be asked in the interview will be provided to the participants beforehand to allow them time to think about the issues. Each interview should take no more than 45 minutes. They will be carried out in an area away from the Library so as to preserve the anonymity of employees who choose to take part. At the time of the interview, the interviewees will be invited to read the Information Sheet/Consent Form and have any questions answered. When all questions are answered, the participant will be invited to sign the Consent Form and then the interview will commence. Interviews will be carried out face-to-face, recorded and transcribed by the researcher. The interview will aim to follow the same topics as the student survey, but will use a semi-structured format allowing prompting for fuller discussion of the issues. After the interview, the participant will be thanked for their time.

**About your Participants**

**C2. Who will be potential participants?**

Potential participants will be library staff at the University of Sheffield.

**C3. How will the potential participants be identified and recruited?**

Library staff will be contacted via an internal library staff mailing list and invited to contact the researcher directly if they wish to participate. If they do respond, they will be sent the Information Sheet/Consent Form and there will be an opportunity for the researcher to answer any questions they may have. An interview will then be arranged.
C4. What is the potential for physical and/or psychological harm / distress to participants?

The potential for harm or distress is no greater than what might be experienced in everyday life. The subject of the research is not considered generally sensitive or upsetting and focuses on a day to day issue for library staff.

C5. Will informed consent be obtained from the participants?

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If Yes, please explain how informed consent will be obtained?

Participants will be emailed the Information Sheet/Consent Form before the interview and it will be reviewed again with the participant just before the interview. The researcher will be able to answer any remaining questions the interviewee has. The participant will be invited to sign the consent form.

If No, please explain why you need to do this, and how the participants will be de-briefed?

C6. Will financial / in kind payments (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants? (Indicate how much and on what basis this has been decided)

No compensation or honoraria will be provided.

About the Data

C7. What data will be collected? (Tick all that apply)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Type</th>
<th>Print</th>
<th>Digital</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant observation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Audio recording</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video recording</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Computer logs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Questionnaires/Surveys</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Other:</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

C8. What measures will be put in place to ensure confidentiality of personal data, where appropriate?
It is not possible to carry out interviews anonymously but no identifying information will be recorded. Each participant will be assigned a number starting from 1 purely for the administrative purposes of identifying the matching interviews and transcriptions. Only the researcher will have access to this information and to the audio recordings. Only the researcher will transcribe these interviews. No identifying information of any kind will be noted in the final dissertation.

C9. How/Where will the data be stored?

The audio recordings will be downloaded to the researcher’s laptop. This is password protected and only accessible to the researcher. The filename for each audio recording will be identified by a number to allow it to be matched to transcriptions. There will be no key to match a recording to a person’s identity. The audio recording will only be listened to and transcribed by the researcher.

C10. Will the data be stored for future re-use? If so, please explain

The data will be purged after my dissertation is completed and the mark is received.

About the Procedure

C11. 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)? If so, please explain how it will be managed.

There are no anticipated issues of personal safety to the participants or researchers. However, the interviews will take place at the University where possible to protect both the interviewer and interviewee. Where this is not possible, a public space such as a coffee shop will be used. This will always be agreed with the participant beforehand.
Title of Research Project: [Overdue books and Library Fines at the University of Sheffield]

We confirm our responsibility to deliver the research project 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) and, where externally funded, with the terms and conditions of the research funder.

In submitting this research ethics application form I am also confirming that:

- The form is accurate to the best of our knowledge and belief.
- The project will abide by the University’s Ethics Policy.
- There is no potential material interest that may, or may appear to, impair the independence and objectivity of researchers conducting this project.
- Subject to the research being approved, we undertake to adhere to the project protocol without unagreed deviation and to comply with any conditions set out in the letter from the University ethics reviewers notifying me of this.
- We undertake to inform the ethics reviewers of significant changes to the protocol (by contacting our academic department’s Ethics Coordinator in the first instance).
- We are aware of our responsibility to be up to date and comply with the requirements of the law and relevant guidelines relating to security and confidentiality of personal data, including the need to register when necessary with the appropriate Data Protection Officer (within the University the Data Protection Officer is based in CiCS).
- We understand that the project, including research records and data, may be subject to inspection for audit purposes, if required in future.
- We understand that personal data about us as researchers in this form will be held by those involved in the ethics review procedure (e.g. the Ethics Administrator and/or ethics reviewers) and that this will be managed according to Data Protection Act principles.
- If this is an application for a ‘generic’ project all the individual projects that fit under the generic project are compatible with this application.
- **We 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 the Student (if applicable):**
Sarah B Wilson

**Name of Principal Investigator (or the Supervisor):**
Barbara Sen

**Date:** 12/06/14
Purpose of the research
We are trying to investigate why students at the University of Sheffield return books late. We also want to investigate attitudes to the current library policies around overdue books and assess possible improvements to these policies.

Who will be participating?
We are inviting students at the University of Sheffield to take part in an online survey.

What will you be asked to do?
We will ask you a series of questions in three parts. The first part will contain three questions about the type of student you are (e.g. undergraduate or postgraduate) so that we have a demographic profile of our participant group. The second part contains four questions about your experiences (if any) of overdue books. The third part contains three questions about your opinions on current library policies and possible changes to them.
The survey should take no more than 15 minutes.

What are the potential risks of participating?
The risks of participating are the same as those experienced in everyday life.

What data will we collect?
We are only collecting your responses to the survey questions. No other data will be recorded.

What will we do with the data?
The data will be stored on my computer and analysed for inclusion in my PGT dissertation. The data will be destroyed after my dissertation has been marked.

Will my participation be confidential?
The data will be collected with no identifying information attached.

What will happen to the results of the research project?
The results of this study will be included in my PGT dissertation which will be publicly available, and may later be reported in a journal article. Please contact the School in six months.
I confirm that I have read and understand the description of the research project, and that I have had an opportunity to ask questions about the project.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without any negative consequences.

I understand that I may decline to answer any particular question or questions, or to do any of the activities. If I stop participating at any time, all of my data will be purged.

I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential, that my name or identity will not be linked to any research materials, and that I will not be identified or identifiable in any report or reports that result from the research.

I give permission for the research team members to have access to my anonymised responses.

I give permission for the research team to re-use my data for future research as specified above.

I agree to take part in the research project as described above.

Participant Name (Please print)  
Participant Signature

Researcher Name (Please print)  
Researcher Signature

Date

Note: If you have any difficulties with, or wish to voice concern about, any aspect of your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Angela Lin, Research Ethics Coordinator, Information School, The University of Sheffield (ischool_ethics@sheffield.ac.uk), or to the University Registrar and Secretary.
The University of Sheffield.
Information School

Overdue Books and Library Fines at the University of Sheffield

Researchers
Sarah B. Wilson
Masters of Librarianship Student
Information School
University of Sheffield
sbwilson1@sheffield.ac.uk

Professor Barbara Sen
Senior Lecturer
Information School
University of Sheffield
b.a.sen@sheffield.ac.uk

Purpose of the research
We are trying to investigate why students at the University of Sheffield return books late. We also want to investigate attitudes to the current library policies around overdue books and assess possible improvements to these policies.

Who will be participating?
We are inviting library staff at the University of Sheffield to be interviewed.

What will you be asked to do?
We will ask you questions about why you think students return library books late, about how effective you think current library policies on overdues are, and about any possible improvements that could be made to these policies. Other questions may emerge during the course of the interview. The interview should take no more than 45 minutes.

What are the potential risks of participating?
The risks of participating are the same as those experienced in everyday life.

What data will we collect?
We are collecting an audio recording of your responses to the interview questions. The researcher may take notes during the interview as well. No other data will be recorded. The audio will be used for transcription only.

What will we do with the data?
The data will be stored on my computer and transcribed into text for analysis. The data will be destroyed after my dissertation has been marked.

Will my participation be confidential?
The data will be collected with no identifying information attached. No one at the library will be informed about your participation. The audio will be used only for transcription purposes and will only be accessible to the researcher.

What will happen to the results of the research project?
The results of this study will be included in my PGT dissertation which will be publicly available, and may later be reported in a journal article. Please contact the School in six months.
I confirm that I have read and understand the description of the research project, and that I have had an opportunity to ask questions about the project.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without any negative consequences.

I understand that I may decline to answer any particular question or questions, or to do any of the activities. If I stop participating at any time, all of my data will be purged.

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Participant Name (Please print)  
Participant Signature

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Researcher Signature

Date

Note: If you have any difficulties with, or wish to voice concern about, any aspect of your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Angela Lin, Research Ethics Coordinator, Information School, The University of Sheffield (ischool_ethics@sheffield.ac.uk), or to the University Registrar and Secretary.
Information School Research Ethics Panel

Letter of Approval

Date: 27th June 2014

TO: Sarah Wilson

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

Title: Overdue books and Library Fines at the University of Sheffield

Submitted by: Sarah Wilson

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:

Dr Angela Lin
Research Ethics Coordinator
Appendix 2 - Copy of user survey

NB This is a copy of an online survey and does not display formatting as it was seen by participants.

Overdue Library Books

This short survey investigates students' attitudes to overdue library books. It forms part of a study that is being conducted by Sarah Wilson as part of her MA in Librarianship. It should take no more than 15 minutes to complete.

First, you will need to read some information about this part of the research and give your consent to participate.

If you have any questions, please email sbwilson1@sheffield.ac.uk

Thank you for taking part!

*Required

Purpose of the research

We are trying to investigate why students return books late. We also want to investigate attitudes to the ways libraries deal with overdue books and assess possible changes. To do this, we are inviting students to take part in an online survey.

What will you be asked to do?

We will ask you a series of questions in three parts. The first part will contain three questions about the type of student you are (e.g. undergraduate or postgraduate) so that we have a demographic profile of our participant group. The second part contains four questions about your experiences (if any) of overdue books. The third part contains three questions about your opinions on the ways libraries manage overdue books and possible changes to these methods. The survey should take no more than 15 minutes to complete. Your participation is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time before you submit by closing your browser window. Any information collected will be anonymous.

Consent

For more details and a full information sheet please go to: https://docs.google.com/a/sheffield.ac.uk/document/d/1iB3mKQeHsOFXej1FdMtvC1k6wjQQWi6jDR6RXWgshg/edit I confirm that I have read and understand the description of the research project, and that I have had an opportunity to ask questions about the project. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without any negative consequences. I understand that I may decline to answer any particular question or questions, or to do any of the activities. If I stop participating at any time, all of my data will be purged. I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential, that my name or identity will not be linked to any research materials, and that I will not be identified or identifiable in any report or reports that result from the research. I give permission for the research team members to have access to my anonymised responses. I give
permission for the research team to re-use my data for future research as specified above. I agree to take part in the research project as described above.

* Please check this box to confirm that you have read and understood the above information and consent to participate.

**About you**

What type of library user are you?

- Undergraduate student
- Postgraduate student

Are you a full-time or part-time student?

- Full-time
- Part-time

Are you a home (UK) or international student?

- Home
- International

**Overdue Library Books**

Have you ever kept a library book past the date it was due back (so that the book became overdue)?

- Yes
- No

If you have had overdue library books in the past, what was the reason? Tick any that apply.

- I forgot to return the book
- I did not realise the book was overdue
- I forgot to renew the book
- I had lent the book to somebody else
- I couldn't get to the library
- I tried to renew the book but couldn't
- I still needed the book
- I had lost or misplaced the book
- Personal circumstances (e.g. illness)
- I kept the book to prevent anyone else from using it
- Other:

How do you feel if your library books become overdue?
Please write your answer below.
What is your experience of overdue books?
Please read the following statements and tick whether you agree or disagree.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Very effective</th>
<th>Sometimes effective</th>
<th>Not effective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Automatic weekly renewals for books that have not been requested</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly borrowing statement email</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email reminders when books are due back</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blocking users from renewing requested books</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charging fines for overdue books</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shorter loan periods when books are heavily requested</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24-hour book return</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blocking users from borrowing other books once they reach a certain amount of fines on their account</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended vacation loans</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
What else could help?
Please rate the following ideas for other ways to manage overdue books. How effective do you think each idea would be?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Idea</th>
<th>Very effective</th>
<th>Somewhat effective</th>
<th>Not effective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Text message reminders when books are due back</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make more books available online</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make more books reference only (i.e. for use within a library only)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charge higher fines</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reward system for people who return books on time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fines Amnesty week when any book can be returned without fines</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create a High Demand section with shorter loan periods for popular books</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Block users from taking out more books as soon as they have an item that is overdue</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please add any other comments you would like to make about overdue library books. This could include other ideas for ways a library could help.
Appendix 3- Copy of staff interview questions

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

2. How do you think library users feel about their overdue library books?

3. Libraries already do various things to try and help users to return books on time. How effective do you think these methods are? How could they be improved?

4. Some possible ideas for encouraging returns on time include:
   - Text message reminders when books are due back
   - Create a High Demand section with shorter loan periods
   - Make more books reference only
   - Make more books available online
   - Charge higher fines
   - Rewards system for people who return their books on time
   - “Fines Amnesty Week” when any book can be returned without fines
   - Block users from taking out more books as soon as they have any item that is overdue

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

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

6. Are there any other comments you would like to add?
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.

In certain cases where confidentiality of information is concerned, if either the author or the supervisor so requests, the Department will withhold the dissertation from loan or consultation for the period specified below. Where no such restriction is in force, the Department may also deposit the Dissertation in the University of Sheffield Library.

To be completed by the Author – Select (a) or (b) by placing a tick in the appropriate box

If you are willing to give permission for the Information School to make your dissertation available in these ways, please complete the following:

☑️ (a) Subject to the General Regulation on Intellectual Property, I, the author, agree to this dissertation being made immediately available through the Department and/or University Library for consultation, and for the Department and/or Library to reproduce this dissertation in whole or part in order to supply single copies for the purpose of research or private study

☐ (b) Subject to the General Regulation on Intellectual Property, I, the author, request that this dissertation be withheld from loan, consultation or reproduction for a period of [ ] years from the date of its submission. Subsequent to this period, I agree to this dissertation being made available through the Department and/or University Library for consultation, and for the Department and/or Library to reproduce this dissertation in whole or part in order to supply single copies for the purpose of research or private study

Name  Sarah Wilson

Department  Information School

Signed  Sarah Wilson  Date  30/08/2014

To be completed by the Supervisor – Select (a) or (b) by placing a tick in the appropriate box
(a) I, the supervisor, agree to this dissertation being made immediately available through the Department and/or University Library for loan or consultation, subject to any special restrictions (*) agreed with external organisations as part of a collaborative project.

*Special restrictions

(b) I, the supervisor, request that this dissertation be withheld from loan, consultation or reproduction for a period of [ ] years from the date of its submission. Subsequent to this period, I, agree to this dissertation being made available through the Department and/or University Library for loan or consultation, subject to any special restrictions (*) agreed with external organisations as part of a collaborative project

Name
Department
Signed Date

THIS SHEET MUST BE SUBMITTED WITH DISSERTATIONS BY1 DEPARTMENTAL REQUIREMENTS.