“MOBILES WITH A MISSION.” TO WHAT EXTENT MIGHT MOBILE LIBRARIES CONTRIBUTE TOWARDS SOCIAL INCLUSION? AN INVESTIGATION INTO CURRENT AND POTENTIAL PRACTICES.

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ABSTRACT

Social inclusion is a subject high on the government agenda and libraries are viewed as one of the public services possessing the capabilities to contribute significantly in this area. Static library services are referred to extensively within national library documentation outlining approaches towards social inclusion. Mobile libraries, however, rarely feature. So is it the case that mobile libraries do not contribute towards social inclusion, or do mobiles make a significant contribution but their efforts simply go unrecognised?

The study adopts an inductive methodological approach using both quantitative and qualitative evidence to produce findings. A triangulated approach is taken in the methods of data collection with the incorporation of a questionnaire-based e-mail survey of public library authorities in England and Wales, case studies of two authorities, and interviews with senior management, frontline staff and mobile library users. A literature search provides background information of the topic at hand.

Aims and objectives include the investigation into how mobile libraries feature in public library policies, how mobile libraries contribute towards social inclusion, how far they are recognised as contributors in this area, and finally, the future potential of mobile libraries is considered.

Evidence showed that 55% of public library authorities included mobile library services within their current policy documentation relating to social inclusion (including statements in Annual Library Plans). It was found that mobile libraries carry specialist stock for visually impaired people (in addition to standard stock for adults and children), and although more specialist materials could be obtained on request, space limitations on the vehicles meant that it could not be carried without a demand for it. Charging policies differed little to static provision. Services to socially excluded user groups differed between authorities
with some operating specialist services and others offering little above
the standard service. Particular strengths of the mobile library service
are found to be an increased amount of physical accessibility for users, a
social role which encourages social interaction, an increased amount of
personal service (in comparison to static provision), reliability, a flexible
approach in responding to peoples’ needs, and the promotion of the
value of reading to improve peoples’ quality of life. Mobile library
services within some authorities are also found to be aiding urban
regeneration and combating rural deprivation.

It is found that mobile libraries are not widely recognised as
contributors to social inclusion by national bodies or many local library
authorities. They do, however, have the potential through promotion
and the development of effective performance measurements to monitor
work done in relation to social inclusion, to raise the profile of mobile
library services.

Conclusions reveal that mobile libraries are contributing towards
social inclusion but provision differs widely between authorities. Those
authorities not active in this area need to recognise the potential of the
service. Similarly, through partnerships with other voluntary or
community organisations, the potential for mobile libraries to aid social
inclusion are endless.
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4.0 Presentation of results and data analysis 24
4.1 Presentation of results section 24
4.2 Response rates to e-mail questionnaire 24
4.3 Range of respondents 25
4.4 The public library authorities used as case studies 25

5.0 The inclusion of mobile libraries in public library policies 28
5.1 Social inclusion and public library policy 28
5.2 The inclusion of mobile libraries in public library policies relating to social inclusion 30
5.3 How mobile libraries feature in public library policies relating to social inclusion 31
5.4 The perceived importance of mobile libraries within social inclusion strategies 32
5.5 Summary 33

6.0 Mobile libraries’ contribution towards social inclusion 35
6.1 Stock 35
6.1.1 Specialist stock 37
6.2 Facilities and services 38
6.2.1 Routes 38
6.2.2 Charges 40
6.2.3 Services to specific user groups 42
6.2.4 The strengths of the mobile library service 50
6.3 The contribution made by mobile libraries in combating rural and urban deprivation 57
6.3.1 The response by mobile libraries towards urban deprivation 57
6.3.2 The response by mobile libraries towards rural deprivation 59
6.4 Are the mobile library services with larger numbers of vehicles better contributors towards social inclusion? 63
6.5 Are mobile libraries more socially inclusive than static libraries? 63
6.6 Summary

7.0 Recognition

7.1 General recognition
7.2 Performance indicators
7.3 Need for promotion
7.4 Use of non-professional staff
7.5 Summary

8.0 Future potential

8.1 Mobile libraries: a key tool for inclusion
8.2 Methods of incorporating mobile libraries into social inclusion strategies
  8.2.1 Outreach work
  8.2.2 Partnerships
  8.2.3 Active promotion and experimental schemes to target users
  8.2.4 Formulation of performance measurements
8.3 Summary

9.0 Conclusions

9.1 The importance of social inclusion
9.2 The recognition of mobiles as tools for social inclusion
  9.2.1 General recognition
  9.2.2 Recognition within public library authorities
  9.2.3 Reasons for lack of recognition
9.3 Mobile libraries as agents for social inclusion
9.4 The future potential for mobile libraries
9.5 Conclusion
9.6 Recommendations for future research

Bibliography
Appendices

Appendix 1: E-mail questionnaire

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Response rate by authority type  
Figure 2: The inclusion of mobile libraries within policy documentation relating to social inclusion, by authority type  
Figure 3: Existence of public library policy documentation relating to social inclusion by authority type  
Figure 4: Prioritisation of social inclusion within Best Value Reviews  
Figure 5: The inclusion of mobile libraries in policy documentation relating to social inclusion, by authority type  
Figure 6: Authorities having direct responsibility for the selection of stock  
Figure 7: Criteria used to determine which communities receive mobile library provision  
Figure 8: Staff used on mobile libraries  
Figure 9: Staff used on mobile libraries, by authority type
1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The government and social inclusion

Social inclusion is a subject high on the government agenda and in the light of the McPherson Report (1999) and the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (Social Exclusion Unit, 2001a) their commitment towards combating social exclusion is clear. The overarching aim of the government's social inclusion policy has been defined by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS, 1999) as follows:

To promote the involvement in culture and leisure activities of those at risk of social disadvantage or marginalisation, particularly by virtue of the area they live in; their disability or age, racial or ethnic origin. To improve the quality of people's lives by these means.

As part of the implementation process of this policy, libraries are viewed by the government as having 'a major part to play' (Linda Perham MP, in Sugg (ed.), 1999), and this is similarly underlined in the introduction of the Department of Culture Media and Sport policy guidelines Libraries for all: social inclusion in public libraries (DCMS, 1999).

So it is evident that public libraries are recognised as having the potential to contribute towards the achievement of social inclusion. Indeed, the Library and Information Commission (2000) have defined libraries as 'the essence of inclusion' which highlights the fact that libraries are socially inclusive by their very nature; allowing universal accessibility and promoting positive values to reduce inequality. The government echo this view in its response to the sixth report from the Culture, Media and Sport Committee (2000b):

[Libraries] are a cornerstone of our cultural life and a central plank in the delivery of wider educational, social and economic benefits. They are accessible and egalitarian, and provide a platform for self development, a gateway to knowledge and catalyst for the imagination. Above all...they are
highly respected and widely used by the public…. It is this bond with
individual users and communities that represents the single major strength
of public libraries.

However, it appears that in many cases, only static libraries are
recognised within this theory whilst mobile libraries are simply not
considered. Whilst the DCMS (1999) state that the government
encourages the use of mobile libraries ‘to deliver books to housebound
people in the community’ they do not seem to recognise them as having a
role beyond this. Indeed, in the recent DCMS report (2001b) *Culture and
creativity: the next ten years*, a proposal for library provision for those living
in isolated rural communities suggests that the best option would be to
house ‘small static collections of books’ in rural post offices. The details of
how mobile libraries are currently providing a service to those communities,
or the consideration that this service could be expanded to provide better
provision is not mentioned. This suggests that static provision, however
limited, seems to be preferable over the mobile service.

Similarly, the recently published Public Library Standards (DCMS,
2001a) fails to include mobile libraries in a significant number of areas.
One of the few areas in which mobile libraries are mentioned is in reference
to missed stops, which simply portrays the service in a negative light.
There is also a failure to include mobiles in the standard specifying that
libraries open more than ten hours a week should have online access to the
library catalogue. This suggests that the government does not view the
inclusion of an online catalogue on mobile libraries as essential. The
reasons for this are not given. However, if the government does not appear
to value mobile libraries enough to ensure that authorities invest in providing
mobile library users with the basic service of access to the full range of
resources available (which could be said to be even more essential than a
static library due to the limited amount of stock held on the vehicles), then
how will the public library authorities themselves view the status of mobiles
within the service as a whole?
Indeed, those within the library community do not appear to view mobile libraries as having a significant role to play in combating social exclusion. For example, Muddiman et al (2000) examine the ways in which public libraries have responded to social inclusion in their report *Open to all? The public library and social exclusion* but mobile libraries, which as part of the public library service should be included, get only a cursory mention. Similarly, John Pateman (2000), the Head of Libraries and Heritage in the London Borough of Merton, discusses in his article “Social exclusion: putting theory in to practice”, the ways in which static libraries can introduce socially inclusive policies, but fails to consider the contribution that could be made by mobile libraries.

Such omissions suggest that the part played by the mobile library service in relation to social inclusion is an area in need of research. So, is it the case that mobile libraries do not contribute towards social inclusion? Or do mobiles contribute significantly but their efforts are simply not recognised?

1.2 Aims and objectives

The aim of this study is to investigate the ways in which mobile libraries currently contribute towards social inclusion and to explore potential ways in which mobiles may be used to further combat social exclusion.

The study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

a) The inclusion of mobile libraries in public library policies
   - To ascertain the extent to which mobile libraries have been included in public library policies relating to social inclusion.
   - To investigate how public library authorities perceive the importance of mobile libraries within social inclusion policies.
b) Mobile libraries’ contribution towards social inclusion

- To ascertain the ways in which mobile libraries are socially inclusive.
- To establish how far mobile library stock, facilities and services contribute towards social inclusion.
- To discover to what extent mobile libraries contribute towards combating rural and urban deprivation.

c) Recognition

- To ascertain how far any contribution towards social inclusion made by mobile libraries is recognised.

d) Future potential

- To consider possible ways in which mobile libraries can best be incorporated into social inclusion strategies.

1.3 Limitations of the study

It is recognised that current projects to introduce ICT onto mobile libraries may have a positive contribution towards social inclusion by ‘bridging the gap’ between ‘the information-rich and the information poor’ (Haywood, 1999). However, this particular avenue will not be pursued as another student is undertaking a dissertation on this subject, and it was felt that it would, firstly, be unfair to expect respondents to provide material of a similar nature to more than one student, and secondly there was a danger of duplicating research.

The scope of the project extends to cover England and Wales only. While it is recognised that Scotland and Northern Ireland have similar policies relating to social inclusion, the researcher felt that it would be impractical to undertake a survey of the whole UK within the time period of such a small-scale study.
2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW: SOCIAL INCLUSION AND RELATED LIBRARY PROVISION

2.1 Definitions

Much of the literature on social inclusion/exclusion provides the reader with a definition. One of the most authoritative is given by the government in the policy document *Preventing social exclusion* (Social Exclusion Unit, 2001b) which defines social exclusion as:

...a shorthand term for what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime, bad health and family breakdown.

The people likely to suffer as a result of being socially excluded are those susceptible to the ‘risk factors’ of ‘low income; family conflict; being in care; school problems; being an ex-prisoner; being from an ethnic minority; living in a deprived neighbourhood in urban and rural areas; mental health problems, age and disability’ (Social Exclusion Unit, 2001b).

Social inclusion, then, goes far beyond the tackling of poverty. As Tony Blair had stated (quoted in Dutch, 1999: 15), ‘Social exclusion is about income but it is about much more...it is about prospects and networks and life chances.’

The European Union (in Dutch, 1999: 16) echoes this sentiment, highlighting that social inclusion is about providing fundamental rights to all individuals. This definition stipulates that social inclusion is directly concerned with the ‘social rights of citizens to certain basic standards of living and to participation in the social and occupational opportunities of society.’
However, the Library and Information Commission (2000) stresses the intricacies surrounding the definition of social exclusion. Firstly it is ‘complex’, with no single concept, e.g. poverty, to fully explain it. It is ‘pervasive’ as it can affect any one at any time of their life. It is ‘experienced subjectively’ therefore each case is ‘specific and relative to each individual, group or environment.’ Social exclusion can also vary with time as different forms of exclusion can affect an individual at different stages of their life and at various degrees of intensity. It is also stressed in this article that social exclusion is ‘multi-faceted’ due to the fact that more than one form of exclusion can be experienced at any one time. Therefore, cases of exclusion very often cannot be pigeonholed and must be assessed on an individual basis.

Indeed, the difficulty in defining the complex nature of social exclusion and the parties who suffer from it is evident in the Public Library Standards (DCMS, 2001a: 7) which state that libraries must report in their Annual Library Plans on ‘children, the socially excluded, ethnic minority communities and people with disabilities’ – thereby suggesting (in contradiction to statements in other policy documentation e.g. Social Exclusion Unit, 2001b) that those from ethnic minority communities and people with disabilities do not fall within the category of groups considered to be socially excluded.

Yet whilst the definitions surrounding social exclusion are complex both in terms of which groups and individuals suffer from exclusion and in what specific ways, it can be agreed that ‘Excluded people and communities…are all affected by forces which prevent them participating fully, as citizens, in social activity in its widest sense’ (Muddiman, 1999).

But Tony Blair (Cabinet Office, 2001) adds a further interesting dimension to the topic of social exclusion by stating that everyone is affected in some way, be it directly or indirectly. As he states:
Social exclusion affects every single one of us. There are the huge personal costs to those people who are sleeping rough, missing out on education or struggling through poverty or deprivation. But we all suffer when so many of our fellow citizens are missing out. Our society is less cohesive and everyone pays the bills for social failure.

So by combating social exclusion, society as a whole (and not just those who directly suffer from being socially excluded) can benefit.

### 2.1.1 Barriers to social inclusion

Barriers to social inclusion are identified in the report *Libraries for all: social inclusion in public libraries* (DCMS, 1999) and can be divided into the categories of institutional; personal and social; and environmental. Institutional barriers (in relation to libraries) are shown to be found in rules, regulations and particular library practices which could cause particular groups or individuals to feel excluded (e.g. the insistence on providing documentary evidence of one’s fixed address before being allowed to register as a member of the library would exclude travellers, the homeless or refugees). Personal and social barriers extend to educational deficiencies; homelessness; poverty; lack of opportunities for social interaction; and poor self esteem. Finally, environmental barriers are identified as problems related to physically accessing buildings; urban degeneration; feelings of isolation amongst those living in rural communities; and problems caused by poor transport systems.

### 2.2 National policies related to social inclusion

#### 2.2.1 National policies in England and Wales

In 1997 the Labour government set up the Social Exclusion Unit to investigate the causes of, and ultimately tackle social exclusion. Their findings have highlighted problems surrounding the issues of truancy and expulsions from school, rough sleepers and the need for neighbourhood
regeneration. This final subject is detailed in the document, *A new commitment to neighbourhood renewal* (Social Exclusion Unit, 2001a) which sets the objective that ‘in ten to 20 years no-one should be seriously disadvantaged by where they live’. In order to achieve this The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal Action Plan has been developed to address deprivation ‘at community level’ by combining ‘improvements to services with new mechanisms to join up local services and involve communities, and strong regional and national leadership’.

The Social Exclusion Unit (2001b) have also formulated the policy document *Preventing social exclusion* which states that social inclusion can be achieved only through ‘Prevention, reintegration and basic minimum standards’.

In *Culture and creativity* (DCMS, 2001b) culture is offered as a way to combat social exclusion. In line with this policy, libraries, museums, galleries and archives have been identified as possible ‘agents of social change’ (DCMS, 2001c) who can work together to offer accessibility to all and provide services (either within the existing physical spaces or in the form of outreach projects) to ‘improve the lives of socially excluded people.’

### 2.2.2 National policies in Scotland

In contrast to the social inclusion policies relating to England and Wales, Scotland has a different key phrase yet a similar strategy. Here the term ‘social justice’ is prevalent and the policy document *Social justice…a Scotland where everyone matters: Social Justice Annual Report* (Scottish Executive, 2000: 5) details the need to combat ‘poverty, deprivation and social exclusion’. So social exclusion is not highlighted in its own right but features as part of the social justice strategy. But having stressed this, the document identifies similar groups of people considered as excluded and comparable measures to combat exclusion to those highlighted in the policies of England and Wales.
2.2.3 National policies in Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland the policy relating to social inclusion is detailed within the document entitled *Making it work: The second new targeting social need report* (2000) which details the aim of ‘tackling poverty and social disadvantage’. This work focuses on the same groups identified as socially excluded in the policies of England, Wales and Scotland, but also, understandably in the light of the troubles in Ireland as a whole, particularly highlights the desire to combat exclusion created as a result of religious differences.

2.3 Public library policy and social inclusion

Much of the public library policy regarding social inclusion is governed by national policies. The Department of Culture, Media and Sport (1999: 8) policy document *Libraries for all: social inclusion in public libraries* details the governmental aim in relation to social inclusion in libraries:

To promote the involvement in culture and leisure activities of those at risk of social disadvantage or marginalisation, particularly by virtue of the area they live in; their disability or age, race or ethnic origin. To improve the quality of people’s lives by these means.

This document further encourages local authorities to formulate social inclusion strategies to promote good practice in this area. The Department of Culture, Media and Sport (2000) similarly lay great importance on library authorities to include social inclusion within their Annual Library Plans. The article by Mason (2000) highlights specific recommendations to libraries embarking upon the formulation of a social inclusion strategy, including tailoring services to meet the needs of socially excluded groups and communities via consultation with those affected; having opening hours which reflect the needs of the community; offering affordable or free access to ICT; establishing the library as the ‘champion of
the independent learner’ and forming partnerships with other learning organisations.

The Culture, Media and Sport Committee (2000a and 2000b) also feature social inclusion greatly in their reports and provide suggestions on how public libraries can use their services to combat social exclusion, particularly amongst the unemployed and low-waged; people with disabilities; ethnic minorities and rural communities.

The Library and Information Commission (2000) stress in Libraries: the essence of inclusion that libraries hold a unique position within communities which make them the ideal candidates for aiding social inclusion. Suggestions for implementing inclusion strategies in libraries include sharing good practice, promoting the culture of inclusion, and reaching out to the community via partnerships with other community-based organisations and projects to engage ‘hard-to-reach’ groups.

Ethnic minorities can be said to constitute some of these ‘hard-to-reach’ groups and Pateman (2000) writes that there are works on race that libraries can utilise to improve their practices towards these groups such as the report by Roach and Morrison (1998) Public libraries, ethnic diversity and citizenship and the MacPherson report (1999). Pateman (2000) further recommends that libraries should adopt the proposals outlined in Libraries for all (1999) and recognise that Annual Library Plans, Public Library Standards and Best Value are ‘powerful mechanisms in tackling social exclusion’ as they allow public library authorities to plan, monitor and maintain quality in their approaches to aiding social inclusion.

2.3.1 Social inclusion in static libraries

The most recent and comprehensive work on social inclusion in public libraries is Open for all? The public library and social exclusion (Muddiman et al, 2000) which details the efforts currently being made by public library authorities in the UK to combat social exclusion. The findings
show that public libraries are merely ‘superficially open to all’ in terms of providing ‘passive “access” to materials’ whilst lacking proper strategies which aim to cater for the needs of excluded groups (Muddiman et al, 2000: ix).

Vincent (1999) shares a similar view, believing that libraries are ‘not good at tackling social inclusion’. He puts this down to the insufficient number of excluded individuals employed within public libraries, and a general lack of sufficient and ‘continued’ financial aid to carry out the amount of socially inclusive measures that authorities would wish to put into practice.

Hopkins (in Sugg (ed), 1999: 16) reflects the same opinion surrounding the intermittent approach of the public library service as a whole towards social inclusion. She states that her research on public libraries and social inclusion displayed that there were ‘some imaginative initiatives, some very focussed authorities, some well integrated local staff; but perhaps a shortage of cohesive library service policies and planned action at a strategic level.’ Examples of some of the ‘imaginative initiatives’ amongst authorities can be seen in Beyond book issues: The social potential of library projects (Matarasso, 1998a) which gives details of the socially inclusive programmes nominated for the 1998 Holt Jackson/ Library Association Community Initiative Awards. The results of this work display that libraries provide the public with opportunities for personal development; social cohesion; community empowerment; a sense of local image and identity; the opportunity to exercise their powers of imagination and creativity; and a sense of health and well-being.

The literature search further shows that some libraries have been practicing the community-orientated principles of social inclusion long before this political concept became popular. Hendry (1988) for example, writes of ‘caring libraries in a caring society’, detailing how libraries stand as a ‘local, community-based, positive public service’ and the ‘community’s cultural catalyst.’
Other writers have highlighted the cultural role of libraries. Shimmon (1999) for example, states that libraries are a ‘gateway to culture’. However, he also goes further by expressing the view that the ‘public library is socially inclusive by its very nature’ and simply has to work to remain so.

Usherwood (1989) too, in *The public library as public knowledge* highlights the social value of libraries, citing them as ‘an essential community resource’ whose very existence as an organisation which promotes and provides education, information and culture can work to ‘improve the life chances’ of those who wouldn’t necessarily have the means to access these resources. Similarly, Linley and Usherwood (1998) assert that public libraries ‘enrich the lives of many people’ via the services and resources they offer, whilst concurrently promoting ‘social cohesion and community confidence.’

Kerslake and Kinnell (1998) also investigate the social impact that libraries have on communities and find that they aid the community by providing a ‘cultural meeting point’; offering support for those outside the labour market; providing a sense of social cohesion in times of demographic change; providing ‘information in times of crisis; and acting as facilitators in providing an education in, and access to technological information sources.

Matarasso (1998b: 30) reports similar findings on the social impact of libraries on communities and views the library service as ‘a powerful, if unheralded, force for social inclusion…successful in enabling people to become involved in their community’.

One of the crucial ways in which libraries can encourage involvement in the community is through the promotion of education and literacy to enable those without basic skills to obtain the ability and confidence to participate fully in society. Illiteracy is a significant problem in Britain – in England alone, one in 20 adults have very low literacy skills whilst a staggering one in four are deemed as ‘functionally illiterate’ (Basic Skills Agency, quoted in Prasad, 2001). Zapata (1994) highlights that there is a
link between illiteracy and poverty and, therefore, public libraries play a crucial role in ensuring that ‘unequal access to social wealth, information resources and knowledge’ do not further disadvantage people with literacy problems. By additionally providing literacy activities, libraries can significantly aid social development and so ‘guarantee a better life’ for these individuals. Astbury (1994) shares this view, believing that the public library has the potential to become ‘the key information and learning centre in the community’ both in adult literacy education and further in providing access through education to technological information resources. In this way, individuals can access information and gain skills to improve their quality of life and become involved in society.

People living in isolated rural areas are another group who are often not at the forefront of peoples’ mind when considering those who suffer from social exclusion. But geographical isolation alone can be damaging to those living in the countryside due to a lack of social facilities, public transport, job opportunities and access to educational and social facilities (Mason and Taylor, in Library Information Series No.20, 1993). Both Barton (ed) (1993) and Library Information Series No.20 (1993) investigate the impact of the library service in rural areas and find them to be a vital resource for the very reasons listed above. Although these two works were published before the term social inclusion became widely used, the same principles are in evidence and they show that the library service is one of the main contributors in rural communities to aiding those suffering from exclusion.

2.3.2 Social inclusion and mobile libraries

Mobile libraries receive mere cursory mentions in much documentation addressing social exclusion in public libraries. The 62nd IFLA General Conference Proceedings (Nilsen and Kjekstad, 1996), for example, state that mobiles operate a service in areas ‘where it would not be feasible to operate branch libraries’, which can contribute towards social inclusion by promoting ‘equity and access to library services’. Whilst this is
an understandable justification, it simply establishes the service in a compensatory role for the absence of branch libraries, and with little to offer beyond the realms of access.

The 62nd IFLA general conference (Nilsen and Kjekstad, 1996) similarly stresses that the main role of mobile libraries is to ‘promote equity and access to library services’. However, this paper does go on to recognise ‘the special nature of mobile library services’ and sets an objective to ‘foster awareness of…[their] value and importance’.

The Committee of Culture, Media and Sport (2000a) gives a little more detail on the valuable role that mobiles play, stating that ‘Through mobile libraries, the public library service has been able to reach not only remote, rural communities, but also isolated urban communities such as old peoples’ homes and to provide special services for children.’ This establishes mobile libraries as definite contributors towards social inclusion.

Telfer (1997: 16) adds another dimension to the role that mobile libraries play, highlighting that they ‘Offer flexibility and [have the] ability to respond to changing community needs. As communities evolve and new housing is built, the library service can move with them.’ This quality fits in especially well with the ideology of social exclusion as it establishes mobiles as units that are able to quickly and effectively respond to pockets of need.

2.4 Socially inclusive uses of mobile libraries in countries outside the UK

The literature search revealed many novel and valuable ways in which mobile libraries are used in countries outside the UK to aid social exclusion. In India, Tanzania and Nigeria mobiles are used to complement literacy programmes (Shukla, 1998). By focusing on the particular area of post literacy, mobile libraries and their staff work to strengthen adult continuing education by encouraging neo-literates to develop newly
acquired reading and writing skills instead of allowing them to become redundant.

In Thailand, mobile libraries are similarly used to promote education amongst the population (Lerdserietyakul, 2000). The mobile bus library service in Bangkok is targeted towards aiding disadvantaged people of all ages in the slum areas and less developed communities, providing learning materials, and information ranging from current affairs to entertainment news in order to keep people informed about their world, and thereby make them feel included as part of it. Other buses target schools, temples and businesses with their educational resources, and a further bus accesses the general public by making stops in parks.

But as many people in Thailand are geographically isolated other means of transport, in addition to buses, have been utilised. Two mobile train libraries (converted unused train compartments) operate and are parked at particular train stations for one or two days duration before moving on to the next station. Whilst serving the whole community at each stop this service has gained particular success with homeless children who have found the mobile train library a far more welcoming facility than children’s homes. Opportunities to engage in non-formal education have been provided where children can gain vital skills to help them in life. Some children have even decided to return home as a result of their positive experiences on the mobile library train.

A mobile boat library also operates to serve people living by the main rivers in Thailand. In addition to lending books to the communities served, the boat also offers a ‘floating classroom’ where people can take a short course of a few hours duration on subjects relating to their lives such as water civilisations, problems of and conservation of water environments and river tours.
3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research approach

The study takes an inductive approach based on grounded theory. Induction is a "bottom-up-" approach (Gorman and Clayton, 1997) where no initial assumptions are made and theories are formed as a result of the data collected. Similarly, grounded theory refers to theories being established as the study progresses, or, more simply, is "built "from the ground up"" (Gorman and Clayton, 1997). Therefore, data is collected and analysed then conclusions are drawn from theories that emerge from the study.

Bailey (1994: 55) illustrates this view:

Grounded theory begins at the empirical level and ends at the conceptual level, because the only concepts used are those that are generated throughout the analysis of empirical data.

Triangulation, i.e. the use of multiple methodologies (Gorman and Clayton, 1997) was used - a combination of quantitative and qualitative evidence works to incorporate the strong characteristics that both paradigms bring whilst avoiding the weaknesses that are brought about by using only one approach. It is important for this type of study, where personal opinions and perspectives will play as large a part as the statistical information gained, to use more than one paradigm. As Ford (1999: 1151) notes, the use of only quantitative evidence can have a seriously limiting effect on a project: ‘Overly-analytic states of knowledge are characterised by fragmentation – at worst, isolated facts lacking integration into any wider conceptual picture.’ But although the ‘quantitative versus qualitative debate’ is still alive (Morgan, 1995), it can be argued that an amalgamation of both qualitative and quantitative paradigms can create a wider perspective and work to overcome the limitations of using only one approach, therefore producing richer results. Entwistle and Hounsell (1979: 361) highlight this theory:
The two paradigms…contain the tension of opposites – a thesis and antithesis out of which a fruitful synthesis might be anticipated… the methodologies of competing paradigms could be used alongside one another, each providing distinctive yet equally valid types of evidence.

A triangulated approach was also adopted in the methods of data collection. This enabled information to be cross-validated (Hittleman and Simon in Gorman and Clayton, 1997), thereby creating more accurate results. A questionnaire-based survey of public library authorities in England and Wales, and two individual case studies (incorporating interviews with senior management, front-line staff and users), intended ‘to follow up and…put flesh on the bones of a survey’ (Bell, 1987:6), allowed an opportunity to collect a broad scope of data. As Marton and Svennson (1979: 484) note, this combined approach must be taken to avoid limited results:

> What we can see from one point of view we cannot see from another…. With one kind of observation certain aspects become visible: with another kind of observation we see something else. We cannot arrive at a procedure of observation which makes all the various aspects visible simultaneously.

### 3.2 Methods of investigation

#### 3.2.1 Questionnaire-based survey

A questionnaire-based survey of public library authorities in England and Wales was carried out. Both qualitative and quantitative evidence was attained through a combination of open and closed questions, aimed to establish how far mobile libraries are included in public library policies, and how mobiles contribute towards social inclusion in terms of stock, facilities and services. A majority of closed questions, which provide answers that are ‘easier to code and analyse’ (Bailey, 1994), were also used. Although some open questions were featured to allow for individual responses, a majority of closed questions were used to make the process of collating results from a large body of respondents easier.
The Heads of Mobile Library Services of all the public library authorities in England and Wales that have mobiles were surveyed. It was decided to limit the investigation to England and Wales only as it was felt that the inclusion of Scotland and Northern Ireland would produce too many results to pursue in a study of such a small scale.

The survey was executed via e-mail, to be completed by the respondents on screen and returned simply by marking the reply with the original message. The method of conducting a survey by this medium was chosen for several reasons. Firstly e-mail is a quick and convenient way of distributing a questionnaire. Secondly, it was hoped that the recipients would view this form of survey as undemanding and not overly time consuming, so would be more willing to complete and return it. Therefore, overall returns were anticipated to be higher that a postal questionnaire. Finally, the cost of sending out an e-mail questionnaire was almost minimal as the costs for paper, printing, postage, and stamped-addressed envelopes (to encourage returns) did not have to be found (Foo and Hepworth, 2000).

The questionnaire was piloted before it was distributed in order ‘to show up any weaknesses in the questions’ (Stone & Harris, 1984:19). It was assessed by a senior manager at one of the public library authorities chosen as a case study, firstly, to ensure that it was clear and easy to understand, and secondly, to eradicate any ambiguity.

A due date for the questionnaires to be returned was specified, thus allowing a period of two weeks for completion. Immediately after the due date had expired, reminders were sent out to the authorities who had failed to respond. A further ten day period was given for those respondents to reply within. This was intended as the cut-off point after which all further responses would be ignored. However, no completed questionnaires were received after this date so a decision regarding their inclusion did not have to be made.
3.2.2 Case studies

Two case studies of mobile library authorities were conducted to investigate, in greater depth than the survey, how individual bodies are using mobiles to combat social exclusion. As Bell (1987: 6) highlights, case studies are an ideal way to access vital material which would ordinarily be missed by conducting a survey alone.

The great strength of the case-study method is that it allows the researcher to concentrate on a specific instance or situation and to identify, or attempt to identify, the various interactive processes at work. These processes may remain hidden in a large-scale survey but may be crucial to the success or failure of systems or organizations.

The two authorities were chosen primarily because they were geographically convenient for the researcher to reach, in order to carry out day visits and interviews. A ‘convenience’ sample, although limited in nature, is generally considered to be a practical option which is largely reliable (Bell, 1997). The choice of only two authorities on which to provide case studies was decided upon due to the short nature and limited time period of the study. However, Goodall (1996) believes that this is the best option regardless of the size of the project, stating that a ‘small concentration can yield the best results’.

3.2.3 Interviews

As part of the two case studies, interviews were carried out with senior management, front-line staff and mobile library users. Via this method, it was hoped that enough qualitative evidence would be attained to establish how mobile libraries are regarded within each library authority as a whole, how they are regarded by the users, and how individual authorities use the mobile library service to contribute towards social inclusion.
The interviews with senior management were semi-structured in order to gain answers to specific questions whilst allowing the option to add further spontaneous questions. In this way respondents would have the opportunity to elaborate upon particular points, whilst the researcher would also be able to pursue relevant areas arising from the conversation that may previously have been overlooked. As Fetterman (in Erlandson et al, 1993: 86) states, in this way, ‘questions typically emerge from the conversation. In some cases they are serendipitous and result from comments by the participant.’ Open questions were used throughout to promote full answers, which would provide depth of coverage to particular subject areas and would help to compensate for the brevity of the answers in the survey.

The decision to record the interviews was not taken lightly. Indeed, this issue can often cause a ‘dilemma’ for the researcher (Erlandson et al, 1993) because whilst recording is often the preferable option for convenience and accuracy, it is also subject to the possible disadvantages of malfunctioning equipment, and the prospect that interviewees may offer more guarded and less natural responses. However, taking these factors into consideration, it was decided to record the interviews on a Dictaphone, primarily to allow the researcher to concentrate on the answers and the general course of the interview as opposed to being preoccupied with note taking. This approach also ensured that the interviewees were not misquoted, thus creating more accurate results. It was also recognised that this method could result in more guarded responses but it was hoped that this would not impact too greatly on the accuracy of the answers. Furthermore, the method of recording was particularly apt for a study adopting an inductive approach because as Silverman (1997: 11) observes, ‘recordings and transcripts can offer a highly reliable record to which researchers can return as they develop new hypotheses.’ It was noted, however, that there was the possibility that some respondents may not have agreed to being recorded, in which case, it was planned that notes would be taken.
The interviews with the mobile library front-line staff and users took on a more informal nature and were conducted throughout day visits out on the mobile routes. A list of issues and queries were prepared prior to the visits, to which the researcher planned to find answers during natural conversations throughout the course of the day rather than through more structured sessions. In this way, more natural and honest responses were hoped for.

### 3.2.4 Literature search

An initial search of the Libraries and Information Science Abstracts (LISA) and Web of Science databases on ‘mobile libraries and social inclusion’ resulted in no hits. A search of the library catalogue produced a similarly poor response. This indicated that this was a subject that has not previously been addressed and was therefore an area in need of research.

As a result of the lack of specifically relevant articles and books on the topic of mobile libraries and social inclusion, it was decided to conduct a literature search focusing mainly on ‘social inclusion’ and ‘social exclusion’ (as either one, or both of these antithetical phrases seem to feature in the context of most material on this subject). A second search was conducted simply on the subject of ‘mobile libraries’.

A search of the Internet using the Google search engine and the terms ‘Mobile libraries and Purpose and Role’ produced further valuable resources. The results of these searches came up with material in the following areas:

- Definitions of social inclusion.
- National policies related to social inclusion.
- Social inclusion in static libraries.
- Socially inclusive uses of mobile libraries in countries outside the UK.
Governmental web sites proved to be an excellent source for obtaining information on social inclusion both as a subject in its own right and in relation to libraries.

A further source of material was acquired by consulting the bibliographies of previous dissertations which had focused on mobile libraries. A significant amount of general material on mobile libraries (although much of it very dated) could be gained via these means.
4.0 PRESENTATION OF RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Presentation of results

The results of the study are presented in a combined format under specific subject headings. Therefore, data collected from the e-mail questionnaire, from interviews with front-line mobile library staff and senior management, and anecdotal evidence gleaned from mobile library users are assessed collectively. In this way, subjects could be addressed as a whole, thus making the formulation of conclusions easier.

Results are presented both through the text and via the use of charts and tables. Where multiple comments on a similar subject exist, they are displayed within a box to illustrate the weight of opinion surrounding that particular point. All comments are followed by an indication of the position held by the contributor (followed by the appropriate abbreviation in brackets) as follows: Senior manager (SM), Front-line staff (FLS), Mobile library user (MLU). No names are used in order to ensure the anonymity of the respondent.

4.2 Response rates to e-mail questionnaire

The initial response from the e-mail questionnaire was extremely encouraging. A two-week deadline for completion had been specified on the questionnaire and around 85% of the overall responses were received within this time period (mostly by e-mail, but a small number of postal responses were also received). It can be assumed that the e-mail format of the questionnaire was partially responsible for this success as people may have viewed the completion of a questionnaire in an electronic format quicker to complete than a paper-based version. Shortly after the expiry date had elapsed, a reminder was sent out to those authorities who had failed to respond and the remaining 15% of the total responses were received, along with notification from some authorities of their unwillingness to co-operate (see below).
A total of 163 public library authorities were approached to complete the questionnaire and of those, 75 completed responses were received; 9 authorities stated that they have no mobile library service; 3 authorities refused to respond due to lack of staff time; and 6 e-mails were undelivered due to incorrect addresses. So, discounting the authorities who specified that they possessed no mobile library service from the overall total, the response rate of completed questionnaires was 46%.

4.3 Range of respondents

The range of respondents extended to a geographically diverse number of authorities throughout England and Wales. Of these, a representative number of responses from different authority types were received (see Figure 1).

![Figure 1: Response rate by authority type](image)

4.4 The public library authorities used as case studies

Two public library authorities were chosen to be used as case studies, and for the purposes of this study and to ensure anonymity, they are referred to as Library Authority A and Library Authority B.

Library Authority A is a metropolitan authority which geographically spans mainly urban, and semi-rural regions with some rural areas covered.
The mobile library service within this authority consists of five vehicles – four large mobile libraries, and one travelling library used specifically for visits to sheltered housing complexes and remote rural areas. A separate service for the housebound exists within this authority (which was not investigated as part of this study).

The mobile library service operates three main types of route. The first covers large suburban areas of the region and is aimed at library users who are unable to access static services due to problems such as distance, lack of public transport or simply a lack of a static service point. These routes operate weekly or fortnightly and also cover four schools to allow children greater access to reading books than their school can provide. The second type of route covers inner city areas and targets estates, particular streets and groups of houses, again on a weekly or fortnightly basis. The final type of route covers small communities and isolated rural areas of the region, incorporating visits to sheltered housing complexes, luncheon clubs and playgroups.

Library Authority B is a county council authority which, other than a number of large towns, is essentially rural. The mobile library service consists of thirteen mobile libraries – ten standard vehicles and three maximum capacity vehicles. In a similar manner to Library Authority A, a separate service for housebound people exists to that offered by the mobile library service.

The maximum capacity vehicles provide a library service for larger communities in rural areas that do not have a static service point. They are stationed on one site for either a full day or, in linear villages, they are stationed for half a day at the top end of the village and half a day at the bottom. This system allows users the opportunity to access the Internet facilities on board these vehicles. They operate on a weekly or fortnightly basis.
The ten standard vehicles operate in areas covering smaller communities and more scattered populations, making stops between ten minutes and two hours depending on the number of users wishing to use the service. Similarly, if users at a particular stop are physically impaired in any way, more time is allowed for them to access the vehicle and choose their books. They provide a service which is targeted at the whole community, although the majority of users are made up of the over 60s and young mothers with children. A family issue ticket system operates on these vehicles so one member of the family can obtain books for everyone within the family unit.
5.0 THE INCLUSION OF MOBILE LIBRARIES IN PUBLIC LIBRARY POLICIES

5.1 Social inclusion and public library policy

The results of this study show that 45 (60%) authorities had produced current policy documentation or guidelines relating to social inclusion (including statements in their Annual Library Plan), 4 (5%) authorities had not produced any to date, and 26 (35%) authorities planned to formulate policy documentation on social inclusion in the near future.

Figure 2: Existence of public library policy documentation relating to social inclusion

Figure 3: Existence of public library policy documentation relating to social inclusion by authority type
In terms of authority type, all those English unitary, county and metropolitan authorities surveyed had (or had plans to have) some form of strategy in place relating to social inclusion. The 5% of authorities having no social inclusion policies, or plans to introduce them were found amongst the London borough and Welsh unitary authorities (see Figure 3).

Of the total responses received 22 stated that they had completed their Best Value Review and they were asked to show on a scale of 1-6 (with 1 = no mention and 6 = highest priority) how far social inclusion was prioritised. The results are displayed in Figure 4:

![Figure 4: Prioritisation of social inclusion in Best Value Reviews](image)

The results suggest that social inclusion is regarded as a high priority within Best Value Reports, with 81% of respondents ranking it within the top half of the importance scale. Although it is hard to generalise on such a small scale survey, these findings suggest that county and English unitary authorities value social inclusion as a high priority whilst opinions vary amongst metropolitan, London borough and Welsh unitary authorities from those who prioritise it quite highly to others who view social inclusion as an area of lesser importance. Indeed, Library Authority A (a metropolitan authority) can be viewed as one of those rating social inclusion as a high
priority in their Best Value Review and this is illustrated in the praise they received from their Best Value Reviewer who commented that the mobile library service was ‘the most focussed of all the services towards social inclusion’.

5.2 The inclusion of mobile libraries in public library policies relating to social inclusion

Of the 71 authorities reporting to have (or planning to have) current policy documentation relating to social inclusion (including statements in Annual Library Plans) 39 (55%) authorities stated that mobile libraries featured in their policy documentation on social inclusion, and 31 (44%) stated that they did not, (1% of authorities failed to answer the question). Again, the highest number of respondents appear to be from the English unitary and county council authorities (see Figure 5).

![Figure 5: The inclusion of mobile libraries within policy documentation relating to social inclusion, by authority type](image)

Most references to mobile libraries in public library documentation relating to social inclusion were featured in Annual Library Plans, where 29% of authorities surveyed revealed that statements of this nature exist.
Only 5% of authorities said that mobile libraries feature in their Social Inclusion Policy; 4% of authorities feature them as part of their Best Value Report; 4% feature mobiles in their Business Plan; and 1% of authorities stated that mobile libraries feature in each of the following documents: Education Strategy Plan, Literacy Policy, Sure Start Plan, Local Agenda Plan.

5.3 How mobile libraries feature in public library policies relating to social inclusion

General statements referring to mobile libraries in respondents’ Annual Library Plans and other documentation consistently raise two main themes:

1. Mobile libraries provide a library service to people who are not able to access a static service point, and
2. Mobile libraries are targeted at the elderly and disabled.

This raises the issue that mobile libraries are in some way compensatory for a lack of static provision. Similarly, whilst the targeting of elderly and disabled people does fit in with social inclusion, it fails to highlight all the many other socially excluded groups who could benefit from the service if a more concerted effort were made to target them.

However, whilst this may be the case for a significant number of authorities, others stand out as providing an exemplary contribution to social inclusion through the use of the mobile library service. Many respondents highlighted the schemes (either in operation or in the planning stages) to use their mobile vehicles to provide access to ICT for socially excluded people.

Other areas in which respondents have indicated that mobile libraries are used include the provision of access to library materials for Travellers; plans to offer study support; plans for a mobile learning centre for adults and
young people; provision for the under 5s; work to target non-users in more
deprived areas in favour of deciding upon stops in terms of user figures;
Sure Start initiatives taking learning facilities out to adults in rural
communities with the addition of child care facilities on board; the piloting of
a scheme to target users at supermarkets and workplaces; initiatives to
promote the mobile library service to more users; and the promotion of
cultural activities on the mobiles.

Of the case study authorities, Library Authority B is currently working
on a social inclusion strategy and though it is expected that mobile libraries
will feature within it, it is not yet known in what context. Library Authority A
is also in this position, and believes that mobile libraries will be mentioned in
relation to services to people with disabilities. However, mobile libraries will
not feature in any great detail as the document as a whole is of a very
general nature and does not single out any of the services within the library
authority.

5.4 The perceived importance of mobile libraries within public
library policies

The obvious split (55%/44%) between authorities who do and do not
feature mobile libraries within their policy documentation relating to social
inclusion can also be viewed in the comments from the senior managers of
the mobile library services within the case study authorities. When asked if
they felt that mobile libraries were often overlooked in policy-making the
Senior Manager of Library Authority A felt that mobile library services were
viewed as a separate service to static libraries and therefore often
disregarded:

‘I don’t think the value of them [mobile libraries] is recognised by our own
services. It’s a shame, because…I think that it’s partly the make-up of the
management team in that it’s heavily weighted towards the community
library sector. But no, we’re something else. People don’t really understand
what we do.’ [SM, Library Authority A].
In contrast, the SM of mobile library services of Library Authority B expressed the opinion that mobile libraries were not overlooked within policy-making. The reason for this, however, echoes the sentiments of the SM of Library Authority A, stating that the management structure of an authority is a primary factor in regard to the degree of recognition awarded to mobile library services within the library service as a whole:

‘Our Director… is very supportive. It helps that we issue approximately a million books a year which is roughly 20% of all items issued through the whole library service… so we don’t tend to get overlooked….We’ve got a very good mobile team and we’re all the kind of people that if we felt we were being overlooked…we could tell [name of Director]. I think in other authorities they couldn’t say “I could tell [name of Director]”. We’ve got a very contactable senior management.’ [SM, Library Authority B].

5.5 Summary

Social inclusion is an issue that is increasingly being embraced by public library authorities as only 5% of those surveyed do not have (or plan to have) policy documentation on this subject. Similarly, of those authorities who had completed their Best Value Reviews, 81% stated that social inclusion ranked as an important issue within their reports.

In terms of the inclusion of mobile libraries in public library documentation relating to social inclusion, findings reveal an almost half way split (55%/ 44%) between those who do feature mobiles and those who don’t. Of the authorities who recognise mobiles within this type of documentation, a further split involving how they are included exists. Some authorities give mobiles a cursory mention whereas others are quite detailed in the descriptions of how they are contributing towards social inclusion.

Links can be made between the ways in which individual mobile library services are perceived within their library authority as a whole and how they are depicted within policy documentation relating to social inclusion. From the case study authorities, it is revealed that the
management structure is a determining factor over whether mobile library services receive recognition for their services, or alternatively, if they are largely ignored in favour of static provision.
6.0 MOBILE LIBRARIES’ CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS SOCIAL INCLUSION

6.1 Stock

In Libraries for all: social inclusion in public libraries (DCMS, 1999: 12) it is stated that one of the institutional barriers that hinder social inclusion can be found in the existence of ‘Book stock policies which do not reflect the needs of the community or are not in suitable formats.’ In this light, then it would appear that it is imperative for a library authority to use the knowledge of its users to influence selection policies in order to provide for the needs of those specific individuals. As the ‘book stock is…central to the quality of a library service’ (Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2000a), the use of staff specialist knowledge of user needs to influence stock selection would ensure the optimum level of service. Additionally, the limited space on a mobile vehicle means that staff are unable to carry a great amount of material outside the realms of the specific needs of their users, so relevant stock selection is crucial.

However, it would appear that in a significant number of authorities mobile library services do not have direct responsibility for stock selection. Whilst 39% of respondents stated that their mobile library staff do carry this responsibility, a staggering 61% do not (see Figure 6). Instead, the mobile library services within these authorities have their stock allocated to them through centralised buying policies.

The Senior Manager of the mobile library service within Library Authority A felt that the centralised method of stock selection had a negative impact on their attempts to combat social exclusion:

*When you run a mobile library, you have enough room for about 3000 books on board so every title has to earn its place. You can’t afford to have things that won’t issue – that’s the nature of the service. It’s very difficult for us to*
have experimental literature. There are some things that we would love to have….But we’ve just not been bought the things we need.
(SM, Library Authority A).

However, in contrast, Library Authority B viewed the selection of their mobile library stock by a separate body as advantageous.

You feed information through about what stock is required on your vehicles, and feedback from the users but we’ve now centralised our stock selection so there’s a team buying, say, non-fiction for all the libraries in the county. I think…we’re having a wider range of items bought for us, it’s more experimental…but in a positive way, not in a negative way….I think it’s an improvement and it’s probably supporting social exclusion a lot more because we’re getting a wider diversity of stock and we’re experimenting… We’ve had comments from users on how the stock in general has improved and we can put that down to the new way of buying and the improved circulation schemes. [SM, Library Authority B].

So with such conflicting viewpoints, it can only be concluded that the mobile library service within some authorities feel that they could contribute
more to social inclusion if they were given more control over stock selection, whereas others feel that the centralised stock selection teams are so successful that with a degree of input from those within the mobile library service, they are able to provide the right type of stock to meet the needs of their users.

6.1.1 Specialist Stock

In terms of specialist stock, 52% of authorities state that they either carry materials in foreign languages on the mobile library vehicles, or can access books for speakers of minority languages if requested. As the Senior Manager of Library Authority B highlights, plans are in place within the service to cater for the more specific needs of people if required:

‘We don’t carry any books on the mobile as permanent stock...but if you’re a speaker of a different language we can supply those books....We have a couple of Punjabi speakers who we take books to. We share the service with the city library who has a specialist who does a profile of the reader and she selects the books for the reader and they’re exchanged every two weeks...it seems to work well, I mean, they’re still using the service. We can get books in any language to suit people, books in European languages for people who are doing courses as well as if they’re speakers....We’ve had Polish people in the past too.’ [SM, Library Authority B].

Library Authority A share a similar position. They admit that they ‘really do need to build up...[their] service to ethnic minority groups’ and find it ‘very sad when there’s not the demand’ [SM, Library Authority A] but they are able to easily provide books in different languages if requested. However, this authority does recognise that more can be done to target speakers of different languages and the mobile library service are working with a specialist in the authority to address this issue.

So whilst the needs of speakers of minority languages can be catered for, the stock carried on mobile library vehicles does not reflect this. However, considering the space limitations on the vehicle and the fact that
every book has to earn its place in terms of being regularly issued, it is
understandable that more specialist stock is not carried. Nevertheless, it is
essential for mobile library services to advertise the fact that they are able to
provide specialist material, both in terms of posters (in prominent positions
and in languages other than English) and by oral promotion on the vehicle.
Training could also be provided for staff in approaching users from ethnic
minorities sensitively in this manner without causing discomfort or offence.

So whilst stock in foreign languages is not readily available on mobile
library vehicles, one group who are well catered for are visually impaired
people. The vast majority of authorities provide large print books and
spoken word cassettes as standard on their mobile library vehicles. One
possible explanation for this could simply be the response to demand. As
a significant number of mobile library users are over 60 years of age, visual
impairments are more likely amongst this group of users and that is
obviously reflected in the stock selection process. Indeed, use is so great
in Library Authority A that they ‘struggle to keep up with’ the demand for
spoken word cassettes (both in number required to meet user needs and
also due to the fact that they are a particularly expensive resource in
comparison to the cost of a book).

6.2 Facilities and services

6.2.1 Routes

The criteria used in the planning of mobile library routes obviously
differs widely between authorities, however findings show that social
inclusion isn’t always at the top of the list when deciding who should receive
a service (see Figure 7). The most important criteria specified by 56% of
authorities is simply in keeping with the Public Library Standards (DCMS,
2001a) which states that everyone should be able to access a public library
within 1 mile (or 2 miles if a County Council authority) of their home. The
next most important factor for authorities appears to be demand from the
community, followed by the recognition of the existence of a high number of
elderly people in the area. As with the third factor, the fourth most important point of criteria is in keeping with social inclusion - 28% of authorities take into consideration whether an area has a high proportion of poverty or deprivation when deciding upon routes.

However, it is difficult to make generalisations on this subject because whilst the mobile library services within some authorities do not seem to consider social inclusion as a service directive, others are clearly extremely conscious of social inclusion when deciding upon routes. Approximately 25% of authorities consider the socially inclusive points of criteria listed on the questionnaire as the most important. Similarly, the study also reveals that some authorities provide a service over and above the Public Library Standards in order to meet the needs of some users. This is displayed in the provision of a service to a number of geographically isolated people within Library Authority B who would technically not be entitled to a mobile library service under the distance specifications of the Standards.

‘In [name of town] the library is on the edge of the main centre of the town, and the criteria to get a mobile library service is that they’ve got to be one mile from a static service point, but in [name of town] as the crow flies we have some stops within half a mile because geographically to get to the library people have to walk a mile and a half because there’s a railway line right through the middle of [name of town]. So if you’re of a certain age and not as physically active or a mum with young children…it’s probably enough to go in to get your food never mind you’re library books as well.’
[SM, Library Authority B]
6.2.2 Charges

The facility to claim free or reduced priced access to materials for excluded groups is common throughout the public library system as a whole – Muddiman et al (2000) has found that 81% of authorities offer reduced
fees and charges for these people. Findings show that charging policies on mobile libraries largely support social inclusion too.

Groups who receive free materials or concessions in static libraries and mobiles alike include housebound, blind and sight impaired people, children under 18 years of age, people over 60 years of age, individuals on incapacity benefit or job seekers allowance, and individuals and their dependants in receipt of income support or working families tax credit.

Particular facets of charging policy that do differ from static service points (and between mobile library service in different authorities) surround fines and reservation fees. Library Authority A do not charge fines on some routes yet they do have reservation fees.

“We don’t charge fines on the monthly routes – that’s the rural and the small communities, mainly because we only go once a month and it is quite difficult. If you miss a visit, it’s an enormous amount of money, two months fines. And partly, especially with small communities, there’s so many disabled people, that we’d rather treat it like the housebound service. So yes, we don’t charge on fines on those. But we do charge reservation fees.”

[SM, Library Authority A]

In contrast, Library Authority B has a reduced reservation fee on the mobile library (with some groups receiving free requests) yet the policy on fines offers no concessions.

‘The standard request charge in a static library is 75p but on mobile libraries as a reflection of the limited access they [mobile library users] get to the stock and of the limited number of titles they get access to they are only charged 45p. Housebound people get it free. Blind and sight impaired people get books on tape requests free. Children under 18 get requests free, they don’t pay any overdues until they’re 12 and then they get concessions. But once you’re an adult you don’t get any concessions, not even if you’re a pensioner.’

[SM, Library Authority B].
So whilst the charging policies of mobile library services differ on more specific issues between authorities, it can be concluded that charging polices on mobile libraries do not differ greatly from those of the static service points in each authority. However, in terms of requests (in Library Authority B) and fines on the monthly routes (in Library Authority A) issues surrounding social inclusion do come into play.

6.2.3 Services to specific user groups

57% of authorities specified that they possessed mobile libraries which targeted particular user groups. The group of users targeted most was found to be elderly people in sheltered housing and residential/nursing homes with 59% of authorities having vehicles geared towards these users. Children were the next largest group, with 20% of authorities targeting schools, playgroups and mothers with young children. The housebound made up 15% of targeted users (however this figure cannot be wholly relied upon as some authorities count their housebound service in with their mobile service whilst others operate a separate service). 5% of authorities stated that they have vehicles targeted towards people in day centres. The targeted user groups that featured in 3% of authorities were found to be the people with disabilities and special needs, and people living on housing estates. Finally, 1% of authorities stressed that farms and rural dwellers were a target group.

The following groups are looked at in greater depth in terms of how they are approached by mobile library services: housebound people, people with physical disabilities, young people, speakers of minority languages, Travellers, job seekers/unemployed people, people with mental health problems, and people with basic skills needs.
**Housebound people**

The researcher wished to investigate how far mobile libraries (and not housebound services) specifically aid housebound people. Due to the fact that some authorities operate a separate housebound service to their mobile service (yet often under the same management team), confusion amongst authorities in answering the researcher’s requests resulted. Consequently, some authorities answered questions about their housebound service rather than their mobile library service, thus making it difficult to establish figures from these findings.

However, despite the lack of clarification on the researcher’s part of what was required of respondents, some findings can be established from the case studies. Both Library Authority A and B compliment their own authority’s housebound services by serving some housebound people throughout the course of their routes. This service is obviously appreciated by those who receive the service. As one housebound lady expressed, ‘I’ve had the mobile library come to me for seven years and when my eyes were bad I had the audio books. I really look forward to them coming.’ [MLU, Library Authority B].

**People with physical disabilities**

The majority of mobile library vehicles display features to aid ease of access for people with mobility problems – 71% of mobile library services have lifts on their vehicles whilst a further 28% have low access vehicles. Grab rails and D-bars are similarly common. These facilities offer users with mobility impairments the same independence to choose books on the mobile as fully mobile people.

The provision of specialist stock for people with visual impairments has already been discussed (see 6.1.1). In addition to this, other facilities are sparse throughout different authorities: 6% of authorities offer magnifying sheets; 6% have signs in large print; 4% offer audio-described
videos; 3% have the facility for special laptops and IT equipment; one authority has a Braille machine; one offers talking magazines to users and one makes a visit to the Blind Society as part of a route.

In regard to people with hearing impairments, provision is again sparse - 20% of mobile library services have induction loops, 12% offer subtitled videos and a member of staff in one authority is able to use sign language.

**Speakers of minority languages**

People from ethnic backgrounds are highlighted by the Social Exclusion Unit (2001b) as a group particularly prone to suffer from social exclusion because they ‘are more likely than white people to live in deprived areas, to be poor, to have difficulty finding work, to suffer ill-health and to live in unpopular housing.’ They should therefore be a primary target for libraries to aid social inclusion.

However, in many authorities, this does not appear to be the case. Mobile library provision of stock for speakers of minority languages has already been discussed (see 6.1.1). Yet in regard to other specialist services for this user group, a minority of mobile library services are providing additional provision. Only 5% of authorities stock videos in foreign languages, 3% carry music targeted at minority speakers, 3% of authorities operate special visits to this group of users, and 4% have specialist staff on board.

**Young people**

As Hopkins (in Sugg, ed., 1999: 13) stresses ‘Children are still crucially the place to start in combating disadvantage and exclusion… so much of a child’s potential development and attainment depends essentially on their early learning experiences.’ Indeed, by targeting the children of
families who may be socially excluded due to poverty or lack of education the cycle of exclusion can be broken.

Mobile libraries contribute towards the prevention of social exclusion in this way by targeting children at home, at playgroups and at school. One member of front line staff within Library Authority A noted that the mobile ‘teaches children to use a library and it offers more stimulation from a wider variety of books than the playgroup holds.’ The targeting of children at such a young age to use libraries and enjoy reading can only be beneficial for the future.

Similarly, the same member of mobile library staff recounted successful experiences to the researcher of sitting down and spending time with some of the previously troublesome children on the council estates route. Their dedication and patience has obviously paid off in a number of cases. As this member of staff stated, such actions could have a great deal of impact in combating social exclusion: ‘If we can break the ice with some of the angry kids and get them interested in books, we can have real breakthroughs.’

Indeed, the researcher spoke to a child on one of the more deprived estates within Library Authority B. This revealed that the enthusiasm for books was present in the child, and, as a static service point was not in close geographical proximity, this quality was being fostered and further stimulated by the books obtained from the mobile library. Her appreciation of the mobile library service was clear: ‘I love the mobile library. I get books from school too but I don’t get them from anywhere else.’

Travellers

Both Library Authority A and B provide services to Travellers, along with 5% of other authorities surveyed. It appears that both authorities were approached in the first instance by an outside body. However whilst the initiatives did not stem from the mobile library services directly, once
approached the projects were embraced fully and serious measures were taken to provide a library service to the Travellers.

'We were approached by the Travellers’ Educational Service to provide services to Travellers’ sites (we had done it in the past but...the Travellers stopped using it so we stopped)....We identified [name of place] as the site that we would do the initial pilot project because library staff have preconceptions about Travellers so I went in and gave them a talk and we invited the member of staff from the Travellers’ Educational Unit to come and explain why we were going to the Travellers’ sites. To me we should be going to all the Travellers’ sites in the county...they are exactly the sort of communities we should be targeting – low literacy skills, and if libraries aren’t about improving literacy I don’t know what they are about personally. It seems to be going really well so hopefully in the next year we’ll be extending that to other sites in the county.’ [SM, Library Authority B].

This approach from Library Authority B seemed to be an all out success and it is revealed, that staff training prior to providing the service by an expert working with the Travellers was an excellent measure to ensure that a socially inclusive attitude was displayed in their dealings with this group of users.

Library Authority B tell a similar story regarding their service approach to Travellers, yet although successful for a period as a service to both adults and children, the service was forced to be redirected towards the children only, after it was found that a number of adults were abusing the stock.

'The service to travellers was instituted...eight or nine years ago and we had an approach from the Traveller Education Unit – part of the Education Department. They came to libraries and said “how do we encourage children to use books because basically, their schooling had been disrupted, and all the rest of it, how do we get to them?” And it seemed a natural thing for the mobile library service because we could actually go out on site. So a lot of preparation was done, and we used to go to [names of two sites] and we did monthly visits to each of them. Things changed over the years and the Council closed down [one]. They opened up [name of a third site], and
we got some advice from the warden up there who basically said “I think it’s better if you don’t come anymore” because of the particular problems we had over the videos. Basically what was happening was, we weren’t getting back the videos that we were lending out. We were getting something else back and our videos were being sold on. They said it was just an insoluble problem, and we said that what we don’t want to be doing is take stock off and say “well you can’t have this but you can have this”. They either get the library service or they don’t. So they decided that it was better for us to target the children, which is why we go to the playgroup there.’ [SM, Library Authority A].

It was admirable on the part of Library Authority A to continue the service to children despite the problems experienced by visiting a Travellers playgroup. Indeed, findings show that both authorities are acutely aware of the value of targeting children within the Traveller community in order to minimise some of the cultural attitudes towards education (which, although changing, are still present in a number of individuals) affecting them negatively.

‘The gypsy culture means that there’s a split between those who are interested in education and literacy and those whose parents don’t encourage it due to their own illiteracy. But times and attitudes are changing. This is why we’re targeting the young, because they’re a new generation’. [FLS, LA A]

Library Authority B similarly recognise the value of working in partnership with other bodies to reach the children who might otherwise be held back educationally by facets of their culture.

‘It’s a key thing to get the Travellers’ Education Unit Officer involved because…she goes out on to the site to motivate the parents of the children to use the mobile library because use of a library service is not part of their culture.’ [SM, Library Authority B]

It was also noted that mobile library staff had to work quite hard with these children to establish trust between them, but breakthroughs have been made. As a frontline member of staff within Library Authority A noted,
'The children were very timid initially. It took about four or five visits before they would even make eye contact never mind talk.'

**Job seekers**

People who are unemployed are not a group who are specifically targeted by mobile library services. Only 5% of authorities claimed to offer specific services for this user group, including Job Seekers information, and concessionary rates. But beyond this, no additional services are offered.

'Some people get on especially to look at the county council job sheet for themselves and their relatives.' [FLS, Library Authority B]

'I think the times that we do go out during the day, we are going to get unemployed people. But we don't target them specifically.' [SM, Library Authority A]

'We try to encourage the unemployed to use the mobile library and we offer concessionary rates.' [SM, Library Authority B].

**People with mental health problems**

Findings show that 3% of authorities use their mobile libraries to provide a service to people with mental health problems. Library Authority A is one of those authorities who have provided services to such groups in the past, and although some of the services have now ceased, a service to a hospital for people with mental health problems is currently in operation.

'I think that one of the nice things we've done is working with people with mental health problems, and that's being able to respond to requests from [name of a community organisation]. We've done it a few times. Services come and go and I'm never sorry when we've put in a service and maybe two years down the line we don't go anymore. It's because people don't need us anymore. That's absolutely fine, we've served a purpose. At the moment we're visiting people with mental health problems on the site of the old big
mental hospital at [name of a place]. These are people who have been institutionalised and are unable for that reason and others to use local community services. They absolutely love books and they love to see us and they love to talk about what they’ve been reading. These aren’t people who are illiterate or who have any other reading problems. They are very vulnerable and they feel safe when they come on the mobile and they know us. They know who to expect and they trust us and that’s a huge thing. And I think one of the other things we did, we used to have what used to be the Spastics Society and became the Skills Centre. They were out at [name of a place] and we used to go every fortnight with a mobile. We’d have about 20 clients trying to get onto the mobile to choose books and they loved it. And it made a lot of difference to their lives. And I think if we can carry on visiting the small communities with special needs, that’s one of the most exciting things we could do.’

[SM, Library Authority A].

**People with basic skills needs**

Findings show that 5% of authorities provide a service and appropriate materials for people with learning difficulties. One authority provides a specialist service for this group of users; something which in the past Library Authority B did, after they were approached to become involved in a literacy project to aid people with basic skills needs.

‘The Adult Basic Education Unit at [name of town] had got some European funding….We went with a mobile library already to [name of town] but we linked in with the classes. People met there to do the classes and they all had worksheets…[which] we carried on the mobile. We were a point of contact and we could actually deliver the worksheets to the students which they could then forward to their tutors. It worked reasonably well.’

[SM, Library Authority B].

Unfortunately, this project ended suddenly when the person in charge fell seriously ill leaving no-one there to ‘motivate the students’. The senior manager recognises that the project ending as a direct result of this would probably not happen today as the county council is far better funded and staff replacement would be found. However, the value of the part played by
the mobile library service was recognised, and successes were made in changing attitudes towards using libraries. It is further noted these people with basic skills needs valued the personal service and discretion displayed by the mobile library staff, which in contrast to a busy static service point, would not always be available.

‘Part of their [people with basic skills needs] culture is not using a library. Many are frightened…but as far as I’m aware some students still use the mobile library. One or two fed back and said …how nice the mobile library staff were and how discreet they could be in helping them (because we quickly became aware of who they were and what their needs were we could discreetly help them).’ [SM, Library Authority B].

But although this service ended, Library Authority B now provides a mobile library service to a centre for people with learning difficulties. The Senior Manager of the mobile library service explains that ‘We were contacted and asked to go…and it’s a successful stop. They obviously use the stock to meet their needs’ [SM, Library Authority B].

6.2.4 The strengths of the mobile library service

Physical Accessibility

Findings show that one of the most striking factors that the mobile library service offers to people with mobility problems is simply physical accessibility. Comments from mobile library users who have mobility problems due to old age or illness, suggest that without the mobiles, access to a library service would be denied. The main reason for this appears to be geographical conditions (i.e. it being too far to walk, involving an uphill walk) or requiring the use of public transport.

‘It’s too far to go [to the nearest static library].’ [MLU, LA B]

‘I’ve got arthritis so I can’t go far.’ [MLU, LA B]
‘It’s that bit of a hill on the way back that stops me going to the local library.’ [MLU, LA B]

‘It’s all uphill on the way home [from the local static library].’ [MLU, LA A]

‘I used to go to [name of local static library] but there’s that hill on the way back.’ [MLU, LA B]

‘It’s [the mobile library] a good thing. I’d have to get a bus to my local library.’ [MLU, LA A]

‘I do well out of the mobile library, especially as they come to my door.’ [MLU with severe mobility problems, LA B]

‘I rely on it [the mobile library]. My husband’s had a stroke so he doesn’t get out and I have trouble walking.’ [MLU, LA B]

Social Role

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (1999: 11) highlights the necessity for socially excluded people to be provided with chances to engage in social interaction: ‘Opportunities which promote face-recognition, which reduce fear and isolation, and which promote communication, are fundamental to creating a socially inclusive society.’

The fact that mobile libraries play a vital social role in the community is clearly apparent from the findings. The researcher felt that from the days spent on the mobile libraries of Library Authority A and B that the opportunity for social contact was quite clearly as important (if not more so) to the users as obtaining reading materials. All the users (with very few exceptions) appeared to relish the chance to interact with both the frontline library staff (who are regarded as friends and confidantes by most) and also with their friends and neighbours who used the service. Comments from the users and staff reflect this:
‘I get to see my neighbours here.’ [MLU, LA A]

‘[This is] more of a community run. You get time to chat.’ [FLS, LA A]

‘[Mobile libraries are] excellent. You can have a chat. I come on and see my mates [the staff].’ [MLU, LA B]

‘You get to see people and talk to the staff.’ [MLU, LA A]

‘I’d be lost without it [the mobile library]. It’s also good for a gossip.’ [MLU, LA B]

**Personal service**

It appears that the high level of personal service offered to mobile library users is of great appeal. In contrast to a busy static service point in which staff have more limited opportunities to interact fully with users, and where computerised systems are daunting to some, the mobile seems quite definitely the preferred option. Findings show that the reasons for this lie firstly, in the fact that staff can not only identify all of their users by name, but they also know each individual user’s preferences and are thus able to recommend new books. This goes a long way in promoting reader development whilst providing an exceptionally personal and high level of service. Secondly, in relation to the previous point on the social role of mobiles, the personal way in which staff converse with people establishes them to some as true friends, with whom they can share their worries and concerns. The following comments display the value of this personal service both from the perspective of the users and the front line staff:

‘We get to know the users needs and they feel they can discuss their problems with us.’ [FLS, LA A]

‘We have one lady who’s got problems with her family and a legal problem with the council. We always listen to her problems every time we come. We’ve also been getting information on legal issues for her.’ [FLS, LA B]
‘He [the driver] really looks after me. He chooses my books for me.’ [MLU, LA B]

‘The mobile is much better than the library. It’s the personal attention you get. And there’s no computers.’ [MLU, LA B]

‘Computers make the service impersonal and old people like you to know their names.’ [FLS, LA B]

‘They [the staff] are so helpful. They help me on and off with my books.’ [MLU, LA B]

‘The mobile library is lovely. It’s lovely what they [the staff] do for us. I don’t know what I’d do without them.’ [MLU, LA B]

‘The staff really look after us.’ [MLU, LA B]

**Reliability**

Although mobile library services are often highlighted in national documentation on libraries in the context of missed rounds and unreliability (e.g. Public Library Standards, DCMS, 2001a), the researcher found from the case study authorities that this is far from the true picture. One driver from Library Authority A highlighted that ‘In three and a half years, we’ve missed only half a round.’ Similarly, one mobile library user within Library Authority B supports this evidence, stating that ‘Rain, snow, they’re always there on my doorstep.’ Obviously, the nature of the service means that sometimes mobiles may run a little behind schedules, but a member of front line staff from Library Authority B observes that the service is so well appreciated by the users that ‘they [the mobile library users] never complain if we’re a bit late.’

Whilst this is obviously not a national picture, it does show the same features in two sample authorities, that both staff and users view mobile libraries as providing a reliable service. From the perspective of social inclusion, regularity is a vital factor for people with specific needs, and this is evident within the mobile library services of these two authorities.
**Flexibility in responding to peoples’ needs**

Findings show that one of the great strengths of the mobile library service in contrast to static service points is the huge degree of flexibility they hold which offers them the ability to quickly respond to peoples’ needs. Indeed, findings reveal that in both Library Authority A and B this feature of the mobile library service is not only present, but is exercised regularly:

‘The timetables are being altered all the time, we’re constantly adjusting them to suit the needs of the users …[such as] personal physical needs… [If someone begins to have mobility problems] we’ll add on ten minutes to allow them to use the chair lift.’ [SM, LA B].

‘We provide continuity of service for regular customers who are temporarily housebound if, for example, they’ve had a fall, by visiting them in their houses.’ [FLS, LA A]

‘We changed the stop because it was too far for people to walk before.’ [FLS, LA B].

‘In [name of village], the entire village was rebuilt over the road and we went and looked at all the development plans. So we had stops in the old village and stops in the new village and slowly moved across to the new town. [SM, LA B].

‘[During the foot and mouth crisis] we contacted the farmers or the people who lived in isolated cottages and we stopped in a nearby village for longer and they would come down to us…or they would decide that they weren’t coming out.’ [SM, LA B].

‘We are able to respond very quickly. I had a letter from Age Concern saying there were some elderly people who couldn’t use the stop because it was across a main road and within three weeks we had a stop that was accessible for them and during daylight hours.’ [SM, LA A].
A front line member of staff from Library Authority A further highlights that the flexible approach to service delivery extends to the users, who ‘will come out and wave at us if they want us to stop for them.’

So the ability to respond quickly to peoples’ ever changing needs is crucial in combating social exclusion. If cases of exclusion can be dealt with swiftly, they can be kept short term and, therefore, the amount of anxiety suffered is reduced. The mobile library service, then, is in this way unique – a notion that is summed up by the manager of the mobile library service of Library Authority A:

‘I think nobody else has that flexibility, nobody else can make the service as accessible and I think maybe no other service can be as responsive as we can. So I think for social inclusion we’ve got a huge contribution.’ [SM, Library Authority A]

The value of reading and recreational facilities to improve the quality of life

Findings show that the books and recreational facilities provided to people by the mobile libraries work to improve their quality of life.

‘My friends get on to chat and recommend books.’ [MLU, LA B]

‘I depend on them [the mobile library service] because I don’t get out now. I spend most of my time reading because I can’t do much else.’ [MLU, LA B]

‘The mobile is the best thing since sliced bread because I do a lot of reading.’ [MLU, LA B]

‘If I can’t read I don’t know what I’d do.’ [MLU, LA A]

‘I got a lot of pleasure from doing that [a jigsaw].’ [MLU, LA B]
Furthermore, Library Authority B reveals that in addition to the provision of books, mobile libraries are also valuable in promoting reading through the development of informal reading groups. As people meet at roughly the same time to select their books, natural conversation leads to talk of books, including the recommending and criticising of literature.

As the Senior Manager of Library Authority B explains, in addition to people talking about books, a visit to the mobile library often promotes the formation of informal readers’ groups.

“We have been doing a big push on readers’ clubs in this authority in the last two or three years…and when we appointed the new officers, one came out on the mobile with us, and what she couldn’t get over…was Mrs Smith and Mr Jones will get on and say “Oh you ought to read this, this is a good ‘un” ….And just because they aren’t talking in an academic or critical way, their criticism and assessment of a novel is probably a lot more astute but the language they use is more down to earth. And there’s a lot of people recommending books to other people informally on the mobile. Also at some places reader groups were already established but people didn’t, and still don’t, see themselves as reader groups. People see that it’s mobile library day, they all go on and choose their books, go to someone’s house for a cup of tea and talk about their books. But they don’t see that as a readers group, they just see that as going round to Mrs Bloggs’ for a cup of tea.”

[SM, Library Authority B].

**The overall value of the mobile library service to users**

The researcher felt that the overriding feeling exuding from the users on the mobile libraries of Library Authority A and B was appreciation. As the following comments display, mobile library users appear to value the mobile library service in a way that library staff rarely see in static service points.

“People say all the time “we don’t know what we’d do without you”.” [FLS, LA A]
‘I’d be in [name of a local hospital for people with mental disabilities] without them [the mobile library staff and service]. I couldn’t be without them.’ [MLU, LA A]

‘I’d hate to think what I’d do if they took it [the mobile library service] off.’ [MLU, LA A]

‘They [the mobile library staff] have been very good to me.’ [MLU, LA B]

‘I’m moving to Cheltenham soon…I’ve already checked if they have a mobile library.’ [MLU, LA B]

‘It’s really nice to come on.’ [MLU, LA B]

‘The mobile is extremely good. It’s got all that I need and I read a lot.’ [MLU, LA B]

‘It’s [the mobile library] wonderful. I really appreciate it.’ [MLU, LA B]

‘The mobile’s really good. I look forward to them coming.’ [MLU, LA B]

‘I’d be lost without it.’ [MLU, LA B]

6.3 The contribution made by mobile libraries in combating rural and urban deprivation

6.3.1 The response by mobile libraries towards urban deprivation

Urban deprivation is a major cause of social exclusion and regeneration cannot be achieved in the more deprived areas without a sense of community. Indeed, in Libraries for all (DCMS, 1999: 9) it is stressed that ‘Community activity underpins social inclusion and effective regeneration, but it may require a great deal of time and skilled intervention to stimulate and sustain it.’ Furthermore, libraries are in an ideal position to foster community activity as they target all age groups, and people from different class and ethnic backgrounds, thus, acting as ‘a central factor in any programme of urban revitalisation’ (Worpole, quoted in Astbury, 1994: 135).
Findings show that mobile libraries are contributing towards urban regeneration by actively working to stimulate community activity in affected areas. Indeed, it appears that in many cases, mobile libraries are better placed to achieve this than static service points, by having the ability to target specific geographical areas:

‘We can visit small pockets of deprivation and bring information, leisure reading and a presence to parts of an estate which, I think, a community library couldn’t reach.’ [SM, Library Authority A]

Part of the positive effect that mobile libraries have on a deprived community lies simply in the physical appeal of the mobile library within the backdrop of a degenerated area, which has a heightened visibility that will encourage greater use. As the Senior Manager of Library Authority A explains:

‘It’s always a choice, isn’t it, whether to use a community library or not? And if the community library is…not highly visible then they’re not going to use it. But a mobile library is extremely visible and the person who did our Best Value review for us said how nice it was to go up to [name of a deprived area] and see something nice on the estate. A big vehicle, brightly coloured with lots of lovely things on. People up on that estate don’t see those sorts of things usually. It’s a pretty drab place to live in a lot of ways.’ [SM, Library Authority A].

The simple opportunity for people to meet on the mobile vehicles to promote a sense of community is another way in which urban regeneration can be encouraged. This appears to be crucial because as the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (1999: 10) has noted, social isolation in these areas can have damaging results: ‘In disadvantaged communities isolation and inertia may constitute formidable barriers to the flow of information, personal relationships may be weak, and creative neighbourhood networks may function poorly.’
Similarly, mobile libraries have the ability to target specific groups of users in these areas to aid and stimulate them educationally. This promotion of literacy to those who need it most has a positive effect by helping to ‘counteract both existing poverty’ in the provision of free reading materials and furthermore in aiding the prevention of future poverty ‘by developing skills valued in the labour market’ (Wigg, 1995 and Scott, 1993 in Kerslake and Kinnell, 1998). Library Authority B describes the initiatives their mobile service operates:

‘On one urban route we go to a family learning centre. Part of the reason we were asked to go there is because the adults have got low educational attainment. It passes on to the children so we would go in as a two-fold attack. Often we’re asked to go to schools, but we tend to target schools with low educational attainment. We deal especially with the classes where the children’s reading and writing skills are not up to the standard they should be, and it’s to encourage them to read more. So those children are able to take books home which because of their family background, because their parents may not be brilliant readers or they may not have been brought up with that culture of reading they’re not likely to have books at home. And it’s trying to break that cycle really. Obviously if someone is unemployed, they get concessions and if they require any information we’ll try to get that for them. We also carry the job sheets for people.’

[SM, Library Authority B].

6.3.2 The response by mobile libraries towards rural deprivation

As detailed in the literature search, rural deprivation is a serious cause of social exclusion, often with limited access to public services and transport. Indeed, preserving a sense of community in rural regions can be very difficult when particular services cease to exist – the Library Association (2000) have noted that in such areas ‘the loss of just one shop, post office or library can leave a community without any centre or social outlet.’ These factors are particularly relevant for people living in rural communities who have mobility problems as they have neither the local services at hand nor the means to access them by public transport or other means. The mobile library is therefore, for those people
‘an even more crucial contact point...[in providing] informational and recreational material...than it is for their able bodied counterparts’ ASLIB (1995: 195) and findings show that this group have been recognised within the charging policy of Library Authority A (see 6.2.1).

The value of mobile library services to rural communities has further been highlighted by Doughty (1999: 87-88):

For many rural communities the local Post Office has gone, the buses are less frequent, the shops have gone. The one agency still providing an element of social cohesion and educational and recreational support for isolated rural communities is the County Council’s mobile library service. This is surely a simple but very real contribution to meeting the social inclusion agenda.

This viewpoint is supported by the findings of this research which show that the mobile library service has in some rural areas taken on the role of a community centre in which people, in addition to using the library service, are able to post community information, and meet friends and neighbours:

‘In a lot of places there’s no longer a village shop and we do take on that role of the community meeting place and a place for people to post community information. The MCVs for example, quite often have all the local newsletters. But you find quite often that neighbours use the mobile as a meeting place.’  [SM, Library Authority B]

It has also been noted that ‘For many the visit to the library is the tonic that helps to overcome isolation and loneliness’ (Library Association, 2000) and this can be seen to apply to mobile libraries too. The findings on the social role of mobile libraries (see 6.2.4) also apply to rural communities, where people use the mobile to chat to the staff and other users. Yet the researcher found the combating of social isolation as a result of geographical isolation a prominent role for mobile libraries. Front line staff within Library Authority A revealed that on one of the rural routes they have
a stop scheduled at a remote farm in which the farmer ‘gets on just for a chat.’ Furthermore, the opportunity for social interaction appeared to be so much more important to him than using the stock, as the same member of staff revealed that ‘He’s taken only one video in three years of us coming.’ The researcher had the opportunity to witness this interaction and saw that staff tactfully took their tea break at the stop to justify spending the time talking to him without getting behind schedule. The farmer did indeed ‘just get on for a chat’ yet, just like the other users in the more populated areas, he spoke of his concerns which at that time were the fears of the Foot and Mouth disease spreading to his farm. The researcher felt that the social outlet the mobile library provided for the farmer was particularly poignant in the light of newspaper headlines detailing that some farmers were on the brink of suicide (McGrory, 2001). The researcher is not suggesting in any way that this was the case for this farmer yet the opportunity to air his worries to a third party was obviously both valuable and necessary to him at what was clearly a very worrying time.

But whilst mobile libraries offer an essential service to rural communities, an ominous statement from the Culture, Media and Sport Committee (2000b) which proposes that static collections of books should be housed in rural post offices ‘to complement library provision’ suggests that mobile libraries a) have not been considered and ‘library provision’ refers to static libraries only, of b) mobile libraries are not providing an adequate service. Either way, mobile libraries are obviously not part of the government’s plans to provide a better library service to people living in rural areas.

This proposal, it appears is simply recreating a service from the past that proved to be inadequate and was replaced by the mobile library service many years ago. As Library Authority B explains:

‘That’s what the MCVs replaced. In [name of county] there were small collections of books that were in shops and community rooms. The maximum capacity vehicles cover 15 large villages and they, in the past had
these small collections of books. But if you’ve got 15 collections of books, financially you’ve got to support those collections of books. Individually none of them were terribly highly used. You had limited opening times because they tended to be open for only a couple of hours in the evening probably. It cost more to maintain 15 collections. As a result you end up with smaller collections where the replacement rate of stock doesn’t seem to work as well. It’s economy of scale. If you’ve got the books for 15 little collections on to three maximum capacity vehicles you’ve got a much better collection of books. You can use your book fund more economically to do that. With our MCV’s you’ve got 3,500 books on it but in total you’ve got 10-12,000 books because the rest are out on loan. So every time a reader comes on to an MCV they are seeing a different stock because it’s been to at least another 4 other communities since it’s last been to that place. So…there’s a circulation scheme in place that’s putting new stock in from other libraries plus new stock. Plus a small collection of books, how do you tailor that to meet the needs of a community?’ [SM, Library Authority B].

So the plan to place static collections in rural post offices appears to be neither effective nor economical, and in the light of Best Value, the scheme simply is not feasible. Similarly, as highlighted in the above quote, without having library staff present who have a knowledge of the users, how could the collection aid social inclusion? The Senior Manager of Library Authority A agrees and believes that people living in rural areas deserve more than a small collection of books:

‘That’s just giving people a poor standard of service. It’s saying “You live in a rural area therefore you’ll get a collection of books, whereas if you live in [name of an urban area] you will get a library, people, access to the Internet… But because you live in a rural area you can’t even have that brought to you”.’ [SM, Library Authority A].

Indeed, as Northwood (1994: 324) highlights, people in rural communities pay for a library service as part of their taxes and are thus entitled access to one regardless of their geographical situation, and mobile libraries can provide the level of service people deserve:

…the mobile library forms an integral part of library thinking, providing an
important, much appreciated and wide level of service to specific client groups and to individuals – often in isolated rural areas – who might be able to take advantage of a facility for which they are paying.

So, when it comes to provision for rural communities ‘Mobile libraries are essential services’ (Kennington in Barton, ed, 1993: 8).

6.4 Are the mobile library services with larger numbers of vehicles better contributors towards social inclusion?

No correlation can be found between the size of mobile library fleets and performance in relation towards social inclusion. The findings reveal that different authorities offer different levels of service provision in line with social inclusion regardless of size. Indeed, some authorities with only one vehicle were found to be better contributors than those with far more vehicles. Therefore, it can be concluded that a valuable contribution towards socially excluded individuals can be made with only a limited number of vehicles. Similarly, those with larger fleets who are not found to be doing as much in line with social inclusion as some of the authorities with smaller numbers of vehicles have the potential to use their resources to much greater effect.

6.5 Are mobile libraries more socially inclusive than static libraries?

Findings show that mobile libraries have the potential to promote social inclusion to a greater effect than static libraries. If used to their full potential, mobiles can reach out to the most needy in the community – a quality unique to the service. The Senior Managers of the mobile library services within both Library Authority A and B recognise the value of the service and the potential impact that mobile library provision can have on both excluded individuals and communities:

‘I think [mobile libraries contribute to social inclusion] more so in some ways than community libraries. But I think our big thing is to be able to reach isolated individuals, and it’s a thing that the government’s social inclusion
strategy deals with less, I would say, than the concentration on communities. We go to people who don’t belong to communities, who don’t belong to groups, who are never going to join other people to make their live better. And to me those people really are excluded. I think the strength of the mobile library service is to reach individuals and working with other agencies to identify those individuals.’ [SM, Library Authority A].

‘We are one of the very few services who…go out into the rural communities, but in other authorities they [also] go into areas of deprivation. We are going out, we are making overtures towards people like Travellers, people who are disabled, people who are excluded in society in some way. We are actually going out to them, we’re not expecting them to come to us in any way.’ [SM, Library Authority B].

6.6 Summary

The contribution that mobile libraries make towards social inclusion appears to differ widely between different library authorities. Whilst some authorities are exemplary in their approach to make their mobile library service accessible to all, other mobile library services appear to be doing little in addition to offering a service to library users who are unable to access a static library. No correlation can be made between the size of mobile library fleet and performance in line with social inclusion.

Stock on mobile libraries reflects that visually impaired people are very well catered for in terms of large print books and spoken word cassettes. Whilst this fits in with social inclusion, it also reflects demand, as a significant number of mobile library users are elderly so the likelihood of sight impairments in this group of users is obviously higher. Other socially excluded groups are less well catered for: a high number of mobile library services can access books in different languages yet do not carry them on the vehicle if demand is not high. Although this is means that stock is less accessible for speakers of minority languages, it must be remembered that the practical issues of limited space on mobile vehicles must dictate that the stock carried must reflect demand.
It is inconclusive whether centralised stock selection policies or the mobile library services themselves having direct responsibility for selecting stock is the best way of ensuring that stock meets the needs of all users in line with social inclusion. It appears that whilst some feel they could contribute more to social inclusion by having direct responsibility in this area, others feel that their users are happy with the stock chosen centrally.

Routes appear to be largely dictated by the stipulations within the Public Library Standards and from customer demand. However, in contrast, a quarter of authorities are found to prioritise socially inclusive directives to decide which areas are served. But generalisations are hard to make as individual authorities differ greatly in regard to this subject.

Charges for mobile library services are mostly in keeping with static provision in terms of concessions for socially excluded groups. The only exceptions in the two case study authorities, surrounded reservation fees and fines which were both subject to concessions for reasons aimed at targeting social exclusion.

In regard to user groups, the elderly are targeted by most authorities (59%), followed by children (20%). Other targeted user groups highlighted by some authorities include the housebound, people with disabilities, people living on housing estates and rural dwellers.

Whilst some mobile library services provide some valuable services to housebound people (in addition to specific housebound services) this research was unable to establish figures to support these findings.

People with mobility problems are supported well by mobile libraries as the vast majority of vehicles offer full access via the use of lifts, low access vehicles, grab rails and D- bars. Beyond the widespread provision of large print books and spoken word cassettes, additional services to people with visual impairments are fragmented throughout the authorities. People with
hearing impairments benefit from the use of induction loops in 20% of authorities whilst 12% offer subtitled videos.

Speakers of minority languages (beyond the provision of books) are not very well represented, with less than 5% of mobile library services providing music, videos, specialist visits and specialist staff.

Young people, however, are very well catered for in terms of stock and mobile library services, with specialised vehicles for children in some authorities. Mobile library services are shown to be contributing well in the promotion of literacy and reading, particularly in regard to children in deprived areas. In terms of adult literacy, 5% of authorities provide services to aid people with basic needs skills.

Job seekers are a group that few authorities recognise widely, with only 5% of mobile library services offering special services for this group of people.

Whilst only 5% of mobile library services offer services to Travellers, this figure is positive since library services to this group are a relatively new phenomenon, and the work that is going on within these authorities to promote literacy and social inclusion is extremely encouraging. Similarly, this is a group of users are still unable to obtain resources from many static libraries due to the lack of a permanent address (which is a prerequisite to obtaining membership), so the targeting of this group by mobile library services is social inclusion in practice.

Similarly, people with mental health problems are another group often overlooked by library authorities, yet 3% of mobile library services target them specifically with the mobile library vehicles, to very positive effects.

The strengths of the mobile library service in line with social inclusion are that they offer greater physical accessibility to people who through old age, disability, or illness would find it difficult to access a static service point
and thus, a library service. They provide valuable opportunities for social interaction to overcome social isolation. The personal service users receive on the mobile is often over and above that received in a busy static library, because smaller user numbers mean that most users (along with their needs) are known instinctively by staff. Similarly, the worries and problems of users are often shared with staff, creating a further personal bond. The service is reliable (despite the mobile nature, missed stops are very rare) and one in which the public can depend upon. The way in which the mobile library service can quickly respond to peoples' needs is another major strength in line with social inclusion, as problems (which would otherwise prevent a person from using the service, e.g. geographical conditions) can be swiftly addressed. Mobile libraries add to the quality of peoples' lives through the provision of reading and recreational material. Similarly, the promotion of reader development is active on mobile library vehicles, both through users interacting with staff and with fellow users, which often lead to the formation of 'informal readers groups'.

A further strength of the mobile library service can be seen in the tackling of urban degeneration as they are better placed than static services to target specific areas of deprivation. The highly visible nature of mobile library vehicles promotes greater use in these areas as they offer relief from the degenerated environment. They promote a sense of community by offering a meeting place for people, and also promote literacy and reading to develop skills which will prevent future degeneration.

Similarly, mobiles offer a valuable service in aiding rural deprivation, by, again, offering a community centre (this time for excluded people through geographical isolation) and providing opportunities for social interaction in addition to a good selection of library resources. In this way mobile libraries are essential to rural populations and would not easily be replaced or complimented by the addition of static collections of books in rural post offices.
By having the ability to target specific user groups and deprived areas, mobile libraries are in a better position than static libraries to combat social exclusion and can in this respect be seen as having the potential to be better contributors towards social inclusion.
7.0 RECOGNITION

7.1 General recognition

So whilst mobile libraries obviously make a contribution towards social inclusion, this is not always recognised by some public library authorities. It has been shown that 45% of the library authorities surveyed appear to disregard the mobile library service as contributors to social inclusion as they do not feature in their policy documentation on the subject. But whilst these authorities appear to favour static provision, it seems that the remaining 55% of authorities surveyed do recognise the value of their mobile library service (see 5.4).

However, findings suggest that mobile library services are not generally acknowledged by national policies, thereby individual library authorities are not encouraged to appreciate the value of their mobile provision particularly in relation to social inclusion. As the senior manager of Library Authority A stated when asked if mobile libraries are widely regarded as contributors to social inclusion:

“Well, from “Libraries for all” we’re not, we’re just not mentioned, and the whole thing in the service standards…[which] say we will have a mobile library if there isn’t a static service within so many miles. That’s ludicrous. If you are disabled, then a hundred yards from your library is a…distance that you can’t cover. So we know as professional librarians working in mobile services that we’re not recognised. Our contribution is, we’re an-add on. People still see us as filling in the gaps of the community library service and I don’t think they really understand the penetration we have, the people we can reach and the exciting things we can do with ICT now. I mean, we can bring the Internet to your door and I think we’ve got a lot of work to do to make people realise exactly what we can contribute.’

[SM, Library Authority A].

So the mobile library services appear to be viewed as secondary to static provision in the eyes of the government, an opinion which obviously filters down to some library authorities and to other organisations. The
Senior manager of Library Authority B points to the fact that mobile libraries are not widely recognised by other organisations until they actually see the work that the service does for themselves.

‘A lot of people external to mobile services and...the library service...don’t think about us. But when we draw the fact to their attention that we are actually a visible part of the community at least every two weeks it suddenly dawns on people how they can use us and what we can do for them, and what they can do for us as well.’ [SM, Library Authority B]

Similarly, the fact that the value of this mobile library service is recognised by their director is shown to be a rare occurrence amongst the library community, and a fact that is envied by the mobile library staff in other authorities.

‘It goes back to...promotion. A lot of people just see us as a service for the very young and the very old and not a service for everybody and I think all mobile library services need to fight a battle against the media. We’re quite lucky that our director...is an excellent communicator and he raises the profile of libraries including mobile libraries with our political masters. [Name of a Senior Manager] spoke at a mobile meet... and all the other authorities were really impressed that the leader of [name of county] county council was aware that he had a mobile library service and...[also] that he thought it was great.’ [SM, Library Authority B].

So it would seem that the mobile library staff in a large number of authorities feel that they are lacking recognition from their own library authority never mind those external to it.

7.1 Performance indicators

This lack of recognition experienced by the mobile library services within some authorities could be attributed to the lack of performance indicators on which to measure the service. The Culture, Media and Sport Committee (2000a: Paragraph 51) recommends ‘that the government ensure[s] the collection and publication of comprehensive statistics on
library use by all socially excluded groups’ yet this recommendation seems to be a difficult one to put into practice.

Findings show that of the total responses received, 76% of the authorities had taken steps to monitor or measure the effectiveness of their mobile library provision, mainly via the means of user surveys, user figures and issue figures. A further 20% of authorities had plans in place to monitor the effectiveness of their mobile library service.

However, in terms of measuring the effectiveness of any contribution mobiles make towards social inclusion, only 13% stated that they had taken steps to achieve this, whilst 36% had plans to do so. The low figures in this area could either be a reflection of the fact that authorities are not concerned about measuring the effect their mobile library service has on social inclusion, or, a far more likely explanation is that authorities are having extreme difficulties in finding performance indicators to measure how effective their mobile service is in combating social exclusion. Indeed, the respondents who stated that they have taken action to measure their contribution towards social inclusion reflect this too, as some of the explanations detailing how they have achieved this appear to be somewhat vague in nature. Entries include: by conducting a survey of visually impaired users; monitoring user satisfaction rates; monitoring the ethnic minority service; monitoring the housebound service; evaluating ICT; and consulting Umbrella groups.

Comedia (1993:35) have also noted the difficulty in measuring much of the socially inclusive work that goes on in libraries:

[Performance indicators] can easily measure book issues, turnover of book stock and other statistics, but in no way can measure the quality of a relationship between a library, its users and the geographical area it serves.

Although referring to libraries in general, this observation is particularly true for mobile libraries whose value to users is not always
necessarily in the form of a book issue, but instead could be in the form of, for example, an opportunity for social contact. Whilst it is easy for authorities to log statistical data in terms of user figures and numbers of issues, this in no way goes towards measuring social inclusion. Similarly, the difficulties in identifying the socially excluded, as not all groups can be identified visually (e.g. the unemployed) make this task almost impossible.

Therefore, if no effective performance indicators are in place on which to prove the value of the mobile library service in relation to social inclusion, they will continue to lack recognition.

7.2 Need for promotion

Telfer (1997: 15-16) has recognised that in order for the profile of mobile libraries to be heightened in the eyes of the public, the library world and national government, the need for promotion is imperative.

The entire library system, the elected members and the public must be continually reminded of the purpose of the mobile library service. We need to establish clear priorities and plan and develop our services within them. Otherwise we have no unique purpose. Having no unique purpose means being part of the general pattern of service delivery and being much more vulnerable to cuts. It means that mobiles could be seen as a fill in and substitute. Mobiles are not a fill in for gaps in the community library service and cannot afford to be seen as an add on.

But Library Authority B highlights the dilemma surrounding their mobile service, because although there is a strong desire to promote and thereby develop the service, they are already operating to their full limit and would not, within their current budget and amount of vehicles, be able to cope with the extra demand that promotion would create:

‘I don’t know if other authorities are like this but [name of county] Mobile Library Service is really well used and what we need to do is make more
overtures to communities to make them aware that they can ask for a service and use us. But because we’re are so well used and we’ve got full timetables, your own success is actually a bit of a millstone to develop services. But we are getting involved in the Sure Start project. We’ll be targeting under 4s and part of the…[project] is that they’ve got to come and use the mobile library.’ [SM, Library Authority B].

However, whilst Library Authority B appears to be suffering as ‘victims of their own success’ they also recognise the potential that promotion could create in terms of forging valuable partnerships with other community organisations. It has been found by this mobile library service that such organisations are already beginning to recognise the value of mobiles in helping them to effectively (and cheaply) reach the community.

‘A lot of other services have latched on to the idea that the mobile library service is one of the few that goes out into the community. We’ve taken representatives from other organisations out with us when we do a route so they can talk to the users, people like [name of a local rural community council], volunteers bureaus and a food advisory/ healthy eating [representative]… So people…come out with us to help them to target people in those areas, or we take information out. There’s lots of services that need to get out to those communities but they don’t have the finances. But we’re quite happy to promote them.’
[SM, Library Authority B].

7.3 Use of non-professional staff

The survey findings state that 96% of those authorities surveyed use non-professional staff on their mobiles (86% of which, utilise the driver to work alongside the non-professional member of staff), 27% of authorities use professionally qualified librarians on their mobile vehicles, and 3% use volunteers (see Figure 7). The use of non-professional staff alongside drivers, then, appears to be the most common form of staffing mobile libraries. This trend is common throughout all the different authority types (see Figure 8).
Whilst the researcher has witnessed the excellent work that non-professional staff do in terms of connecting with users and offering a great deal of both reader support and personal support in their relations with the community, in terms of specific outreach work which could further the scope of mobile library service, it is wondered how adequate the use of non-professional alone is. The Senior Manager of Library Authority B expresses that given proper training, non-professional staff can competently do the work of a qualified librarian.

‘The way we run our mobiles is the exactly same we run our static service points….To me, if you’ve trained your staff properly, there’s no reason why they can’t run the service well. It’s a question of training.’

[SM, Library Authority B].

In contrast, the Senior Manager of Library Authority A feels that the lack of professional staff is holding back the mobile library service from contributing fully towards social inclusion in terms of being unable to carry out professional outreach work.
‘We tried very hard to get a community librarian here [within the mobile library service]. [We have] a senior librarian but we have nobody really to do the professional outreach work…that I would have wanted…which makes sense if you’re looking at social inclusion.’ [SM, Library Authority A].

Indeed, the use of more professional staff on board mobile library vehicles would enable the service to provide more outreach work to socially excluded groups, for example, work to aid people with basic skills needs. Whilst this work may be achievable by non-professional staff, it is unfair to expect such members to carry out the work of a professional on the wage of a non-professional.

So whilst the use of qualified librarians on mobile library vehicles is in a minority within most authority types in favour of the use of non-professional staff and drivers, it is particularly rare in County and Welsh Unitary authorities (see Figure 8). It is hard to draw conclusions from these findings to explain why this is. Budgetary restrictions could play a part in these authorities being unable to afford professional staff on their mobiles.
Alternatively these authorities may feel, like Library Authority B, that the service does not warrant the use of professional staff because a) the non-professional staff are providing the optimum service without the need of professional staff on board the vehicles, or b) the value of the service is not recognised by senior management. These are simply suggestions on the researcher’s part and in order to gain a more accurate explanation, this could be an area in need of further research.

7.4 Summary

Findings suggest that there is a definite split between authorities who do recognise their mobile library services as contributors towards social inclusion and those who don’t. Whilst the national picture very rarely features mobile libraries – government documents relating to libraries giving mobiles only cursory mentions - individual authorities differ widely in relation to giving their mobile library services due recognition.

Of the 44% of mobile library services that do not feature in the social inclusion documentation, a possible explanation for their lack of recognition is a lack of performance statistics relating to social inclusion which makes it difficult to prove the worth of the service to higher management. A general lack of promotion is a further factor affecting lack of recognition. However, it is clear that once promotion of the service has taken place, the value of the service is immediately recognised, particularly by other community organisations who can see the potential benefits to both themselves and the community by creating partnerships with the mobile library service.

It is inconclusive whether the widespread use of non-professional staff in favour of qualified librarians on mobile libraries is due to lack of recognition from higher management and could be an area in need of future research.
8.0 FUTURE POTENTIAL

8.1 Mobile libraries: a key tool for social inclusion

…the concept of the library needs to be broad and all embracing and not focused simply on buildings, institutions and the barriers they erect. Outreach, partnerships and joint provision all have a place in creating a new, more accessible “library” for the twenty first century.

As Muddiman et al (2000: 42) have observed, public libraries need to take action beyond the perimeters of the library building to aid social inclusion. In this sense, mobile libraries are in a prime position to contribute in this area as they are able to physically reach out to the community to target particular user groups. The potential ways in which social exclusion could be combated via the use of mobile libraries are endless. As the senior manager within Library Authority A shows, many mobile library services are not lacking the ideas for ways to aid inclusion, they are simply lacking the resources:

I would have specific mobile libraries for specific community groups. I would have a children’s mobile which I would take around schools and playgroups. I would have something like the traveller we have and I would concentrate on day centres. I think that’s a big area of work. I would have what we’re working on at the moment, a family learning vehicle that would go out to the estates and the isolated rural areas and we would work with families to help improve the reading of the entire family…with younger children, children of school age and with adults who aren’t used to reading… I would take a mobile out to centres where there are adults with learning disabilities and we would combine with social care to do reminiscence sessions there backed up with books. You know the possibilities are absolutely endless. I’d also have an information vehicle because one of the things we can’t provide at the moment with the space we have is good up to date information. And I would love to take a vehicle out with the latest ICT on it, up to date information from places like Age Concern, Community Health [name of metropolitan borough] and the voluntary agencies. I would like to work with the voluntary agencies to deliver that service as well. I’d like it as a joint project. And that’s just for starters… [SM, Library Authority A].
8.2 Methods of incorporating mobile libraries into social inclusion strategies

8.2.1 Outreach work

Outreach work is a major area in which mobile library services can contribute towards social inclusion. Outreach can be defined as ‘an aspect of service targeted to groups which have traditionally been excluded and are not currently connected to the traditional library service’ (Muddiman et al, 2000: 46).

Findings show that the mobile library services within some authorities are already providing outreach services within existing budgets to particular excluded groups, through, for example, services to travellers and ethnic minority groups, and visits to daycentres for people with learning difficulties, people with mental illnesses and people with visual impairments. Although such services are in relatively small numbers, they are something that can be expanded upon.

Similarly, mobile libraries have the potential to provide a more educative role to users in terms of more structured services, such as literacy projects to aid people with basic skills needs and IT training (on vehicles with such capabilities) to combat the social exclusion experienced by those who are suffering as a result of computer illiteracy. These services could be conducted in the form of half-day workshops in which instruction and support are offered either on the larger mobile library vehicles or in a static situation in partnership with other organisations with additional resources (see 8.2.2). Either way the resources of the mobile library could be used to offer support material. However, the employment of more professional staff on the vehicles would be required to carry out outreach work of this nature, yet in the light of the long-term benefits to the community, it would be hoped that this added expense would be justifiable.
8.2.2 Partnerships

The formation of partnerships with voluntary or community organisations is a key area in which mobile library services can move. In this way both services can draw huge benefits – voluntary organisations can gain access to the community in a cheap manner by accompanying staff on the mobile routes, and the mobile library service can provide a superior service by offering their users access to valuable information or advice. The community could only benefit from such partnerships, and the potential contribution that can be made to combat social exclusion in this way is endless. Similarly, from the mobile library service’s perspective, the forging of partnerships with other community organisations fits in with both social inclusion strategies and Best Value (as public money is obviously being saved in transportation costs for the community/voluntary organisations).

Similarly, partnerships can be created with voluntary and community groups to aid outreach work by sharing resources and expertise. By doing so, many community initiatives could be achieved in the form of increased educational opportunities for socially excluded groups or individuals. Alternatively, opportunities of a more recreational nature using the resources of the mobile (e.g. book or audio-based reminiscence sessions for the elderly), which could improve the quality of life for many excluded people, would be a further valuable scheme for mobile library services to work with other community organisations.

8.2.3 Active promotion and experimental schemes to target users

The promotion of mobile library services is an area of great need (see 7.2). However, whilst general promotion to increase user numbers, and the profile of the service is needed, a more experimental approach could be taken in an attempt to target users who would ordinarily be inaccessible. An example of this could be to target supermarkets as a place to station the mobile vehicles for a period of time each week. As one member of frontline staff within Library Authority A commented:
‘I don’t see why we couldn’t make some of the slacker weekly services fortnightly, and go to some of the supermarkets for half a day – everybody who can, manages to get to a supermarket, so we could attract users that way.’ [FLS, Library Authority A].

Indeed, as stated, everyone in the community who is able to uses the supermarket, so whilst many may not make the effort to go to a library, if mobile library provision is accessible as part of a weekly shopping trip, people are more likely to use the service. Similarly, some hard-to-reach user groups (for example, some people from ethnic minorities) could be targeted in this way. Once initial contact has been made and a user base built up, additional routes could be planned to incorporate the new users in their home areas, and word of mouth recommendations from those users could allow the mobile library service to serve the wider community.

8.2.4 Formulation of performance measurements

Whilst many of the above suggestions could prove costly (particularly in the purchase of specialised vehicles for e.g. IT provision, or in the purchase of more vehicles to offer additional, more experimental services), if mobile library services were able to prove their worth in aiding social inclusion, they would be on a better footing to obtain funding both on a local and national scale. Only through wider recognition can the latent potential of mobiles be unleashed.

In order to achieve this, the need to establish effective performance indicators is imperative for mobile library services. One way in which a service’s contribution towards combating social inclusion can be measured is in the form of qualitative data from user surveys. Comments from users about how a library service has enhanced the quality of their life, be it from an educational perspective or simply as a forum for interacting with friends or neighbours, can be used as evidence of a successful social inclusion policy. However, performance measures which produce easy-to-measure quantitative data are also required. Muddiman et al (2000) suggest that
national performance indicators should be formulated for use throughout the public library service as a whole. This would be particularly advantageous for mobile library services because if they were able to produce statistical data to prove their worth in comparison to static provision, it would be easier for mobile library management to argue for greater funding in order to expand upon their successes.

8.3 Summary

Mobile libraries are ideally placed to contribute towards social inclusion as they have the ability to target specific groups and geographical areas. Much valuable work is already operating within the mobile library services of some authorities yet others can learn from their successes to improve provision to socially exclude people within their own authorities.

Mobile libraries can contribute further to social inclusion by developing more outreach work to targeted user groups, possibly with a view to providing a more educative focus in addition to library resources. The development of partnerships with other community or voluntary organisations can aid this work to the community.

The formulation of performance measurements to assess the effectiveness of service provision in line with social inclusion could further provide mobile library services with a sounder footing to obtain greater recognition and funding. If mobile library service provision can be measured against static provision in regard to social inclusion, more authorities may recognise the value of their mobile libraries. In this way mobile library services may receive the credit they deserve and further services can be developed to have a greater impact on the combating of social exclusion.
9.0 CONCLUSIONS

9.1 The importance of social inclusion

When considering the existence of public library policy documentation relating to social inclusion amongst individual authorities, it is noted that 60% of authorities surveyed already possess such strategies, and a further 35% have plans to do so. This obviously shows that public library authorities are viewing social inclusion as an important issue. Similarly, of the 40% of authorities who do not currently have a social inclusion strategy in place, only 5% have no plans to introduce a policy in the near future.

9.2 The recognition of mobiles as tools for social inclusion

9.2.1 General recognition

In national library policy documentation, mobile libraries feature very rarely. Static services are widely held as the main source of public library provision, thereby mobile library services either omitted from such documentation or included in brief.

9.2.2 Recognition within public library authorities

Whilst the issue of social inclusion is a prime focus for the vast majority of public library authorities, it appears that only 55% have recognised their mobile library service as a tool to combat exclusion by including them within their social inclusion policy documentation. This leaves 45% of authorities who are failing to recognise the current performance or the potential of their mobile library services.

Furthermore a split exists amongst the authorities who have included mobiles in this documentation. This split surrounds the way in which mobile libraries feature. Some authorities give prominence to the valuable
work achieved by their mobile library service, whilst others devote only brief statements to them. Again, this reflects that some mobile library services are perceived as being of lesser importance within the public library authority as a whole. It can therefore be concluded that although 55% of authorities feature mobiles within their library policy documentation on social inclusion, a significantly lower number give the service due recognition.

9.2.3 Reasons for lack of recognition

The absence of effective performance statistics on which to measure the contribution made towards social inclusion is a significant reason why mobile libraries lack recognition, both nationally and within some public library authorities. If suitable measures were in place, the service could be measured alongside static provision and it would then be more evident how they compare. Until these are put into place mobiles in some authorities will find it difficult to prove their worth in the shadow of static provision.

A further reason lies in the promotion of the service. In order for mobile library services to gain greater recognition both nationally and within individual authorities, their profile needs to be raised. It is therefore up to those in charge of mobile library services who feel they are lacking recognition to increase their profile via promotion and by exploring the possibility of partnerships with other community or voluntary organisations.

9.3 Mobile libraries as agents for social inclusion

Mobile libraries are undoubtedly contributors towards social inclusion. However, provision differs greatly between authorities - some are exemplary in their efforts to target the socially excluded whilst others appear to be doing little beyond providing books to areas not covered by static service points.
Despite this, the contribution currently being made by mobile libraries towards social inclusion in some authorities must be commended, and should be used as examples of best practice for other authorities to follow.

In terms of stock, whilst visually impaired people benefit greatly from specialised stock (and speakers of minority languages can request stock in many cases), mobile libraries are unable to carry large quantities of other specialised stock which will not be used, due to space limitations on the vehicle. It would therefore be unfair to say that mobile library services are failing to show a socially inclusive attitude within their stock provision as the carrying of stock that does not meet demand is simply impractical. Furthermore, stock provision alone does not reflect the positive impact that some mobile library services are having on socially excluded people.

The specific ways in which mobile libraries are successful in tackling social exclusion can be found in the following key areas:

a) The targeting of specific user groups
b) The ability to react quickly to peoples’ needs to lessen or prevent cases of social exclusion
c) The combating of social isolation via opportunities for interaction
d) The promotion of community spirit

a) The targeting of specific user groups

Mobile libraries can be seen to target specific socially excluded user groups and communities via their service. Mobile library services in the majority of authorities target the elderly (including those with disabilities) and children. These groups in themselves are valuable to target – elderly people often suffer from social isolation and a lack of opportunities to interact with others; people with disabilities obviously have a great need for services which enable them to feel as much a part of society as their able-bodied counterparts; and it is important to target children to promote reading
and literacy, and in so doing, prevent future cases of exclusion through illiteracy.

In the course of their work, mobile libraries also serve people who are geographically isolated or living in an area suffering from urban degeneration. Whether these services are provided because a mobile library service has targeted them as having a high proportion of socially excluded people, or whether they are covered simply in line with the geographical specifications for library provision within the Public Library Standards is largely irrelevant. The level of service these people receive in order to aid social exclusion is of greater importance, and, indeed, mobile library services have shown some successes in aiding both rural deprivation and urban degeneration. These successes can only increase as mobile library service provision continues.

Furthermore, some mobile library services are successful in providing services to other socially excluded groups, such as Travellers, people with mental illnesses, people with literacy problems, people with visual impairments, and speakers of minority languages. Although numbers of authorities operating such services are low, their value must nevertheless be recognised, celebrated and built upon. In this way other authorities can follow their good example.

Indeed, the mobile nature of the mobile library service puts them in a far better position to target socially excluded groups and communities than static libraries as they are able to physically reach out into the community.

For the mobile library services within some authorities, their lack of recognition by senior management is clearly unfair as their contribution towards tackling social exclusion is unquestionable. As Doughty (1999: 87) notes, the services provided by mobile libraries are ‘social inclusion in practice’.
b) The ability to react quickly to peoples’ needs to lessen or prevent cases of social exclusion

One of the unique qualities that mobile library services possess, which make them key players in the area of social inclusion, is the ability to react quickly to peoples’ needs.

Findings have shown that mobile library services are constantly changing routes and particular stops in order to respond to specific requests which, unless addressed could lead to cases of exclusion. Examples range from a group of elderly users being unable to use the mobile due to the stop being situated across a busy road, or simple conditions that it is too far for people with increasing mobility problems to walk.

Peoples’ needs are changing all the time and the mobile library service is one of the few bodies that has the ability to respond to these needs quickly without causing users to feel that their changing circumstances will exclude them from using the mobile library service.

So by swiftly responding to individuals’ needs, mobile library services are not only providing an excellent service but are also preventing cases of social exclusion.

c) The combating of social isolation via opportunities for interaction

A key area in which mobile libraries contribute towards social inclusion is in the combating of social isolation by providing opportunities for people to engage in social interaction. Whilst many people use the service simply to obtain reading material, the vast majority of users enjoy going on to the mobile library vehicle to chat to staff, their neighbours and friends. In some cases, these opportunities are rare and in providing a neutral space for people to meet, the mobile library service is enabling those individuals to combat any feelings of social isolation they may harbour. Similarly, problems are often shared between individuals and staff (or other users)
during these opportunities, and in doing so, individuals can feel less burdened than if they had no one to listen to them.

d) The promotion of community spirit

In line with the above point, the way in which mobile libraries provide a venue and opportunities to meet other people in their neighbourhood, not only helps to combat social isolation but further works to create a sense of community spirit. This is particularly important for people living in isolated rural areas with no shop or post office to act as a community centre. It is similarly important for people living in deprived urban areas where little community spirit exists. In such cases, the promotion of a sense of community can be a vital step in achieving urban regeneration.

9.4 The future potential for mobile libraries

Mobile libraries have great future potential in helping to combat social exclusion. The outreach projects already in operation within the mobile library services of some authorities are extremely valuable and should act as examples of how other authorities can take action. This work could also be furthered via the targeting of other user groups considered to be socially excluded. More experimental forms of user targeting could be applied to reach the more hard-to-reach groups, e.g. stationing a mobile vehicle for a period each week at a supermarket.

The forging of partnerships with other community or voluntary organisations could further enable mobile libraries to aid social inclusion. Similarly, the promotion of the service and the formation of effective performance measurements would enable mobile library services to prove the value of their work and thereby raise the profile of the service. With added recognition, mobile libraries have the potential to gain a sounder footing on which to attract additional funding to develop the service.
9.5 Conclusion

Mobile library services are contributors towards social inclusion in many ways beyond stock provision. They are one of the few services which have the capabilities to target specific user groups and pockets of deprivation, and many mobile library services have recognised and worked towards fulfilling this potential. They combat social exclusion by maintaining a flexible service in line with users’ changing needs, whilst also combating the effects of social and geographical isolation by providing a community meeting place in which people can engage in social interaction.

It must be recognised, though, that the contribution made by mobile libraries towards social inclusion is not first-rate throughout all authorities. Whilst some are doing an excellent job, others have yet to recognise the potential that the mobile library service has in relation to this area. There is no correlation between the size of mobile library fleets and the contribution made towards social inclusion, so library authorities must not think that a lack of resources mean that they do not possess the capabilities to make an effective contribution to combat social exclusion.

Similarly, the potential contribution that mobile libraries can make towards social inclusion is something that can be expanded upon perpetually. Through partnerships with other community and voluntary organisations the mobile library service can achieve endless commendable work with all types of socially excluded people within the community. If effective performance measurements could also be formulated to measure (and further prove) the contribution made by mobile libraries in this area, the potential exists for the expansion of mobile library services to aid social inclusion yet further.

9.6 Recommendations for future research

As this study covered England and Wales only, a further study of how mobile library services contribute towards social inclusion in Scotland and
Northern Ireland could be undertaken as a comparison to the findings in this research project.

Furthermore, a more in-depth investigation of English Unitary, Welsh Unitary and London Borough authority types could be undertaken in line with this subject area. As the more detailed part of this research was based upon case studies of one County Council authority and one Metropolitan authority, it would be interesting to discover if a deeper investigation into the mobile library services within other authority types would reveal any new findings.

Another area of the study that the researcher was unable to find an answer to could also be a possible area for future research. This lies in the issue surrounding the use (or non-use) of qualified librarians on mobile libraries. Whilst a minority of authorities use qualified librarians to staff their mobile libraries, the vast majority do not. An investigation could be undertaken to reveal the reasons behind such differing approaches to service provision. Do budgetary implications govern policy in this area or do some authorities view mobile library provision as unworthy of professional frontline staff?

A final area in need of urgent research is a study into how performance measurements could be designed to monitor a service’s contribution towards social inclusion. This would be of great use to all public library services to prove their worth in the eyes of both local and national bodies.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDIX 1: E-MAIL QUESTIONNAIRE

FOR THE ATTENTION OF THE HEAD OF MOBILE LIBRARY SERVICES

Questionnaire Survey re: mobile libraries and social inclusion

Dear Sir/ Madam,

As part of my Masters Degree at Sheffield University, I am currently undertaking a dissertation project investigating how far mobile libraries contribute, or are perceived to contribute, towards social inclusion. In order to establish findings, I would like to survey as many public library authorities in the UK as possible and I would be very grateful if you would assist me by taking a few minutes of your time to complete the following questionnaire.

Please note that the information you give will be treated in the strictest confidence, and your authority will not be named within the final report.

I sincerely thank you for your help.

Jo Arrowsmith

Instructions

Please complete the questionnaire by marking the brackets with a cross e.g. [ x ] where stated, or by offering details in the spaces provided.

Then return the questionnaire to me via one of the following methods:

1. Select the reply option on your e-mail server and mark it to include the original message.
2. Copy the questionnaire, paste it into a new e-mail message and send it to liq00ja @sheffield.ac.uk

Alternatively, you can print off a copy of the questionnaire to complete then post it to:

Jo Arrowsmith
C/o Department of Information Studies,
University of Sheffield,
Regent Court,
211, Portobello Street,
Sheffield.
S1 4DP

If your e-mail server is unable to reproduce the questionnaire in a readable form, I would be happy to send you a paper copy if you contact me at the above address.
Questionnaire re: Mobile Libraries and Social Inclusion

A. Library Authority Details

1. Name of library authority__________________________________________

B. Policy and Resources

2. How many mobile libraries do you have (including trailers, maximum capacity vehicles, travelling libraries)?

____________________________________________________________________

3. Have you any mobile library vehicles that are targeted towards particular user groups?

   YES [   ]      NO [   ]

   If YES, please give brief details of the type/s of vehicles and the targeted user group/s in the space below

____________________________________________________________________

4. Has your library authority produced any current policy documentation or guidelines related to social inclusion (including statements in your Annual Library Plan)?

   YES [   ]      NO [   ]      PLANNED [   ]

   If YES, please state which documents and give brief details of the content (or paste the relevant sections from any electronic documents into the space below).

____________________________________________________________________

5. Do mobile libraries feature in any of your library authority’s current policy documentation or guidelines related to social inclusion?

   YES [   ]      NO [   ]

   If YES, please state which documents and give brief details of the content (or paste the relevant sections from any electronic documents into the space below).
6. If you have completed your Best Value Review, to what extent does it prioritise social inclusion? Please enclose brackets around your chosen number below where 1 = no mention and 6 = Highest priority.

No mention 1 2 3 4 5 6 Highest priority

C. Services and facilities

7. Has the library service taken any steps to improve access and relevance of mobiles in any of the following ways?

a) Providing special facilities/services for housebound people
   YES [ ] NO [ ]
   Details:

b) Providing special facilities for people with mobility impairments
   YES [ ] NO [ ]
   Details:

c) Providing special facilities for people with visual impairments
   YES [ ] NO [ ]
   Details:

d) Providing special facilities for people with hearing impairments
   YES [ ] NO [ ]
   Details:

e) Providing special facilities for speakers of minority languages
   YES [ ] NO [ ]
   Details:

f) Providing special facilities for people with learning difficulties
   YES [ ] NO [ ]
   Details:
g) Providing special services for geographically isolated people/ households
   YES [ ]   NO [ ]
Details:

h) Providing special facilities for unemployed people
   YES [ ]   NO [ ]
Details:

i) Please give details in the space below if your mobile library service provides special facilities/ services for any other socially excluded group

D. Stock

8. Does your mobile library service have direct responsibility for selection of stock?
   YES [ ]   NO [ ]

E. Routes

9. What criteria do you use to decide which communities/ neighbourhoods your mobile libraries serve? (Please rank the top four 1-4 in order of importance, where 1= most important and 4 = least important)

   a) No static library within one mile (or two miles for County Council Authorities)
   b) Local static library is not physically accessible to those with mobility impairments
   c) Demand from community/ neighbourhood
   d) Area of poverty/deprivation
   e) High number of elderly people in the area
   f) High number of pre-school children in area
   g) Other
10. Who staff your mobile libraries? Mark all that are relevant.
   a) Qualified librarians [   ]
   b) Non-professional staff [   ]
   c) Drivers [   ]
   d) Volunteers [   ]

G. Performance measurements

11. Have you taken any steps to monitor or measure the effectiveness of your mobile library provision?
   YES [   ]   NO [   ]   PLANNED [   ]

If you have answered YES to the above, please give details below.

__________________________________________________________________________

12. Has your library service or mobile library service taken any steps to monitor or measure the effectiveness of any contribution made towards social inclusion?
   YES [   ]   NO [   ]   PLANNED [   ]

If you have answered YES to the above, please give details below.

__________________________________________________________________________

H. Further Information

Please use the space below if you wish to add any comments relevant to the subject area that you feel would be helpful.

__________________________________________________________________________
I would like to interview respondents in a sample of authorities. Would you be willing to speak to me at a later date?

YES [    ]  NO [    ]

If YES, please put your contact details below

Name__________________________________________

E-mail address__________________________________________

Telephone number__________________________________________

Thank you again for completing this questionnaire. Your assistance is greatly appreciated.

PLEASE RETURN BY WEDNESDAY 20\textsuperscript{TH} JUNE