Assessing the quality of websites:

The view from Public Library Authorities.

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By

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Abstract

The study aims to find and evaluate criteria put forward for selecting quality webpages in Public Library Authorities. The current trends and criteria used to assess quality websites have been investigated.

Issues regarding web quality and selection criteria were identified from carrying out an initial literature search. The research methods have taken a combined approach that has included both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The issues and criteria identified from the initial literature review and web-based research have been used to formulate a number of themes and research questions, designed to find out more about the selection of quality websites. Both quantitative and qualitative data has been collected by sending out an email-based questionnaire. A case study interview with a Library Authority has been carried out in order to collect further relevant qualitative data.

The responses from the questionnaires and case study interview have been presented and summarised by using descriptive statistics. The statistics have been analysed and discussed in the light of the literature to present the current selection criteria used by Public Library Authorities to select quality websites.

The conclusion was made that a number of key selection criteria have been identified by the information professional that are fundamental in determining the quality of a website. A number of secondary criteria have also been identified that can be used to differentiate between websites that have all of the key selection criteria.

Recommendations for further extension to the research have been made by putting suggesting that the criteria considered important by library users and web designers could both differ from each other and differ from those of the information professional. These both should be further investigated in order to establish a comprehensive view of website quality issues.

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1.   Introduction

1.1.   Background

There is a constantly growing amount of information on the web. Not all people will have the skills to identify quality information and this is where the librarian or information provider can act as a mediator to make quality information available to all.

The ideas of providing links to quality websites seem at present to be only in the early stages of implementation. The purpose of this dissertation was to establish what links and the processes had been used to determine these links to quality websites. This has been done with a view to benefiting the profession, by suggesting recommendations for good practice in this area.

1.2.   Relationship to IT for Me Project

In recent years, there has been a growing importance of information technology within the library environment. The 'IT for Me' project will develop this technology to enable public libraries to provide personalised interactive webpages for every member of the public. The aim is to provide reluctant IT users with a more attractive access route to the World Wide Web. The project will provide a "personalise gateway to web-based resources for every registered individual in disadvantaged communities. A personalised home page with resources and links tailored to each registered user's specific needs will be created by matching personal profiles against an interactive database of quality learning and information resources", Department of Information Studies (2002). The 'IT for Me' project will help support the ideas of social inclusion and lifelong learning for all, by allowing easy access to quality pages on the web relevant to the individual.

This dissertation would contribute to some of the preliminary groundwork and investigation for the 'IT for Me' project. This dissertation is concerned with the need to be able to assess the quality of information sources on the web. In the literature there appears to have been a number of criteria put forward to what makes a quality website. However, there is not much evidence to show how these criteria have been implemented into web practice in the library authorities.

1.3.   Aims and objectives

This dissertation will investigate how the applying of criteria has been used in order to assess good quality web pages relevant to the public.

- What criteria and standards have been but forward in the literature and on the web to determine a good quality website?
- What criteria and standards are Library Authorities currently using to determine good quality websites?
- How might library authorities use these initiatives, criteria and standards to benefit from them and promote good practice within the field?

1.4.   Relevance and context in relation to current issues

The emergence of information gateways on the WWW is a recent development. Some quality assessed academic gateways already exist but there are very few for popular or leisure subjects relevant to the public. The purpose of this dissertation will be to establish what kitemarking of webpages have already been carried out and to determine the standards used to assess the quality of websites. This will be done with the idea of benefiting the library profession, by providing a number of criteria that can then be used to assess the quality of web pages. This could form the basis of good practice in the kitemarking field as a whole.

1.5.   Dissertation structure and arrangement.

This first chapter has provided a background to the research, and the findings that follow. The next chapter describes the different methodologies used to carry out the research. The report will then present and discuss the findings of the research. The results and data gathered through the questionnaires and interview have been analysed and discussed in the light of the literature reviewed. The final chapter goes on to draw conclusions and then put forward recommendations for good practice. Limitations of the study have then been outlined and recommendations for further study suggested.

1.6.   Summary

The chapter has outlined in brief the area of study and set the aims and objectives of the project. The chapter also has revealed the relevance of the research by pointing out that this appears to be a new area of study within a developing field. Therefore, further investigation and examination of this area could lead to benefits for the profession as a whole. A brief overview has been given of the structure of the report that follows.

2.   Literature Review

The aim of the chapter is to provide background information and to study the issues surrounding web quality. The growth of the WWW and the increased use of computers is a key issue to consider in the information society. The amount of information on the Web is constantly growing and this mass of information is varying in quality. Therefore, issues relating to how the quality of websites are assessed have now become fundamentally important.

2.1.   The World Wide Web

The emergence of the World Wide Web has taken place dramatically over the last few years.

> "The World Wide Web, is often referred to as the multimedia portion of the Internet, is undoubtedly the most significant Internet service available today. Information is provided in the form of hypermedia pages, which combine graphics and text and have the added feature that the user can follow the links provided to other documents located virtually anywhere on the web", (Chowdhury, 1999:397).

Any estimate of how large the web is inaccurate and out of date the instant that it is computed. The internet is therefore constantly growing and expanding. Deegan and Tanner, (2002:107) describe that "the Web is now the largest information space that the world has ever known, and it continues to grow exponentially".

2.2.   Computer access and internet use

The use of the internet continues to increase each year. Figures published by the Office for National Statistics (2002), show that in April 2003, 54 percent of adults in Britain had used the Internet in the three months prior to interview, an increase of 5 percent on April 2002 figures. Also 60 per cent of adults in Great Britain had used the Internet at some time, also an increase of 5 percent on April 2002 figures.

Figure 1: Adults that have used the Internet

(in 3 months prior to interview) 2000 to 2003.
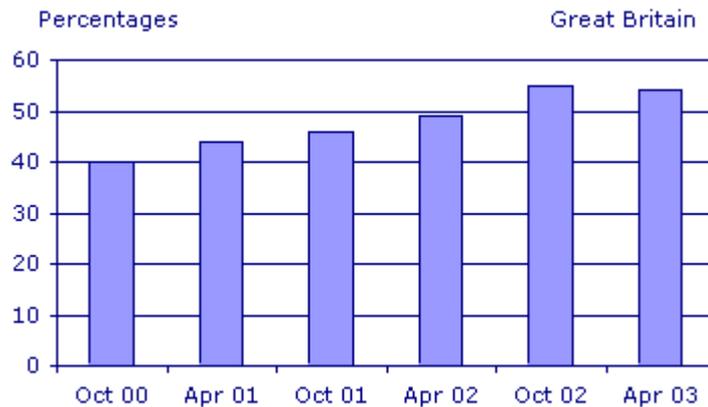
Source: Office for National Statistics (2003).

2.2.1. Government encouragement of IT

The Government has outlined its future information policies and wishes to provide access to the internet for all. There is an aim to have universal internet access in the UK, by 2005. An example of this provision is given below.

2.2.1.1. People's network in libraries

The People's Network is a project as outlined in (Resource, 2003 and Brophy, 2003) and aims to connect all public libraries to the internet as part of the Government's commitment to give everyone in the UK the opportunity to get online. There are more than 4000 public libraries offering free or low cost access to the internet across the UK, representing the largest ever initiative of its kind. Over 30,000 computer terminals with broadband internet access provide over 68.5 million hours worth of internet use every year across the UK. The People's Network is Lottery-funded by the New Opportunities Fund. It is part of a broader government initiative called UKonline. This is providing internet access to anyone who wants it through 6000 new IT learning centres in England.

2.3. Wealth of Information on the web

The internet is not an organised resource and is a mass of information, described in the following way.

> "The Internet is like a herd of performing elephants with diarrhoea -
> massive, difficult to redirect, awe-inspiring, entertaining, and a source of

mind-boggling amounts of excrement when you least expect it",
(Rowland, 1998:223).

Everyone with access to the technology, can both look at, and contribute to this global information, virtually freely and nearly instantaneously. Therefore, the amount of information is constantly growing. Lyman (1999:17) describes the web as "an unprecedented medium for individual publishing on a global scale, since anyone may distribute information on it". Deegan and Tanner, (2002:108) have also described the web environment as a place where "anyone can have access to the information on the web if they have a computer, modem, a phone line and a small amount of knowledge. And with little more knowledge, anyone can become a content producer". However, this increase use can also bring problems itself as anyone can put both good and bad quality information up on the web.

2.3.1.   Bad quality information on the WWW

The WWW differs from the print world, where quality checks are carried out in the publishing process, so that bad quality information can be stopped or corrected.

"Prior to the availability of networked information, users could have some confidence in the quality of information available to them. For example, publishers of popular material have a commercial imperative to produce 'quality' material, while academic publishers seek to maintain quality through the editing and refereeing process" (Cooke et al., 1996:3).

The People's Network initiative described above is important, as it has now made free web access available for all. Therefore, allowing information to be now available for everyone wishing to have access to it. However, many people do not have the necessary skills needed to search for and find the quality information that they require, from the huge amount of information now available on Internet. Hopkins (1995) outlined that one of the major problems in information systems in the future will revolve around the processes of reducing the amount of and raising the quality of information brought to the attention of the user.

2.4.   Lack of information literacy skills

As described above it is now possible for anyone to put up content onto the web. Therefore, there is increasingly the possibility that information will not be reliable and

of the high quality that people require. Therefore providing assess to quality information is now becoming a real issue that has to be addressed. However, this is not as easy as it sounds as unlike in the library environment there is "the problem that there is no single catalogue and the documents are not organized in the way we find them in a library", (Chowdhury and Chowdhury, 2001:8).

Consequently, there is now a new role for the LIS professional in the web environment in arranging the large amount of unsorted information out there.

> "There is an important role for people who can combine an understanding of the world wide web with a knowledge of the way that information is stored and used", (Griffiths, 2000:3).

2.5.   Kitemarking schemes of quality information

A number of different ways have been proposed to address the problems of web quality. One of these has been to select quality pages and award them with a kitemark.

> "During the mid-1990's there was a trend towards providing more effective access to internet materials through the provision of various forms of badges and rewards. Many of these services were developed and most have now disappeared, although it is still often possible to see a collection of logos or badges on a site", (Cooke, 2001:167).

2.5.1.   Gateways and portals

One of the key ideas is that the WWW is the gateway to a set of computer servers, all filled with information, which are located all over the globe. The WWW allows this vast amount, of unstructured information, (commonly referred to as the web), to be searched by the means of a search engine. The emphasis has moved away from actually finding the information, but instead of how to search for it.

The Resource Discovery Network (RDN) was established in 1999 as a free internet service providing high-quality internet resources for research and teaching, especially in higher education. The system is made of a series of subject-based hubs that collaborate and allow cross searching across multiple hubs and information gateways. It is funded by JISC, ESRC and AHRB, (Day, 1999).

These gateways have frequently been developed and designed for the use of academics and therefore there appears to be a lack of gateways that would be of use to search for suitable resources for the public.

2.6.   Standards or Guidelines for Web Quality

The definition of web quality is difficult to define. Aladwani and Palvia (2002:467) have recognised this when they describe web quality as, "a vastly undefined concept. For the most part, existing scientific research discusses the meaning of some aspects of web quality in a descriptive manner without delineating its major dimensions or providing tested scales to measure it". Quality has also be defined "in relation to information available via the Internet, quality is often used to refer to sources which contain original content or sources which are accurate and reliable", (Library Association Record, 2000:14).

There are two different sources of standards or criteria being used or put forward in the literature for evaluating the quality of websites. One of the perspectives is that of the website designer and government guidelines recommended for the design of website. The other perspective is that of the information provider or user, who use criteria to select a quality website.

2.6.1.   Web design criteria

There have been a number of criteria published in the literature for producing a quality website. Quality on the web in terms of design and content is difficult to define and a number of different guidelines have been put forward as to what makes a good quality website. Head (1999:16) has outlined "one study of 21 sites offering web design guidelines found 357 unique recommendations for "good design".

A number of authors have put forward recommendations about how to create a quality website; these include (Rosenfeld and Morville, (1998), Head, (2000), Krug, (2000), Nielsen, (2000), Nielsen (2002), and Williams and Tollett, (2000)).

There are also official e-government guidelines that have been produced by the Office of the E-envoy, (2002). These guidelines contain recommendations about the design and content of the site; these include issues of design elements, navigation and feedback mechanisms such as contact details and complaints procedures.

The publications outlined above have lead to better websites being designed, created, produced and put up onto the web in the first place. These guidelines could also be used to assess whether a web site already in existence fulfils the criteria set out for being a good quality website.

2.6.2.   Information specialist and user selection criteria

The criteria put forward by information specialists include elements such as purpose, source/authority, content, currency, style and functionality. Liu and Arnett (2000) have named such quality factors such as accuracy, completeness, relevancy, security, reliability, customisation, interactivity, ease of use, speed, search functionality and organization.

Bradley (2002) describes features to look for when assessing and evaluating the authority of a resource, these include authority, domain name, company logo, contact details, currency, awards, page design, who owns the site and also to check the site against other sources.

Cooke (2001) has put forward a number of guidelines to assess quality. However, it is also noted that the assessing of quality is not a straightforward procedure involving an identification of the presence or absence of different features or facilities.

> "Instead, quality assessment is a complex process involving the consideration of a wide range of interrelated issues that are of varying importance depending on the nature of the source and the needs of the user", (Cooke, 2001:13).

Guidelines have also been put forward by the SOSIG Information gateway, SOSIG, (2003a) which explains what criteria are used to select a site for inclusion on the gateway. These guidelines outline that the authority and reputation of source, substantiveness, accuracy, comprehensiveness, uniqueness, composition and organisation must be assessed to be able to select quality websites.

2.7.   Public library web quality issues

Public library authorities all now have public internet access for library members. This means that the public library must address the issues associated with this. LIS professionals are trained and experienced intermediaries in the complex information

environment and should turn their skills into the web environment by helping people to find the good quality information out on the internet.

> "Information professionals have been taking an important role….to gather together links to websites with authoritative, current, trust-worthy and useful information", (Bradley, 2002:9).

Information professionals should take on the role of gathering together quality webpages. As well as collecting quality pages, these pages can be grouped together, to form a value added information resource. Cooke (2001) outlines that taking responsibility for the value of linked sites, and aiming to provide unique content contributes to the quality of a resource.

This dissertation will look at how information sources and websites are being assessed for their quality. It will look at how library authorities are selecting links to quality webpages for their own websites. From the literature, there appears to have been a number of criteria put forward to what makes a quality website. However, there is little evidence to show how these criteria have been implemented and used in web practice within library authorities. This research will look to identify the criteria that are being used to select links to quality websites. It will look at how this is being carried out and will look to also provide recommendations for good practice in the field as a whole.

2.8.   Summary

This chapter has given a brief description of the WWW. It then goes on to describe the increase in use of the internet encouraged by government initiatives such as the People's Network. The amount of information on the web is growing continually and this has lead to the issue of finding quality information out there on the web. This has been addressed by a number of gateway and directories being created to link to this quality information. Criteria have been put forward from both the web designer community and information professionals to assess a quality websites. The implications of these criteria to Library Authorities and information professionals have been considered and how they are related to the research has been considered.

3.   Methodology

3.1.   Approach to the research

A combined approach using both qualitative and quantitative methods has been the research method chosen for this research, as this would allow for the necessary flexibility and level of detail of study required. There were no expected or predetermined answers to the questions posed and the dissertation has therefore tried to establish key themes, standards, criteria and practices used in assessing the quality of websites. The relative newness of the field of study and lack of written evidence in the literature has determined this combined research approach in order to find out as much information as possible. The aim of the research was to establish and summarise current criteria used to establish quality websites written about in the literature and carried out in practice by Library Authorities. This research will be used to form the basis for a number of recommendations.

3.2.   Research Methods

This section is concerned with the design of the research methodology conducted. Busha and Harter (1980:20) have described research methods as, the "procedures and methods by means of which the identified problem" has been studied. A number of different methods were used to obtain relevant information for each of the aims outlined in section 1.3. All of the methods are consistent with the research method.

3.2.1.   Literature and web-based research

A literature search was carried out to establish the key themes. A literature search is important as pointed out by Hart (2001:2), as "a search of the literature is an essential part of every research project". Gash (2000:1) explains describes that a literature search is "a systematic and through search of all types of published literature in order to identify as many items as possible that are relevant to a particular topic". This preliminary study allows the discovery of the key issues and themes surrounding kitemarking of webpages to be identified and compared with the relevant literature.

3.2.2.   Web based Search

A brief examination of the existing collections of quality websites was undertaken. This was to discover what kitemarking has already taken place on the web. This

background research has tried to identify standards being used to carry out quality assessment of websites. This has allowed an initial investigation into the standards and procedures involved in the kitemarking of webpages to be investigated.

> "The investigator should conduct a thorough search and review of all literature related to the topic under study. An examination of the underlying theories, methods, and conclusions of related studies allows a better understanding of the research problem and contributes to the conduct of a better study", (Busha and Harter, 1980:61).

This has highlighted a number of issues and themes that have been used to determine suitable themes to ask about in both the questionnaire and case study interview.

3.2.3. Questionnaire

The questionnaire research method was used as this allowed primary data to be collected. This method was chosen as outlined in Kelley (1999) because it allows data to be collected quickly in a standard manner. It allows both quantitative data (numerical values) and qualitative data (comments from open-ended questions) to be collected.

3.2.3.1. Themes and topics for questions

The questions themes were determined by carrying out an initial literature review looking at the issues relating to providing links to quality websites. This enabled a better understanding of the subject and therefore the questions could be tailored to provide only information in areas of interest. This method allowed relevant primary data to be obtained.

3.2.3.2. People chosen

It was important that the sample population of the questionnaire is relevant to the area of study.

> "Investigators should consult with authorities in the topical area of research so that first-hand, additional insights, suggestions and information can be obtained from these experts", (Busha and Harter, 1980:62).

Therefore, the Library Authorities in England were chosen to be sent the questionnaire. This was carried out to try to obtain a wide range of respondents

across England, so that the results could be used to determine trends and practices across public library authority population.

3.2.3.3. Design and structure

It was important to get the design of the questionnaire tailored to the situation that it was to be used in.

> "The sampling procedures used in survey research will depend upon such factors as the nature of the study, available financial support, time constraints and the accessibility of respondents", (Busha and Harter, 1980:60).

The questionnaire was designed using some of the advice given in Busha and Harter (1980), Hague, (1994), McCormack and Hill (1997) and Kelley (1999). A number of factors have been considered in the questionnaire design process. These have included the length of questionnaire; the sequence that the questions appear, the type of question and the layout of the questionnaire for ease of completion. The questionnaire was designed so that the results could easily be coded and put into a statistical package for analysis. A covering letter was included so that the questionnaire could be properly introduced given the respondents an idea of what to expect. An approximate deadline for the questionnaire's return was given allowing the participants of the survey to know how long they had to reply. A copy of the email questionnaire can be found in the Appendix in Section 8.1

3.2.3.4. Delivery of Questionnaire

Busha and Harter (1980:65) have outlined that "all of the preliminary research questions should be refined, restated and pre-tested". Due to the time constraints of the research, it was not possible to carry out a full test pilot questionnaire. However, the questionnaire was given to colleagues. This process highlighted a number of potential points of confusion and so these were addressed by modifying the questionnaire before it was sent to Library Authorities.

Schaefer and Dillman, (1998) have made recommendations for the design and delivery of email questionnaires and these have been considered in this research. The questionnaire was delivered by email, as a Word attachment so that the respondents could fill it in and return it by email. This was possible due to the nature of questions asked. This also meant that the questionnaire was already in a digital form when it was returned. This has assisted with the analysis of the

questionnaire. However, the option to return the questionnaire by post was also given so that the maximum numbers of questionnaires would be returned.

3.2.4.   Case study semi-structured interview

The form of a case study was used to carry out further research that was more detailed in its nature. This was so that the criteria used to select links could be investigated in more depth. Gorman and Clayton (1997:50) have put forward the idea that "it is possible to derive knowledge of the wider phenomenon from intensive investigation of a specific instance or case". Mellon (1990:47) has described interviews as "long, open-ended conversations in which the aim is to understand a particular situation, event or activity from the point of view of the person being interviewed." This method has been chosen, as there has not been sufficient time to carry out a fully comprehensive study to find out all the experiences and views of all library authorities. This has allowed further detailed information to be obtained to clarify a number of issues raised from the questionnaires.

3.2.4.1. People chosen

For this research then the questionnaires were used to identify interesting library authorities to contact. Permission to contact the libraries at a later date was asked as the last question on the questionnaire. The choice of case studies were already limited to people who had responded to the questionnaire and given their permission to be contacted at a later date. It was not possible for a full selection of case studies as only a few libraries who do not provide links responded to the questionnaire. Of those who did not provide links, none of them gave permission for them to be contacted in the future.

To allow full analysis then ideally it would have been best to carry out a small range of case studies, rather than just one, but this was not possible due to time constraints. However, this case study can still be of value in providing further detailed information on the research issues.

> "In this sense, the case study, like an experiment, does not represent a 'sample,' and the investigator's goal is to expand and generalize theories (analytic generalization) and not to enumerate frequencies (statistical generalizations)". (Yin, 1994:10).

3.2.4.2. Design and structure

Robson, (2002:272) outlines the advantages of using interviews, as they are a "flexible and adaptable way of finding things out". There are a number of different interview styles. This research has used the semi-structured interview. This is where the topics and questions are predetermined but the interview wording can be changed and adapted according to the judgements of the interviewer. As suggested by Bryman, (2001) and Robson, (2002) this leads to a conversational style discussion and structure to the interview. This means that the interviewer can keep the discussion relevant and allow areas of particular interest to be studied in more detail.

The interview questions were carefully arranged to try to get the maximum amount of information from the Library Authority interview. The interview had a well-defined structure based on ideas written about in the literature such as Busha and Harter, (1980) and Gorman and Clayton (1997). A number of general questions were used to start the interview so that the interviewee would settle well into the interview and relax. Robson (2002:275) points out that "long, double-barrelled, jargon, leading or biased questions" should be avoided. The detailed and technical questions were in the middle of the interview. The end questions were more reflective about what they thought about the future. The final question gave them the opportunity to add anything else to the discussion that was not mentioned earlier on in the interview. A copy of the semi-structured interview questions can be found in the Appendix in Section 8.2.

3.2.4.3. Delivery of Interview

As suggested by Mellon (1990) and Patton (1990), the interview was taped to allow the researcher to concentrate on delivering the questions and not having to take copious notes during the interview. Robson (2002) does however advise that some brief notes should be made just in case the recording of the interview is unsuccessful. The notes also provide an overview of the interview that can be used during the transcription process.

The interview was recorded so that the maximum amount of information could be obtained from the interview and quotes could be used. Mellon (1990) outlines that permission to record the interview is normally asked for prior to the interview. The permission was granted prior to the start of the interview. The interview was also

carried out in a quiet office so that the tape recording would be of good quality and the interview could take place without any interruptions.

3.3.　Data analysis methods used

A number of methods were used to analyse the data collected. These are outlined for each of the different research methods used.

3.3.1.　Questionnaire analysis

3.3.1.1. SPSS and Excel

The questionnaire was coded that then allowed entry into SPSS. All the questionnaires were entered into a SPSS data file so that descriptive statistics could be obtained from the extracted data. The graphs for analysis were produced in Microsoft Excel.

3.3.1.2. Microsoft Word

The written responses and extra comments for each question were copied and pasted into a Word document for each of the questions. This enabled answers to be "assigned to categories or themes as they are identified to help researchers reduce the data to manageable units", (Mellon, 1990). This has allowed the answers and comments from the questionnaire to be easily compared. The find function in Word has also been used to search through the comments to find common themes.

3.3.2.　Interviews analysis

The interview was successfully recorded and then transcribed so a full account of the interview was obtained. The advantages of this method were that full transcription would allow a complete analysis of what was said. The comments were then sorted into a number of themes to enable them to be related back and to give exemplification to things brought up in the literature and questionnaire. Mellon (1990) has described how themes and patterns emerge from listening back to the taped interviews.

3.4.　Limitations of Methods Used

The usual disadvantages of interviews, for example the extensive time taken to plan, carry out and transcribe the interviews was not an issue in this research because only one interview was carried out. This interview was taken as a case study and was designed to add more detailed background to the research.

Very few of the library authorities who do not select links responded to the questionnaire. This may be due to the design of the questionnaire itself, as it was designed to provide the maximum information from the library authorities who are providing links. The library authorities who do not provide links may have been discouraged from filling in the questionnaire because of this. Busha and Harter, (1980:63) have pointed this out as a disadvantage of questionnaires when they say there is "difficulty in obtaining responses from a representative cross-section of the target population".

The uses of questionnaires have a number of disadvantages as outlined in McCormack and Hill (1997) and Busha and Harter (1980). These are now summarised. The questionnaire will preclude personal contact with respondents that may cause the investigator getting insufficient knowledge. Poorly worded questions may lead to ambiguous questions. "Verification of the accuracy of questionnaires might sometimes be difficult or even impossible", (Busha and Harter, 1980:63).

3.5.   Summary

The chapter has explained the research method used and chosen methodology of the research project. Each research approach is considered and justifications for the choices of methods used have been outlined. The chapter has also considered some of the problems encountered and the limitations of the research methods used.

4.   Results

4.1.   Introduction

This results chapter has been arranged according to the order that the questions were asked in the questionnaire. This was considered appropriate as the questionnaire was designed with the questions starting from more general questions before moving onto more in-depth questions. Each of the questions had a different theme or issue attached to it and therefore allowing the themes of the questions to provide the structure of the results section. This structure was used to talk about the results. In this chapter, the reasons behind asking each of the questions are outlined. The answers given in the questionnaire are then analysed for each question in turn. These results are summarised using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, tables and bar charts. These were all calculated and diagrams were created using SPSS or Excel. The summary tables were produced in Microsoft Word.

The email questionnaire was sent to the 166 library authorities in England and Wales. Of all these authorities, 49 of them responded to the questionnaire. This was a response rate of 29.5%. All the statistics and analysis that follow are based on information provided by the 49 library authorities who responded to the questionnaire.

4.2.   Question 1: Public Internet access

Does your library have internet access for public use?
This question was asked to establish if the library had computers that were available for the public to use. It was found that, 100% of library authorities provide public internet access in their libraries.

4.3.   Question 2: Select links for website

Does your library select useful web pages and links (URL's) for your own website?
This question was used to try to determine if local authorities were using their website to provide links to quality information out on the World Wide Web. 85.7% of library authorities did select useful webpages and links on their own website. Therefore, 14.3% of the library authorities still do not select or provide website links for their staff or members of the public.

4.4.　　Question 3: Record links in other ways

Does the library record useful web pages and links (URL's) in any other way?

This question was designed to find out other ways that the library authorities use to provide links if the library does not provide links to quality websites. Then asking the library authorities to explain how this has been done. This was considered important to ask about as not all library authorities have their own website to present links on.

Thirty-four (69.4%) of the Library Authorities do record useful websites in other ways, other than just putting them onto the library webpages. The most popular way was to provide links on staff PC's in the 'favourites' list' on Internet Explorer, this was done by eleven library authorities. Five library authorities also used the 'favourites' list' on Internet Explorer on their public access machines to provide links for the public user. Hard copy lists were also used to provide quality links, four library authorities provided these for staff and another four authorities supplied these lists for members of the public. These lists were in the form of leaflets that were available next to the public access PC's. The other methods used included, links on library intranet, email suggestions, a logbook, a monthly newsletter, part of the link directory software, in a Word document, listed on a central server and available on a staff conferencing site.

4.5.　　Question 4: Types of links provided

This question was asked in order to establish the types or categories of the links that were provided by library authorities. The questions were arranged in a number of categories. The links were hierarchical and provided information first about the library itself, then the local authority, then local area links and finally links to the web as a whole.

The questions were designed so that a number of themed categories were suggested to the library authorities, and they had to respond whether they did or did not provide these links to these types of websites. This style of questioning was adopted so that that it would be easier to analyse the data by having standardized answers, rather than leaving the responses to be totally open ended which would have been more difficult to analyse and draw conclusions from. However, the option was given to list any other links that they provided in a box at the end of the question.

The responses to the questions are given in the summary tables below (Figures 2-5). After analysing all the questionnaires it was noted that 2% of the library authorities had missing answers to question four. Also 8.2% of the library authorities were instructed to skip this question due to their previous responses to questions 1, 2 and 3. This accounts for and explains the missing percentages in the summary tables (Figures 2-5).

4.5.1.   Provide Library Links

Figure 2: Do you provide links to information provided by the library?

This question was asked to establish if library authorities provided links to their own library information and resources.

Values in %	Contact details /Opening hours	What's On at the library	Library Catalogue	Recommend books to read	Community Information
YES	87.8	79.6	69.4	51.0	79.6
NO	2.0	10.2	20.4	38.8	10.6

It is clear from the statistics that many authorities are providing general information such as opening hours, contact details, what is on at the library and community information. 69.4% of the library authorities also have links to their own library catalogue enabling people to search the catalogue from the web. However, there does seem to be fewer libraries providing links on their website to suggest or recommend books to read (51.0%).

4.5.2.   Provide Local Authority Links

Figure 3: Do you provide links to information provided by Local Authority?

Values in %	Councillor contacts /Surgeries	Council Services	Agendas / Minutes	Policy Documents
YES	59.2	65.3	44.9	51.0
NO	30.6	24.5	44.9	38.8

The statistics show that 65.3% of library authorities are providing links to council services. Links are provided so that members of the public can contact councillors

(59.2%). In addition, links have been provided to link to agendas and minutes (44.9%) and to other council policy documents (51.0%).

4.5.3.   Provide Local Area Links

Figure 4: Do you provide links to Local Area sites?

Values in %	Places to Visit	Local Events	Clubs and Societies	Local Help Groups
YES	59.2	61.2	75.5	63.3
NO	30.6	28.6	14.3	26.5

Of the Local area links offered, clubs and society links are the most popular with 75.5% of authorities providing them. Links providing information to local help groups (63.3%) and places to visit (59.2%) and Local Events (61.2%) are made.

4.5.4.   Provide General Web Resources

Figure 5: Do you provide links to general web resources?

Values in %	News	Search Engines	Educational Resources	Reference Sources
YES	59.2	69.4	67.3	73.5
NO	30.6	20.4	22.4	16.3

It is clear that general web-based reference sources are considered important by library authorities as 73.5% provide links to them. 67.3% of authorities are providing links to educational resources. Links to search engines (69.4%) are also being provided. Fewer authorities in comparison, 59.2% are providing links to news websites.

4.5.5.   Other links provided

In the final part of this section of the questionnaire, an open-response question was included so that the authorities were given the opportunity to list all other links that they provided.

From the many responses that authorities provided the following extra links were given in addition to those specifically asked about above. The most popular extra links provided included seven authorities who had links to National Government sites, six authorities who provided links to local history resources and study groups

and five authorities who provided links to Children's Book Sites. Other links that were provided included; intellectual property links, consumer advice, benefits information, useful down loads, local courses, national organisations, business links, employment and health/leisure, and children's websites.

4.6.   Question 5: Links suggested by whom

This question was intended to find out who suggested the links to quality websites. A number of alternatives were suggested to the library authorities, and they had to respond whether they did or did not provide these methods of link selection. This style of questioning was adopted so that that it would be easier to analyse the data by having standardised answers. However, the final section of the question did allow authorities to add any methods used to suggest links.

It was noted that 2% of library authorities had missing answers to question five. Also 8.2% of the library authorities were instructed to skip this question due to their previous responses to questions 1, 2 and 3. This explains and accounts for the missing percentage in the summary table in Figure 6. The values have not been included on the table to keep them simple and uncluttered.

4.6.1.   Who suggested the links provided by the library?

Figure 6: How links are suggested to the library

Values in %	YES	NO
Librarian	85.7	4.1
Subject Specialist	51.0	38.8
General Public	38.8	51.0
Library Authority	30.6	59.2
Search Engine	14.3	75.5
Questionnaire	6.1	83.7
Suggestion Box	6.1	83.7

Librarians are most frequently selecting the links provided for inclusion on the library authority websites, with 85.7% of respondents selecting links in this way. 51% of respondents say that subject specialist's suggest links and 38.8% of respondents have said that the public suggest links to them. However, only 6.1% of respondents

are actually going out and trying to get suggestions for links, either by using a suggestion box or by carrying out a questionnaire.

4.6.2.   Other people or ways used to select links

In summary, from the many responses received in the questionnaire web links were suggested by the following other people or methods. These included four authorities, where council staff are able to suggest weblinks. The following ways all had two authorities that used them and these included; email facility to suggest links, email suggestions from external organisations, and training courses. Links were additionally suggested by; elected members, from newspapers, books and journals, from the People's Network, swapping links and links based on common queries at the enquiry desk.

4.7.   Question 6: Selection policy or standards

Does your library have a policy or standards to select good webpages?
If YES, would it be possible to send details of this policy.

This question was asked to establish whether library authorities have any policy or standards used to select quality websites to link to. Ten authorities (20.4%) had a policy to select quality websites, not all of these were written down in a formal way. Three authorities were able to send details of this policy. Therefore, thirty-five authorities (71.4%) appear not to have any formal policy for selecting quality websites. Two of the library authorities (4.1%) had missing answers to this question. In addition, four library authorities were instructed to skip this question due to their previous responses to questions 1, 2 and 3. However, two of the library authorities still went ahead and answered this question and their answers were included in the statistics. These policies will be investigated and examined further within the discussion section.

4.8.   Question 7(i): Importance of Criteria to assess quality websites

Please rate <u>how important</u> you believe each of these criteria are in making a good website. *Using the scale below, please give a rating in each box of column (a).*

    Very important   6   5   4   3   2   1   Not at all important

This question was asked to establish how important respondents felt a number of criteria to be, when selecting a quality website. These criteria were selected from

the literature, which included Cooke (2001), Bradley, (2002), Office of the E-envoy, (2002) and SOSIG, (2003a) a number of articles listed in Virginia Tech, (2003) and from reading a wide number of background articles as part of the literature review. A brief definition of each of the twelve criteria, which were used in the questionnaire, is given below. The terms in the brackets are how the criteria are referred to in the remainder of the dissertation. How each of these criteria can be identified on a website will be considered in more detail in the discussion section in Chapter 5.

- **How current is the site? (Currency):** This is how up-to-date the site is and involves finding out when sites were last updated. (The term currency was not used in the questionnaire as this had caused some confusion on the pilot test of the questionnaire. Since some people thought that, that currency referred to monetary units that the site worked in, for example pounds or dollars).
- **Design/Graphics (Design):** The use of images and overall appearance of the website.
- **Authority or reputation of site (Authority):** Look to see who has written or authored a website to establish the knowledge and expertise of those responsible for producing it.
- **Content and coverage of information (Content):** The content and coverage can be defined as the subject area covered by the website.
- **Quality/accuracy of information (Accuracy):** Refers to the factual precision or the correctness of the information source.
- **Structure and order of information (Structure):** The arrangement of the information and layout of information within a website.
- **Navigation (Navigation):** This refers to the ease that you can move around a website.
- **Accessibility (Access):** This involves how readily that the information is available. This will involve factors such as payment, download times or the speed of access to information, website registration and website membership
- **Any Kitemarks or recommendations (Kitemarks):** Has the webpage been awarded any kitemarks by external organisations displayed in the form of a medal or logo.

- **At Correct level for users or intended audience (User Level):** This is the
  level and complexity of information source for end users.
- **Links from other sites (Links in):** These are the URL links that connect
  into the website that you are on.
- **Links to other sites (Links out):** These are the URL links that connect into
  another web site other than the one you are on.

The data from the questionnaire on the criteria used to assess the quality of
websites has been summarised in the table (figure 7) below.

Figure 7: The Importance of Criteria to assess quality websites

Values in %	Very Important 6	5	4	3	2	Not at all important 1	Missing
Currency	65.3	16.3	4.1	0	0	0	14.3
Design	8.2	8.2	38.8	14.3	12.2	0	18.4
Authority	51.0	22.4	10.2	0	2.0	0	14.3
Content	55.1	22.4	6.1	0	2.0	0	14.3
Accuracy	75.5	6.1	4.1	0	0	0	14.3
Structure	20.4	26.5	28.6	6.1	0	0	18.4
Navigation	24.5	30.6	24.5	2.0	0	0	18.4
Access	36.7	22.4	18.4	4.1	2.0	0	16.3
Kitemarks	2.0	22.4	26.5	14.3	10.2	8.2	16.3
User Level	32.7	28.6	18.4	4.1	0	0	16.3
Links in	2.0	12.2	18.4	22.4	16.3	10.2	18.4
Links out	4.1	16.3	22.4	22.4	10.2	6.1	18.4

The percentages of respondents who gave the criteria an importance of 5
(important) or 6 (very important) have been combined. These combined
percentages have been arranged into descending order to produce a ranking of the
twelve criteria. These are presented below in Figure 8.

Figure 8: Percentage of respondents that gave an importance of 5 or 6 for each of the criteria suggested to assess a website.
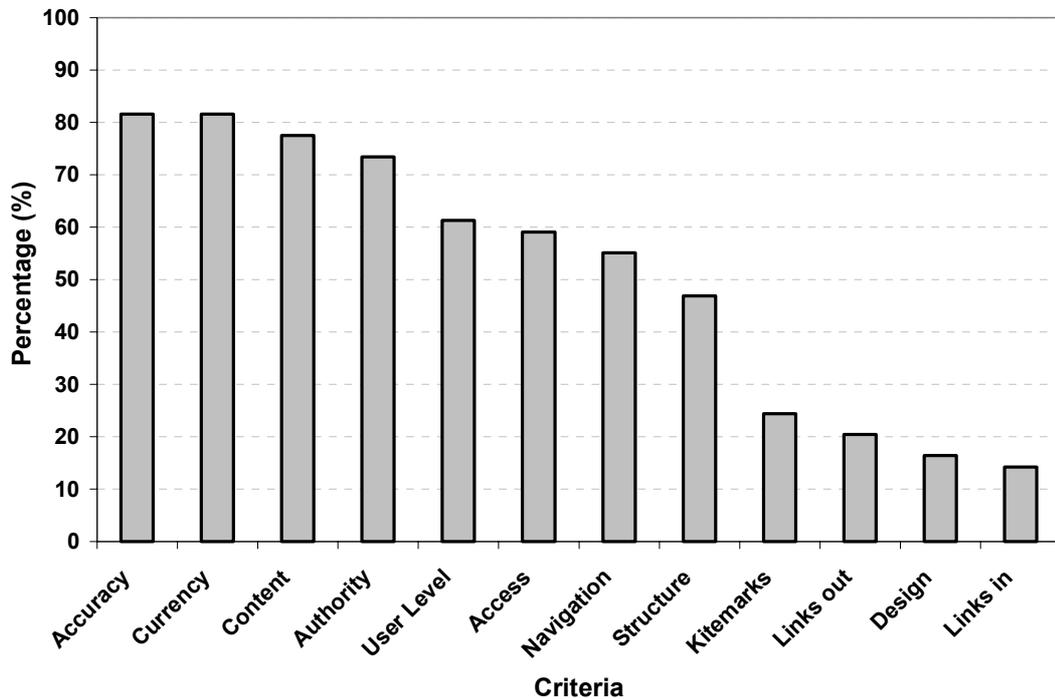
The combined percentages has allowed the criteria to be ranked from the suggested criteria, library authorities considered most important to least important in selecting a quality website. There are three distinct groups of percentages. The top four ranking criteria include accuracy, currency, content and authority and are all concerned with the information itself. The middle four ranking criteria include user level, access, navigation and structure and are to do with the user and moving around the website. The final four ranked criteria are concerned with recommendations or recognition of a website, these include the criteria of kitemarks, links out, design and links in.

4.9.   Question 7(ii): Criteria used to assess quality websites

4.9.1.   Criteria used by the library in selecting a quality website.

This question was asked to establish what criteria were actually being used by library authorities to pick quality pages to link for their websites. The respondents had to answer 'yes' or 'no' to each of the criteria. One point that should be noted, is that there are a high percentage of people who did not fill in this part of the questionnaire correctly. This may have been due to a design error with the

questionnaire by having the answers to two questions on the same table grid and people not noticing the second part of the question.

The answers are summarised from the questionnaire into the table below (Figure 9).

Figure 9: The criteria used by libraries to select a good website

Values in %	YES	NO	Missing	Ranking
Accuracy	75.5	0	24.5	1
Currency	75.5	0	24.5	1
Authority	73.5	2	24.5	3
Content	73.5	2	24.5	3
User Level	69.4	6.1	24.5	5
Navigation	57.1	18.4	24.5	6
Accessibility	57.1	16.3	26.5	6
Structure	53.1	22.4	24.5	8
Kitemarks	46.9	28.6	24.5	9
Design	40.8	32.7	26.5	10
Links out	28.6	46.9	24.5	11
Links in	26.5	49	24.5	12

The above table has been arranged in descending order according to the percentage of respondents who replied 'yes' that the library did use the criteria to select a quality webpage. This forms a simple ranking of the criteria that libraries are using to select quality websites. This will help in the discussion section when these results are considered in more detail.

4.10.   Question 8: Contact in future

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

Of the 49 library authorities who responded to the questionnaire, 55% of them gave permission to contact them later. All the library authorities who gave permission to be contacted in the future were all library authorities that selected links for their own website. None of the seven library authorities who responded to the questionnaire as not providing links gave their permission to be contacted in the future. These responses were then used to decide on which library authority would be used as a

case study to obtain further detailed information about selecting links to quality
websites.

4.11.   Summary

This chapter has summarised the questionnaire data by considering each question
in turn. The ideas behind the questionnaire design and reasons for inclusion of
each of the questions are outlined. Summary statistics, tables and charts have
illustrated a number of common themes and trends. They have also enabled
primary evidence about a number of key ideas to be collected and analysed that
have been recommended within the literature.

5.   Discussion of Results

5.1.   Introduction

This section will discuss the statistical results outlined in Chapter 4. The themes are discussed in the order of the questionnaire. As well as explaining the results and statistics, the written responses from the questionnaire will be included into the discussion and used to add further detail to the statistical results found. Please note that the questionnaires have been cited by calling them 'Questionnaire_ID number'. Quotes are shown by being written within speech marks in italic font.

The case study carried out and the policies received from library authorities will be utilised in the discussion by expanding further on the themes discovered. The case study will be cited as 'Case Study (2003). The policy documents will be referred to as 'Policy_ID number'. Quotes are again written within speech marks in italic font. This approach has been taken so to allow the respondents of the questionnaires and the case study interview to remain anonymous as promised for the purposes of this research.

All the results and findings have been analysed in the light of the literature found on the topic, using information drawn together in the initial literature review and web-based research.

5.2.   Question 1: Public Internet access

Of the library authorities responding to the questionnaire, all of them have public internet access. This shows that the implementation of computers as part of the People's Network initiative in public libraries has been successful.

> "Over 30,000 computer terminals have been installed in more than 4000
> libraries across the country, giving access to the internet for everyone,
> with trained staff on hand to offer support and advice", (Resource,
> 2003:1).

The development of the People's Network is not the only policy causing library authorities to consider implementing public access computers. As Brophy (2003:4) outlines that, "government policy on the delivery of e-services has been a driving force through the work of the Office of the e-Envoy, providing government-wide co-ordination and impetus to the exploitation of new network-based technologies".

It has become apparent that users of libraries are now starting to expect provision of internet facilities, so this needs to become a normal part of the service provided by library authorities. Brophy, (2003:5) has described how many library authorities are taking this all on board by "integrating the People's Network into their mandatory 'Annual Library Plans', firmly embedding this new dimension into their service portfolio".

5.3.   Question 2: Select links for website

From the questionnaires, it was clear that library authorities were providing and selecting links to put onto the computers on the public and staff network. 85.7% of the local authorities are providing links on their library website. One of the reasons given for this lack of link provision was due to the library authority not having a separate library homepage or some library authorities were in the process of setting up a website.

> "*In the future we intend to offer a links page from the library service's public web pages, but these are still very much under development*", Questionnaire_38.

> "*The website is being developed at the moment it is intended that there will be useful links*". Questionnaire_142.

Some Library authorities however, appear to be advanced in the field having selected and are providing a large number of links to websites. A number of library authorities have grouped links to form an information gateway that is available on the web.

> "*We have an A-Z of weblinks under subject categories*", Questionnaire_31.

> "*We provide Internet access via the ………, a specially designed gateway which gathers links to sites together under subject headings, making the Internet easy to navigate. We also have a Young Adult and Children's Gateway which focus on their needs and an Under5s' desktop which links to half a dozen sites just for them*", Questionnaire_116.

> "*………is a selection of approximately 2000 annotated links to websites*
> *put together by library staff to help you find useful information on the*
> *World Wide Web*", Policy_24.

The information gateways are not always on the web and some library authorities provide links on their own intranet gateway that is only accessible from within the library and not available on the open web.

> "*The Library Service does not have its own web site, but is part of the*
> *County Council site. We have some links to web pages on this, but we*
> *also have our own network which has approx 500 selected web sites*",
> Questionnaire_138.

> "*The Gateways mentioned above are only available on library PCs*",
> Questionnaire_116.

In conclusion, it is clear that library authorities are really starting to develop links to web pages in a number of different ways. This will now be investigated further by the next question asked on the questionnaire.

5.4.   Question 3: Record links in other ways

From the questionnaire, thirty-four library authorities recorded links to useful websites in other ways than just putting them onto the library website. One of the most popular ways was to provide links on staff PC's in the 'favourites' list' on Internet Explorer, this was done by eleven library authorities.

> "*We have selections of useful sites on staff PCs that are relevant to the*
> *library section*", Questionnaire_8.

> "*Some libraries use favourites to store links – although we try to*
> *encourage library staff to share then through the website or internet*",
> Questionnaire_92.

Another authority states that they "*keep a list of 80 – 100 useful sites bookmarked on our Enquiry Desk terminals for staff use*", Questionnaire_38. Five library authorities also use the 'favourites' list' on Internet Explorer on their public access machines to provide links for the public.

> "*On our public network machines we bookmark very useful web pages*
> *using favourites*", Questionaire_10.

> "*We have a "favourites" listing which is loaded to the desktop of public library PCs*", Questionnaire_114.

The provision of hard copy lists is still common as a way of providing links by four library authorities for use by their staff as a reference aid on the enquiry desk.

> "*Use this guide as a quick access reference tool to enable you to quickly find answers to customer questions and enquiries*", Policy_24.

Another four of the library authorities have produced or were in the process of producing lists of web links. These are in the form of leaflets that are available to members of the public that are placed next to the public access PC's.

> "*We have printed copies of 'useful websites to get you started' by every PC (including branches). This lists websites by categories e.g. gardening, learn a language, going on holiday*", Questionnaire_96.

> "*We also have a printed list of useful web sites in subject groups for public reference*", Questionnaire_8.

> "*We regularly collect useful URL's and are in the process of making a printed list of these*", Questionnaire_101.

The libraries are also starting to use these printed lists in more advanced ways as they are beginning to use them to promote and encourage people to use the web by making users make suggestions to what should be included on the lists. One of the library authorities who produce a monthly web link leaflet has done this.

> "*Monthly 'What's Cool on the Web' printed sheet which is circulated to libraries (list of websites recommended by and for younger users*", Questionnaire_55.

There is also the encouragement of users to put forward links themselves by emailing them to the library.

> "*There is a facility on the Web page for the public to email us a website they want to recommend*", Case study, (2003).

5.5.   Question 4: Types of links provided

The statistics described in chapter 4 have been used to produce the below summary table, Figure 10. This has taken each of the links that were suggested to the library

authorities and then ranked the links asked according to the percentage of respondents that replied 'yes' they did provide links to this type of website.

5.5.1.   Links provided by library authorities.

Figure 10: Types and Rankings of links provided by library authorities

LINKS	Type of Link	YES	RANKING
Contact details / Opening hours	Library	87.8	1
What's On at the library	Library	79.6	2
Community Information	Library	79.6	2
Clubs and Societies	Local area	75.5	4
Reference Sources	General web	73.5	5
Library Catalogue	Library	69.4	6
Search Engines	General web	69.4	6
Educational Resources	General web	67.3	8
Council Services	Local authority	65.3	9
Local Help Groups	Local area	63.3	10
Local Events	Local area	61.2	11
Councillor contacts/surgeries	Local authority	59.2	12
Places to Visit	Local area	59.2	12
News	General web	59.2	14
Recommend books to Read	Library	51	15
Policy Documents	Local authority	51	15
Agendas / Minutes	Local authority	44.9	17

The table is arranged by descending percentage of 'yes' answers which has then been given a ranked order for each of the types of sites suggested to respondents. The statistics show that the highest three rankings are providing links to general library information such as contact details/opening hours, what is on a library and community information. The fourth ranking is offering links to clubs and societies with the highest category for a 'local area' links. The fifth ranking is to reference resources on the web. All these links have 70 to 80% of respondents providing links to these categories. Therefore these links are seen as standard links provided by library authorities.

There is then another group of link categories that have percentages between 59 to 69%.(rankings 6 to 14). These included the library catalogue, search engines,

educational resources, council services, local help groups, local events, councillor contacts/surgeries, places to visit and news links. Therefore, this group includes three out of the four categories in both the 'Local area' and 'General Web' links. These areas are starting to be provided by library authorities, although these are not standard for all library authorities. Library catalogues (ranked sixth) are having more of a web presence. This is an important development, as this will enable people to search the catalogue from the web from outside the library itself and make it assessable to all.

The final group of links includes; recommend books to read, policy documents, agendas/minutes with 51% or less of libraries providing links to these. It came as a surprise that not more libraries were providing links to sites recommending books to read (ranking joint fifteenth). According to Walkey, (2000) this was a new area of development back in 2000. A number of book recommendation sites do now exist on the web. However, less than half of library authorities are providing links to them. Some of the local library authorities are providing recommended reads, such as one library authority "lists reviews and 'top reads' which are the most borrowed books for a particular month", Questionnaire_31.

The lowest ranking links provided are those to links to other local authority sites other than the library website. An explanation can be given for this, as several local authorities have mentioned that the library site is part of the whole County Council website.

> "*As part of the City Council web site there is a wide range of information about the Council available*", Questionnaire_53.

> "*The Library Service website sits within the structure of the corporate website, which will contain all this information, but there is no reason why specific links should exist from the library pages to pages put up by other Council departments*", Questionnaire_59.

> "*Libraries website is section of City Council website*", _Questionnaire 150.

There are also other ways of linking to the webpages provided by the County Council website rather than from the library website pages.

> "*There are links to the main County Council website on the top banner whenever the user logs on to any pages of the Libraries, Archives and Arts website so Local Authority websites can be reached in this way*", Questionnaire_114.

5.5.2.   Other Links provided

In the questionnaire, the final part of the question was an open-response question so that this would give the authorities the opportunity to list all other links that they have provided. This question was not filled in all that comprehensively as many of the libraries provide a large number of links. Therefore, many of the answers were summarised as library authorities provided too many links for all to be listed individually. It may have been better to ask what main subject areas does the library authority cover other than those listed above.

From the answers that were received, the most popular extra links provided were to National Government sites. This may have been due to the high profile that e-government has at present. Other links mentioned several times were to local history resources and study groups which is one of the more traditional library services that has been started to be moved onto the web. Another area of links provided are to children's websites. This area has been promoted because of the SureStart programme that is taking place in Public Libraries.

The library authorities that are also starting to provide value-added information by providing information that will enable people to search for information and carry out activities on the web for themselves.

> "We provide a guide to the web, including things such as, how to sign up for web based email, how to create your own web site", Questionnaire_155.

5.6.   Question 5: Links were suggested by whom or used what method

5.6.1.   Who suggested the links provided by the library?

It is clear from the responses from the questionnaire that librarians and subject specialists are most frequently selecting the links provided for inclusion on the library website.

> "*Library staff mostly selects the links*", Questionnaire_106.

> "*Input from all library staff*", Questionnaire_53.

It was clear from the questionnaire that 38.8% of library authorities say that the public are able to suggest links to the library of quality websites. One of the ways mentioned was to provide an email facility so members of the public can suggest links to the library.

> "*Anyone can recommend sites, though there is very little made of the email facility to recommend sites by the public*", Questionnaire_24.

> "*We do provide a contact email address on our web pages to encourage suggestions and feedback*", Questionnaire_106.

5.6.2.   Other people or ways used to select links

Library authorities have utilised the following other methods to suggest links. Library authorities are receiving suggestions for links that they should provide from a number of external organisations.

> "*We also receive requests from external organisation's to link to their sites*", Questinnaire_31.

> "*We receive e-mails from people asking to swap links with them*", Questionnaire 92.

> "*Email suggestions come from the site owners themselves*", Questionnaire_106.

> "*Partners have made suggestions of sites we could link to*", Questionnaire_136.

Links to websites have also been made as a direct result of questions that are frequently asked at the enquiry desk.

> "*Some of the links have come from very common public access enquiries e.g. 'how can I get access to email?'*", Questionnaire_155.

> "*Originally the gateway was designed for use by the enquiry staff, to support them when answering enquiries*", (Case Study, 2003).

Sites have been suggested and selected as part of staff training courses.

> "*All staff took part in a supplementary European Computer Driving License (ECDL) training course where websites were assessed and published in leaflet form. All these sites have been put onto the server and can be accessed from any public PC*", Questionnaire_66.

> "*Links found from Courses run for the librarians*", Questionnaire_123.

Two of the authorities have described an interesting development in the selection of quality webpages where they have described that an organisation outside the library has selected the links.

> "*We have a contract with a commercial company who maintain our list of recommended web sites, to which we add sites we have identified for ourselves. They check accuracy and currency of information*", Questionnaire_138.

> "The evaluation and selection of websites to link to from the ……website is not the direct responsibility of the library service, but of the Knowledge Management Unit.. Staff from the library service and any staff within …….County Council can suggest sites which will then be evaluated by the Knowledge Management Unit (KMU)", Questionnaire_31.

5.7.   Question 6: Selection policy or standards

Of the forty-nine library authorities who responded to this question, ten of the authorities (20.4%) had a policy to select good webpages, not all of these were written down in a formal way. Of these authorities three had written policy for selecting quality webpages. Full details of these policies can be found in the Appendix in section 8.3. All of the policies have been edited to remove references to specific library authorities so that they will remain anonymous as promised for the purposes of this research. The policy documents will be referred to and cited as 'Policy_ID number' if they are referred to in the text. There have been two different types of policy received from the library authorities. One type has given general selection guidelines and the other type has given specific criteria in order to select quality websites.

Policy_53 (in Section 8.3.2). This is a set of general guidelines for staff that have been used to select websites for inclusion on the libraries information gateway. A

brief description of what aims and purpose of the gateway is given. A number of criteria are suggested as important and these include, authority and reliability, accuracy and currency, relevance and finally accessibility and usability. For each of the headings more details to what is to be looked for are given as a set of guidelines to aid with selection.

Policy _8 (in Section 8.3.1) This is a list of criteria that has been put forward by the library as part of there website evaluation policy. It has a list of six main criteria that include, purpose and relevance, coverage and scope, authority and reputation, accuracy and bias, currency and maintenance and finally accessibility and ease of use. A number of questions are then outlined to help decide if a website fulfils the requirements of each criteria.

Policy _116 (in Section 8.3.3) The policy has been produced in order to select the best sites on the internet for a subject gateway. A detailed description of the background and principles of the gateway are outlined. A series of website criteria are given in the form of a checklist. They are arranged as a series of questions that must be answered in order to evaluate a website successfully.

From the data collected most of the library authorities have no formal or written policies for selecting quality websites. However, a number of respondents who did not have a formal written policy put a number of comments on the questionnaire. The library authorities have explained that information professionals do use a number of criteria to select quality webpages.

> "*There is no written policy on selecting links but is at the judgement of staff in the Knowledge Management Unit using criteria such as those listed in question 7 below*", Questionnaire_31.

> "*Links are selected by the Libraries Web Team on the basis of their knowledge and expertise*",Questionnaire_114.

Therefore, the expertise and knowledge of the information professional together with a set of un-written criteria are being used to select quality websites.

5.8. Question 7(i): Importance of criteria used to assess quality websites

This question has established how important respondents felt twelve different criteria from the literature were in selecting quality websites. The percentages of respondents who gave the criteria an importance 6 (very important) and 5 (important) have been combined and arranged in descending order to produce a ranking of the twelve criteria. It is clear that the criteria can be split according to percentage into three distinct groups.

Figure 11: Percentage of respondents that gave an importance of 5 or 6 and ranking for each of the selection criteria.

	Criteria	% of respondents giving importance 5 (important) or 6 (very important)	Ranking of Criteria to select a quality website
GROUP 1	Accuracy	81.6	1
	Currency	81.6	1
	Content	77.5	3
	Authority	73.4	4
GROUP 2	User Level	61.3	5
	Access	59.1	6
	Navigation	55.1	7
	Structure	46.9	8
GROUP 3	Kitemarks	24.4	9
	Links out	20.4	10
	Design	16.4	11
	Links in	14.2	12

5.8.1. Group 1 criteria

The top four ranking criteria (Group 1) are accuracy, currency, content and authority. All of these criteria are concerned with the information that has been provided on the website.

Cooke (2001:71) has outlined that "the need to determine accuracy underpins the whole process of evaluation – it is often the reason for looking critically at any

information". However, how you assess accuracy is quite difficult to define as "the ease of assessing accuracy is affected by both the nature of the information and the expertise of the evaluator", Cooke (2001:71).

The currency of information is also very important when trying to establish a quality websites. Therefore, if no date is given, the information on the site should perhaps be taken less seriously, as a good site should be constantly be updated. Bradley (2002) suggests that for a site to be current there should be something new, altered or updated at least monthly. However, the currency judgement will be dependent on the website being considered, for example, as a news website should be constantly updated.

The content and coverage of information on a website is of fundamental importance as it will often be "the principle factor determining the usefulness of any information source is often the subject area covered", (Cooke, 2001:64). Content is also considered important by web designers where Nielsen (2000:160) has described the importance of the content of a website when saying that "content is the focus of the web user's attention. It's the reason they go online, and it's the first thing they look at when they load a new page". If the user cannot find the information they require, they will then try elsewhere.

Cooke (2001) has suggested that the authority of a website is important.

> "A source is generally considered authoritative if it has been written by a
> subject expert, or produced by an institution with recognized knowledge
> and expertise in the field", (Cooke, 2001:69).

The authority of a website is linked to the reputation of a website. A good reputation is created if a source has been successful, useful or valuable in the past or because the author or institution is well know for their knowledge or expertise in a subject area.

All these group 1 criteria are fundamental in the providing links to quality websites. If any of these criteria are not reached, then the information will be considered unreliable and inaccurate. Therefore, the website will be rejected as not being of a high enough quality for inclusion.

5.8.2.   Group 2 criteria

The middle four ranking criteria, (Group 2) are user level, access, navigation and structure. All these criteria are associated with the user or movement around the website.

The intended audience or user level is important as this will determine the detail or depth of coverage require from a website.

> "Accessing whether information is pitched at an appropriate level
> involves reading through the test and attempting to determine whether it
> is either too simplistic or too complex for the audience involved", (Cooke,
> 2001:65).

If the website is considered to be at the wrong level for the user, then it will be pointless selecting it for inclusion on the library website as it will be unusable.

Nielsen (2000:10) has stated that the usability of a web site is very important because if "users can't figure out how to use a website in a minute or so, they conclude that it won't be worth their time. And they leave". This is becoming increasingly important due to the amount of choice available on the web, and people will choose to go to another website. Therefore, access, the navigation and structure of the site will have to be good if people stay on a website long enough to find what they require.

Accessibility involves how easily the information on a site is made available. This will involve a number of factors such as if you have to pay for it, download times or the speed of access to information. Another important issues is do you need to register or be a member to access quality information. Cooke (2001:78) explains how "accessibility might affect your choice of sources" to be selected.

Head (2000: 109) has described navigation as an important issue because she considers "navigation is one of the biggest sources of usability problems on the web". The navigation has to be good and easy to use on a site or as Krug (2000:51) states "people won't use your website if they can't find their way around it". Willliams and Tollett (2000) have described how the navigation should be consistent and therefore be repeated from page to page, in order to provide the user with a feeling of familiarity. This will enable the user of the website to find the information

and answers they are seeking. Therefore as outlined by Krug (2000), navigation tells the user how to use the site, lets the user know what is available and where to find what the user is looking for.

The structure and arrangement of information of a website will determine whether a user can find the information that they seek. Nielsen (2000:198) points out that the organisation of a website is essential because "if the structure is a mess, then no navigation design can rescue it. Poor information architecture will always lead to poor usability".

All the criteria in this group are not to do with the information itself but will help with the locating the information provided on a website. They are not vital in finding the quality information required but can both ease and speed up the time it takes to find the information required from within a website.

5.8.3.   Group 3 criteria

The lowest four ranking criteria, (Group 3) are kitemarks, links out, design and finally links in, with less than 25% of library authorities using them to select quality websites. All but one of the criteria are concerned with recommendations or recognition by others.

Kitemarks are awarded when certain standards or requirements have been reached, that have been set by an external organisation. Kitemarks are designed to show third-party approval of a website if a set of standards are reached by a website. Library authorities are however not really using kitemarks to selected quality links to websites. Bradley (2002) describes how kitemarks and awards should be taken with caution, as there are no official internet bodies, and therefore any awards offered are from individuals or companies. It is often quite difficult to find out exactly what the criteria are for winning the various awards.

A new development in the web citation searching is that "researchers have been using citation searching as a method for finding potential high-quality papers for a number of years", (Cooke, 2001:23). Cooke (2001) explains that at the end of each published journal article there is a list of other articles that have been referenced by the article. With the increasing number of electronic databases of articles available, it is now possible to search one of these databases to find out the number of times a particular article has been cited elsewhere.

> "The theory is that the more times a paper has been cited by other
> authors, the higher its quality", (Cooke, 2001:24).

However, there are limitations to this method as the article in question maybe cited because the article is for example highly controversial.

There are now a number of ways of searching the web in this way, by using the hyperlinks on the web to connect different documents. Therefore, if many links are made to a particular site, this could be seen as adding to the credibility of a site as other people are recognising it. This is clearly a new development within the web community and so many library authorities have not taken it up currently.

One of the surprise results in the criteria ranking is that of design. This may be due to the fact that 38.8% respondents gave it an importance of four and so this has not been used in the rankings. Hence design has been given a lower ranking. According to the web literature, design is considered as a very important issue. Bradley (2002) describes how it is difficult to define what makes good design, as design is entirely down to the individual's personal choice. However if an organization cares about their site, they should ensure that the site can be viewed well in any browser in any screen resolution.

In the literature, it is suggested that a site should be kept simple and uncluttered as for example Krug (2000:11) comes up with the idea when designing for the web of, "don't make me think". Krug (2000:45) then suggests that many sites are too cluttered and his suggestion is to "get rid of half of the words on each page, then get rid of half of what's left". Nielsen (2000) suggests that when designing websites, simpler designs with few graphics are best. Having faster loading times is far more important than complex designs. These ideas are backed up by Head (2000) who describes that graphics should be kept to a minimum and appear only when they add valuable meaning to the content on the screen.

Graphics and the design of a website are obviously not vital if the information can still be assessed. Library professionals would not use graphics as a first choice of selecting a site. Nevertheless, it should be remembered that each of the criteria should not be considered in isolation. Therefore, design could be seen as being used to decide between sites, that have many of the higher criteria in group 1 and group 2 on the list.

The use of multiple criteria to assess the quality of websites can be seen from the responses to the questionnaires and the comments made. One of the library authorities uses all of the top five ranking criteria to select quality websites.

> "*Staff are expected to assess a site on its quality, content, authority and currency, but in particular to its perceived usefulness for a public library audience*", Questionnaire_106.

5.9.   Question 7(ii): Criteria used by libraries to assess quality webpages

The results from the questionnaire show that the library authorities are using all of the criteria suggested to select links. It is clear from the results in the summary tables of Figure 9, and below in Figure 12, that the library authority are using the group 1 criteria of accuracy, currency, authority and content, for the selection of quality websites. The library authorities are then using the group 2 criteria of user level, navigation, accessibility and structure as a refining selection process of website quality. The final set of group 3 criteria of kitemarks, design, links out, and links in are being used to further refine the selection process.

5.9.1.   Comparison of the criteria thought to be important and the criteria used to select quality websites.

It has been noted, that the criteria that library authorities consider to be of importance 5 or 6 and the criteria that the libraries are actually using to selecting quality websites are very alike. The selecting criteria are split into three distinct groups (see Figure 12 below). When comparing the two different rankings the same four criteria appear in each group. The group ranking orders are very similar with authority and content being reversed with each other. Also design and links out are reversed with each other in the group ranking order.

Figure 12: Comparing the ranking of criteria used by libraries to select a good website and ranking of criteria having an importance of 5 or 6.

	Selection Criteria	Criteria used by libraries to select quality websites (%)	Ranking of criteria used to select quality pages	% of respondents giving importance of 5 or 6	Ranking of criteria with importance of 5 or 6
GROUP 1	**Accuracy**	75.5	1	81.6	1
	Currency	75.5	1	81.6	1
	Authority	73.5	3	73.4	4
	Content	73.5	3	77.5	3
GROUP 2	**User Level**	69.4	5	61.3	5
	Navigation	57.1	6	55.1	7
	Accessibility	57.1	6	59.1	6
	Structure	53.1	8	46.9	8
GROUP 3	**Kitemarks**	46.9	9	24.4	9
	Design	40.8	10	16.4	11
	Links out	28.6	11	20.4	10
	Links in	26.5	12	14.2	12

5.10.   Summary

This chapter has discussed; the statistics found, the extra comments obtained from the questionnaire, the case study and the policies received from local authorities, in the light of the literature. The chapter has aimed to draw together the information and research obtained in a number of themed discussions which are based on the structure of the questionnaire.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1. Introduction

This final chapter will attempt to bring together the findings of the research by identifying and summarising the key findings from the discussion, in order to present conclusions. Criteria suggested in the literature and the criteria used by library authorities will be outlined. Recommendations for good practice will be made in the light of the conclusions made. The limitations of the research will be discussed. Then recommendations for further research in the area of selecting quality websites will be given.

6.2. Conclusions and Recommendations

What criteria and standards have been but forward in the literature and on the web to determine a good quality website?

A number of criteria have been put forward in the literature to determine a good quality website. Most noticeably those of Cooke (2001:178-193) who sets out a series of website evaluation checklists with the following criteria headings.

- Identifying the purpose of a source
- Assessing coverage
- Assessing authority and reputation
- Assessing accuracy
- Assessing the currency and maintenance of a source
- Considering the accessibility of a source
- Evaluating the presentation and arrangements of information
- Assessing how easy a source is to use
- Making a comparison with other sources
- Assessing the overall quality of a source

Cooke, (2001) has suggested that all the criteria should be used in determining a quality website. However, there are no real suggestions to the relative importance of the each of the criteria listed above in selecting a quality website.

The Web designer community have also put forward a number of criteria as to what makes a well-designed quality website. Recommendations have been put forward by a number of web designers and these include (Rosenfeld and Morville, (1998), Head, (2000), Krug, (2000), Nielsen, (2000 and 2002) and Williams and Tollett, (2000)). It is clear that the web designers are more concerned with the actual design and layout of a website, in particular that of the homepage. Other criteria mentioned include the audience that a site is intended for, navigation, access and structure of a site rather than the quality of the information on the website itself.

What criteria and standards are Library Authorities currently using to determine good quality websites?

It is clear that the library authorities are in agreement with the literature on the criteria that should be used to assess the quality of a website. However, library professionals believe that a number of the criteria are more important in determining the quality of websites as shown in Figure 13 below.

Figure 13: Percentage of respondents that gave an importance of 5 or 6 for each of the criteria suggested to assess a website.
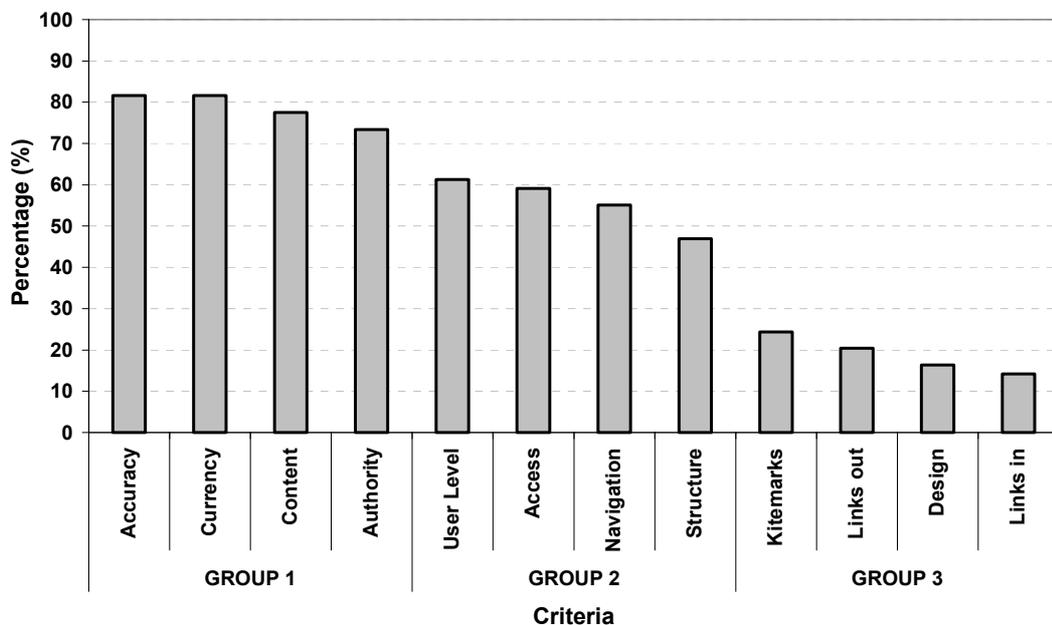
Library professionals agree that the Group 1 criteria of accuracy, currency, content and authority are fundamentally important when selecting a quality website. If a website fails to meet one of these criteria then it will be determined to being not of a high enough quality and will therefore be considered unsuitable and be rejected.

It has also been shown in Figure 12 of the discussion section that the criteria that information professionals feel are important are also the criteria that they are using to select quality websites.

How might library authorities use these initiatives, criteria and standards to benefit from them and promote good practice within the field?

- The twelve criteria outlined in this research should form the basis for a list of criteria that should be used to select quality websites.
- The group 1 criteria (information provided) are of key importance in determining that a website is of a high enough quality. All these criteria will need to be of a suitable standard otherwise a website will be considered of unsuitable quality and be rejected.
- If all the group 1 criteria are met, then group 2 criteria (user and movement) can be used to differentiate between the websites in order to further rank the quality of websites.
- The group 3 criteria are concerned with recognition and design and can be used to further rank the quality of a website after group 1 and group 2 criteria analysis.
- The results of looking at all of the criteria can then be assessed and perhaps given a points score, to determine if a website has a high enough score to be considered as a quality website.
- Each of the criteria need to be defined according to the type of resource that is being assessed. For assessing, whether a website has a suitable currency (in group 1) will depend on the type of website being evaluated. For some types of information, for example an electronic book, the text will always remain the same and therefore currency is irrelevant. However currency would be extremely important in a news site were the regularity of data update is crucial.

6.3.   Provisos and limitations of the study

One of the limitations of the research it all the analysis has only taken place from library authorities who responded to the questionnaire. This could have brought bias into the results, as the respondents who replied to the questionnaire were most often the libraries authorities who did provide links. Only a few questionnaires were received from libraries who did not select links and none of these authorities were prepared to be contacted to take part in the case study interview.

6.4.   Recommended areas for further research

An extension to this study would be to get feedback on the criteria ranking that has been produced from this study. This could be done by sending out a second email questionnaire to the library authorities to establish their views on the ranking findings and recommendations of this research. It could also investigate what are the library authorities definitions of each of the criteria and methods or questions asked to determine whether a website meets each of the criteria.

There have been suggestions from the literature that web designers or public library users will have different criteria they consider important in selecting quality webpages. Website designers appear to consider criteria in group 2 and design in group 3 to be of importance. Further investigation and research is needed to establish if the criteria consider important by both website designers and public library users differ from those identified by the information professional.

6.5.   Summary

This final chapter has summarized the findings of the research, in order draw a number of conclusions from the results discussion chapter and recommendations for good practice have been put forward in order to fulfil the aims and objectives of the project. This has been done while acknowledging the limitations of the research carried. Recommendations for further research needed in the area of selecting quality websites have been put forward.

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8.   Appendices

8.1.   Copy of questionnaire sent to Library Authorities

My name is **Rebecca Hallam** and I am currently studying for a MA in Librarianship at the University of Sheffield. For my dissertation, I am investigating the standards that are being used to assess the quality of websites. Part of this research involves the attached questionnaire. I would be grateful if you could spare a few minutes to answer the following questions.

All responses to this questionnaire will be kept strictly confidential, and no answers will be attributed to any individual. If you have any queries then do not hesitate to contact me.

Please email the completed questionnaire to lip02rch@sheffield.ac.uk **or** return a paper copy to **Rebecca Hallam, Department of Information Studies, Regent Court, 211, Portobello Street, Sheffield, S1 4DP, by Monday 7th July.**

SECTION A

1. Does your library have internet access for public use?	**YES**	
	NO	

2. Does your library select useful web pages and links (URL's) for your own website?	**YES**	
	NO	

3. Does the library record useful web pages and links (URL's) in any other way?	**YES**	
	NO	

If YES, please give details in this box.

If you answered NO to both Questions 2 and 3 in SECTION A, then please only complete <u>Question 7i and Question 8</u> in SECTION C below.

SECTION B

4. What type of webpages/sites do you provide links to? (Please put **X** next to **all** that apply)		
	LINKS TO INFORMATION PROVIDED BY THE LIBRARY	
	Contact details / Opening hours	
	What's On at the library	
	Library Catalogue	
	Recommend books to Read	
	Community Information	
	LINKS TO INFORMATION PROVIDED BY LOCAL AUTHORITY	
	Councillor contacts / Surgeries	
	Council Services	
	Agendas / Minutes	
	Policy Documents	
	LINKS TO LOCAL AREA SITES	
	Places to Visit	
	Local Events	
	Clubs and Societies	
	Local Help Groups	
	LINKS TO GENERAL WEB RESOURCES	
	News	
	Search Engines	
	Educational Resources	
	Reference Sources	

Please specify any other links provided:

5. **Who suggested the links provided by the library** (Please put **X** next to **all** that apply)	**Library Authority**	
	Librarian	
	Subject Specialist	
	General Public	
	Questionnaire	
	Suggestion Box	
	Search Engine	

Please list any other people or ways used to select links in this box:

| 6. **Does your library have a policy or standards to select good webpages?** | **YES** | |
| | **NO** | |

If YES, would it be possible to send details of this policy.

Please send to lip02rch@sheffield.ac.uk or Rebecca Hallam, Department of Information Studies, Regent Court, 211, Portobello Street, Sheffield, S1 4DP.

Please continue to SECTION C.

SECTION C

> 7. **(i) Please rate <u>how important</u> you believe each of these criteria are in making a good website.**
> *Using the scale below, please give a rating in each box of column (a)*
>
> **Very important**   6   5   4   3   2   1   **Not at all important**

> 7. **(ii) Which of the following criteria does the library use in selecting a good website?** (Please put **X** in column **(b)** next to <u>**all**</u> that apply)

	(a)	(b)		(a)	(b)
How current the site is			Navigation		
Design/ Graphics			Accessibility		
Authority or reputation of site			Any kitemarks or recommendations		
Content and coverage of information			At correct level for users or intended audience		
Quality and accuracy of information			Links from other sites		
Structure and order of information			Links to other sites		

Please list any other criteria used to select websites in this box:

8. **I would like to interview respondents in a sample of authorities. Would you be willing for me to telephone you at a later date?**	**YES**	
	NO	

If yes, please give your name and contact details in this box:

Please email the completed questionnaire to **lip02rch@sheffield.ac.uk**
If this is not possible then please return to Rebecca Hallam, Department of Information Studies, Regent Court, 211, Portobello Street, Sheffield, S1 4DP.

Thank-you for participating in this questionnaire

8.2.   Outline of interview questions asked in case study

My name is Rebecca Hallam and I am a postgraduate student at the University of Sheffield. As part of my Masters in Librarianship then I am carrying out some research into kitemarking and the criteria used to select quality webpages and links. I would like to ask you some questions about the links you provide on your website.

I would like to request your permission to tape record this interview for the purpose of analysis. All responses will be treated as confidential, and no individuals or authority will be identified in the final report unless permission is given.

First, I would like to ask you a few background questions.
- Can you tell me what your job title is and then outline some of the key responsibilities of your job within the library?
- Specifically what responsibilities or role do you play in providing the Weblinks lists?

Now can we move on consider the Weblinks lists that you provide.
- How long has the library being providing URL links for web-resources?
- Have these always been available to the public?
- Have these links always been provided in the Weblinks list format?
- If no, how was it done before?
- Can you give me a brief description of the Weblinks facilities and structure?
- Who do you feel is the main audience for the Weblinks? *Novice/advanced public/staff.*
- How well do you consider the facility of Weblinks to be used?
- *Statistics?*

It was mentioned in the literature that you sent me "that each website was assessed using similar criteria to those used to assess book purchases.
- Can you outline, what are the criteria that are used to select a link? *Which of them are most important in the selection process?*
- Are there any criteria used to determine that a link is unsuitable for inclusion on Weblinks?

- Who suggested or how were these criteria determined?
- Do you use any criteria suggested by any other organisations from outside the library?
- Do you use Kitemarking or other recommendations made by other organisations /bodies to determine links?
- Are any of these criteria formally written down in the form of guidelines or a policy used to determine links?

We shall now move onto the links themselves

- Who and how are links suggested & found for inclusion?
- Is there a way that members of the public can suggest links?
- What sources or methods do you use to look for suitable links for inclusion?
- How is the content/coverage of the subject lists decided?
- How are the links classified or grouped together?
- If a link covers, a number of different areas are they included in several different lists?
- How do you keep the links in Weblinks up-to-date and current? *If yes, Is there a formal update procedure in place? how often is this done? By whom?*
- In what ways do you think that Weblinks could be improved or further developed in the future?
- How do you see these Weblinks lists fitting in with National Initiatives or Government Guidelines?
- Do you have further comments that you would like to add about Weblinks that I have not covered in this interview?

I will now draw this interview to a close by saying, thank you for your time and cooperation in taking part in this interview as part of my dissertation study.

8.3.   Library Authority Selection Policies

8.3.1.   POLICY_8

Libraries and Information Service Draft copy of web site evaluation policy

1. **Purpose & Relevance:**
   - Does the web site have state its purpose and aims or is it obvious who the intended audience is?

2. **Coverage & Scope:**
   - What subject areas are covered and what range of information is presented?
   - Is the information complete and how detailed is it?
   - Is the source unique?
   - Does it have hyperlinks to related web sites?

3. **Authority & Reputation:**
   - What does the URL tell us the organisation or person behind the site?
   - Are any independent reviews available for the site?
   - Which other sites have hyperlinks pointing to it?

4. **Accuracy & Bias:**
   - Is the information accurate?
   - Is the presentation accurate (spelling, grammar, typos)?
   - Does it cite its sources of information?
   - Is the site biased?

5. **Currency & Maintenance:**
   - Does it have a date/time of publication and is it up-to-date?
   - Does it have a contact for your comments about the site?
   - Are any pages still under construction?

6. **Accessibility & Ease of Use:**
   - Is it quick to down load?
   - Is it a UK based site or have a UK mirror site?
   - Is any additional software or hardware required to view the site?
   - Does it require the viewer to log-in or submit a password?
   - Is there a cost to view the site?
   - What languages is the site available in?
   - Is it written in plain English?
   - Is it suitable for people with sight impairment?
   - Is it printer friendly?
   - Are any images or animations a reasonable size and do they have good alt tags?
   - Is the site layout clear and logical?
   - Does it have a sitemap or contents list?
   - Does it have a search or help facility?
   - How many clicks are needed to get to the information?
   - Are the pages short or do you need to scroll down?
   - Does it use frames?
   - Are there advertisements or pop-ups?
   - Does it give contact details for email, telephone, fax and post

8.3.2.   POLICY_53

⇨**About the Gateway**

| The purpose of the *Policy_53* Libraries Gateway to Websites is to provide a 'quick reference' set of links to useful and informative Internet sites for the customers and staff of the library service. It has been developed and is maintained by staff in *Policy_53* Libraries - information professionals who work with the public and with the Internet on a daily basis.

Coverage and structure of the Gateway:

As a public library service, we have tried to cover a full range of information topics. At the same time, the aim of the Gateway is to be a usable information tool. For this reason, we endeavour to keep it manageably small. We aim to keep the number of topics limited while comprehensive, and provide key links and links to subject gateways rather than linking to a large number of sites on any single topic.

To help people to make quick choices about what to use, and to highlight aspects of the sites that may be beyond expectations, we give descriptive annotations for the vast majority of sites listed.

A clearer picture of the organisational structure of the Gateway may be found by looking at the Expanded category list and the A-Z list of subcategories.

How we choose sites for inclusion

The *Policy_53* Gateway to Websites is designed primarily as an information tool for the customers (and staff) of *Policy_53* Public Libraries. The resources have been selected by information specialists using the following criteria:

- **Authority and reliability:**
  Where possible, we recommend sites that come from a known and authoritative source. Where such an 'official' source is not available, we carefully consider the credentials of any site included.
- **Accuracy and currency:**
  We look for evidence that sites we include are accurate and regularly maintained. However, we acknowledge that frequent updating is more important in some subject areas than others.
- **Relevance:**
  Resources are included only if they contain substantive information of relevance to *Policy_53* Library customers. For this reason we try to highlight good quality sites with a local focus (Policy_53 local area) where we can. As a public service we cannot limit our audience to a particular group (by age, ability or other criteria) so we try to provide access to sites that are of broad appeal. There are academic sites and sites for children included, but the wider the potential audience the more likely we are to include a site.
- **Accessibility and usability:**
  It is important to us that sites are accessible and relatively easy to use. For this reason we tend to exclude sites that require registration or subscription, as well as sites whose information content is obscured or compromised by advertising or 'pop-up' boxes, unless there is no alternative. This also applies to the language used and technical features (eg: if the site requires plug-ins or is inaccessible using disability technology).

8.3.3.   POLICY_116

Policy_116 **Libraries and Information Service - Information Direct Subject Gateways**

Background:
The Internet is a huge resource. Librarians need to use their information management and selection skills to help their users find the best sites on the Internet for their needs. There is much discussion in the profession about criteria for selecting Internet resources, particularly for children, although many of the criteria we already use for other resources are applicable to web sites. There are no definitive lists but the main areas are content, relevance (for users), accessibility, usability, appropriateness (is this the best format for the information) and provenance (who's information is it).

Useful sources of information and discussion on this topic (in print and on the Internet):
Re:source: http://www.resource.gov.uk/
Library Association: http://www.la-hq.org.uk/
SOCTIM – Society of Information Technology Managers: www.soctim.gov.uk
UKOLN: http://www.ukoln.ac.uk/
BECTA: www.becta.org.uk
DfES: http://safety.ngfl.gov.uk/schools/

Principles:
- The Gateways promote social inclusion and access for all by providing free, mediated access to the Internet in a simple way focussing on high demand subject areas
- Librarians' specialist knowledge is utilised to ensure sites are chosen for their quality, accessibility and usefulness
- Sites of particular interest to citizens, community groups and socially excluded people of all ages are highlighted
- The Gateways are "mainstreamed" and included in all stock planning and work – purchasing, maintenance and development
- The Gateways are kept as a value added resources – not simply the Internet recreated
- The Subject Gateway provides access to sites for all adults to support their information, educational, cultural and leisure needs
- The Young Adult Gateway provides access to sites for of interest to 12 – 15s for leisure, reading and study
- The Children's Gateway provides access to sites of interest to Under 12s for fun, reading and homework

Maintaining the Gateways
- Sites are assessed by librarians using their stock content guidelines and the Website Criteria Checklist. The Website Criteria Checklist (below) provides a list of questions to be considered when assessing a website.
- All staff are encouraged to suggest improvements and new sites and to report broken links.
- Members of the public can make suggestions at any time.
- Only our PCs show the Gateways – they are not available on the public Internet.

Design
- The Subject Heading approach makes web information easily accessible for all users especially beginners
- The A-Z of subject lists is a feature to provide an alternative navigation aid for the headings
- It is a self help tool for customers to find the information they need as simply as possible
- It is recommended that subject lists contain no more than 10 links
- It is recommended that the Main List has no more than 20 links

Feedback & Review
- Comments and suggestions for the Gateways are recorded using the Comments Book and existing monitoring procedures

WEBSITE CRITERIA CHECKLIST

- What is the purpose of the site?
- Who is the site aimed at?
- Who maintains / runs the site & what is their credibility?
- Is the site objective - with content rather than simply promotional?
- Does the site reflect the educational, information and leisure requirements of *policy_116* children?
- Does the site meet the educational, information and leisure needs of *Policy_116* citizens?
- Does the site support a particular accessibility need?
- When was it last updated?
- Is it well maintained overall?
- Are there external links? Are they current and relevant?
- Is the site clear and easy to use?
- Is it attractive and inviting?
- Does the site provide information that is difficult to find in other formats / that is particularly suited to online delivery?
- Do the pages load quickly and easily?
- Is the layout, language and design appropriate to the target audience?
- Are specific plug-ins required to access it?
- Does the site have any affiliation with a recognised web safety body?
- Does it have broad enough appeal to justify its place on the Gateway?