

**A Study of Library Staff Attitudes to IT and the Provision of Public
Access to IT and the People's Network in Public Libraries**

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Owen Coxall

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Abstract

IT resources, and particularly the internet, have now become arguably essential in public libraries. Anecdotal evidence would suggest that there is still some resistance and negative views around the use of IT, mostly in terms of providing public access.

This study will examine attitudes of library staff towards IT within libraries, and public access to IT including the Peoples Network. IT has been integrated into library services for a number of years, in the form of management systems, computerized catalogues, and administrative uses such as email.

The People's Network has so far been successful in providing public access to IT. However, there are now issues surrounding its future, including funding, replacement of hardware and software, and staff training.

The study is based around an inductive approach. The data and case studies will be collected and examined, and conclusions drawn from this. The main content of the study relates to the thoughts of the staff on how IT is incorporated into the library. The methods of investigation will involve a survey by questionnaire and individual interviews.

There is still an element of unease with regards to the presence of public access to IT within the library. However this is less to do with its role as a resource, and perhaps more related to the way it is integrated and implemented within the library service, and in some cases a lack of confidence and skills within individual members of staff.

There was little mention of the use of IT in general, for example the library management system, computerised catalogues, or internal communication by email. These uses of IT appear to be integrated into the daily routine of work and accepted.

The People's Network has enjoyed a honeymoon period, but now faces a more uncertain future. There is still some uncertainty about the role and position of IT in libraries, both amongst users and staff.

However in general, the staff attitudes displayed in the surveys towards the People's Network and IT provision in public libraries was positive. The importance of these resources in contributing to the community was recognised, and although there is an element of caution, the increased emphasis on IT in the future is welcomed.

Table of Contents	Page Number
Abstract	2
Chapter One – Introduction	6
1.1 Aims and Objectives	6
1.2 Summary	6
Chapter Two – Methodology	8
2.1 Introduction	8
2.2 Research Approach	8
2.3 Methods of Data Collection	9
2.3.1 Questionnaire Survey	9
2.3.2 Library Staff Interviews	9
2.4 Sample Size	10
2.5 Data Analysis	10
2.6 Ethical Considerations	11
2.7 Research Limitations	12
2.8 Summary	12
Chapter Three - Background Information and Review of Literature	13
3.1 Introduction	13
3.2 An Information Society and Economy	13
3.3 Public Access to IT and the Internet in Libraries	13
3.4 Negative Attitudes	15
3.5 Positive Attitudes	17
3.6 Other Research	18
3.7 Summary	19
Chapter Four – Questionnaire Survey	20
4.1 Introduction	20
4.2 Age, Sex, and Position - Results and Analysis	20
4.3 Perceptions of the People’s Network and Computers in the Library – Results and Analysis	21
4.4 Perceptions of Uses - Results and Analysis	24

4.5 Perceptions of Training - Results and Analysis	25
4.6 Other Comments – Results and Analysis	27
4.7 Summary of Results	31
4.7.1 Age, Sex, and Position	31
4.7.2 Perceptions of the People’s Network and Computers in the Library	31
4.7.3 Perceptions of Uses	31
4.7.4 Perceptions of Training	31
4.7.5 Other Comments	31
4.8 Overall Summary	32
Chapter Five – Interview Survey	33
5.1 Introduction	33
5.2 Background Information for Branches Chosen	33
5.3 The People’s Network, Internet Access, and IT in Libraries – Comments and Analysis	34
5.4 Perceptions of Usage and Users of IT in Libraries – Comments and Analysis	37
5.5 Perception of Training Needs - Comments and Analysis	41
5.6 The Future of IT and the People’s Network within Public Libraries – Comments and Analysis	45
5.7 Summary of Findings	47
5.7.1 The People’s Network, Internet Access, and IT in Libraries	47
5.7.2 Perceptions of Usage and Users of IT in Libraries	48
5.7.3 Perception of Training Needs	48
5.7.4 The Future of IT and the People’s Network within Public Libraries	49
5.8 Overall Summary	49
Chapter Six – Evaluation and Recommendations for Future Study	50
6.1 Evaluation of the Study	50
6.2 Recommendations for Further Study	50
Chapter Seven – Conclusion	52
7.1 Introduction	52

7.2 Questionnaire and Interview Surveys	52
7.2.1 Perceptions of the People’s Network and Computers in the Library	52
7.2.2 Perceptions of Usage and Users of IT in Libraries	53
7.2.3 Perceptions of Training	53
7.2.4 The Future of IT and the People’s Network within Public Libraries	54
7.3 Comparison to Other Studies	54
7.4 Recommendations for Addressing Negative Attitudes	56
7.4.1 Separate machines for internet and offline services, with different time limits	57
7.4.2 Automatic/central booking system	57
7.4.3 Individual help	57
7.4.4 Training	57
7.4.5 Partnerships	57
7.4.6 Measures of Impact	58
7.5 Overall Conclusions	58
7.6 Summary	59
Bibliography	60
Appendix A – Questionnaire Survey	65
Appendix B – Questionnaire Section 2 Results	68
Appendix C - Questionnaire Comments	70
Appendix D – Interview Schedule	76

Chapter One - Introduction

1.1 Aims and Objectives

The objective of the study is to examine the attitudes of public library staff towards IT within public libraries, and in particular public access to this. It then aims to propose recommendations to improve acceptance and enthusiasm towards IT and the People's Network where this is needed.

The aims can be defined as:

1. Who does the staff feel are using the public access PCs?
2. What do they perceive users to be using it for?
3. Are attitudes to IT in general positive or negative?
4. Are attitudes to public access to IT positive or negative?
5. Are negative attitudes a result of the way access is managed or due to the presence of this resource in a library environment?
6. Are there any training issues identified by the staff.
7. Do these attitudes vary between employee level and geographical locations?
8. Are there any recommendations to address these issues?

These aims were constantly referred to as the study was conducted. The nature of the study meant that new approaches and views developed. Powell & Connaway (2004) identify this circular process, and how it can lead to new ideas or disprove existing ones. This is explored more fully in the Methodology, Chapter Two.

Personal experience of employment in public libraries provided the initial inspiration for this study. A review of the literature revealed similar studies, with similar aims and outcomes to those intended for this work.

Technology such as IT is rapidly changing, and continuing to keep pace is a challenge.

Therefore, the expectations of the public in terms of the facilities and support available may have changed since these previous studies. This study also aims to examine whether this has increased pressure and negative views amongst the staff surveyed.

1.2 Summary

IT resources, and particularly the internet, have now become arguably essential in public libraries. Anecdotal evidence would suggest that there is still some resistance and negative views around the use of IT, mostly in terms of providing public access.

This study will approach the subject openly, that is it will examine the attitudes of the staff, where possible without preconceptions. The results will then be analysed in relation to the aims outlined above. It is hoped that the findings and conclusions will make a useful contribution to the discussion of these issues.

Chapter Two – Methodology

2.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the approach and methods used in the study to achieve the aims and objectives outlined in Chapter One.

This is a particularly important stage, as planning of the methods used will determine the outcome of the study (Powell & Connaway 2004). Careful consideration of the issues involved can address problems of bias, help guarantee that the data is significant, and ensure that the findings are of value.

2.2 Research Approach

The study is based around an inductive approach. The data and case studies will be collected and examined, and conclusions drawn from this. As the basis for the study comes from personal experience, a deductive approach was considered. The main content of the study relates to the thoughts of the staff on how IT is incorporated into the library. Differences in the way that this is managed between authorities and also between individual perceptions would raise questions as to the validity of testing a hypothesis based on another library authority.

The study is not setting out to test a hypothesis. It is more concerned with examining the research question and seeing if there are any trends in this area. Personal experience of working in a library service, and anecdotal evidence from others, suggests that there is a negative attitude towards the provision of internet access in public libraries. However, as stated, the research is not intended to examine this as a hypothesis. For this study to have any value objectivity and open-mindedness (Hart 1998) are vital to maintain.

The approach can be said to be based in grounded theory; it is not predictive and not testing a determined hypothesis. This is also a good approach, as “grounded theories are likely to reflect the complexity of that which is studied rather than oversimplifying it” (Powell & Connaway 2004:202). This is an important consideration as the area is both complex and to a certain amount, emotive.

Grounded theory has been described as “the systematic generation of theory from data acquired by a rigorous research method” (Glaser 1998:2). There is much literature on this area, and a brief review of this has been used as a background to inform this work.

2.3 Methods of Data Collection

The methods of investigation will involve a survey by questionnaire and individual interviews. The survey approach is “generally considered to be more appropriate for studying personal factors” (Powell & Connaway 2004:84).

2.3.1 Questionnaire Survey

The questionnaires in this study will be used to obtain information at a broad level in Sheffield Library Service. This questionnaire was also intended to be distributed to other library authorities. However, a poor initial response and constraints of time and a limited word count for the study meant that this was omitted.

The use of a questionnaire ensures that the questions are standardised and that the respondents have the opportunity to consider their replies. The questionnaire was distributed by e-mail through the library service. A digitised format was chosen for easier collection of results. However, the majority were printed and returned as hard copies by post.

Fowler (1995) conducts an extensive discussion of questionnaire design. This was used to inform the construction of the survey. Issues of bias and leading questions should be addressed in the questionnaire design. Another consideration is the potential for a poor response rate. To avoid this, the questionnaire was designed to be as short and unambiguous as possible.

Another important stage was a pre-test, consisting of asking previous colleagues to examine a draft version. The questionnaire was then sent to the management of case study authority for pre-approval. Despite this, there were some issues with the interpretation of questions; these are addressed in Chapter Six.

2.3.2 Library Staff Interviews

Interviews with various members of staff were also used. Their advantage over questionnaires is that they allow deviation from the script to follow unexpected responses. They also allow more detailed responses than those resulting from the questionnaire.

Mason (2002), and Flick (2006), amongst others, describe the processes involved in interview design. It is important to consider bias or leading questions at this point, not only in the design of the interview script but also to avoid the interviewer influencing the

interviewee when carrying out the interview. It was decided upon adopting a combination of informal conversational interview and standardised open-ended interview, as suggested by Hughes (2002). The interview schedule used is included in Appendix D.

Eight interviews were conducted, four of them individually, with the others taking the form of two people being interviewed simultaneously. There is some discussion of using multiple interviewees as a form of focus group (Powell & Connaway 2004), however in these interviews it was not felt to produce significantly different opinions to those expressed in the individual interviews.

With one exception, the interviews were tape recorded. This was not possible in one situation. The interviewees appeared to be happy to be recorded, and taping aided the interview process and transcription greatly when compared to and writing the notes in the previously mentioned case.

2.4 Sample Size

The first part of the study focussed on Sheffield Library Service as a whole. Secondly, a more detailed study of three individual branches representing different socio-economic areas of Sheffield was undertaken. These branches are outlined in Chapter Five.

It was anticipated that the scope of the study would be expanded to include further examination of attitudes of staff in some of the authorities where branch closures are imminent along with others where there is no (current) evidence of this, and comparing these to the responses of those in Sheffield. This would have improved triangulation of results, but did not prove possible.

However, by combining the interview and questionnaire survey, some triangulation was possible. This lent the results more reliability, an important consideration as the sample size was relatively small. The extent to which the sample can be claimed to be fully representative is debateable, as there were no responses from senior management. However, the views expressed can claim to be indicative of the frontline staff.

2.5 Data Analysis

It was anticipated that the data generated could be analysed quantitatively. This did not turn out to be the case. However the results could be analysed qualitatively, allowing the general trends to be revealed. The main reason for the lack of quantitative analysis was the nature of

the data generated; it was concerned with feelings and thoughts. It is difficult to quantify this data to allow meaningful statistical analysis of much more than mean averages.

A Likert scale, as follows, was used for the questionnaire Section 2. The statements were rated from 1-5, with the figures in brackets the code used for tabulating the results.

1 strongly agree (2),

2 agree (1),

3 uncertain (0),

4 disagree (-1),

5 strongly disagree (-2).

The use of an odd numbered scale as opposed to an even one may give neutral or uncertain responses, but avoids forcing a positive or negative response where this is not felt (Lewin 2005).

2.6 Ethical Considerations

There were important ethical considerations at each of stage of the study design. Broad ethical issues such as bias can be addressed through careful planning of the survey methods (Powell & Connaway 2004).

The importance of addressing issues of confidentiality is identified by Flick (2006). There is the potential for interviews and questionnaires to produce responses which participants would not want their employers to be able to attribute to them. This has been the approach of this study; names have not been attributed to individuals, with codes being used to distinguish them from each other.

The use of an information sheet and consent form before the interviews and questionnaires were carried out provided the opportunity for interviewees/respondents to reflect on what they were being asked to do, and whether they agreed to take part.

2.7 Research Limitations

There are a number of limitations to this study, which were considered in the planning stages.

Firstly is the consideration of the possibility of extreme responses. Powell & Connaway state that “persons who are highly opinionated regarding the subject of a questionnaire are more likely than others to complete and return it” (2004:126). This is especially true of the section of the questionnaire for other comments. This does not mean that the data collected will not be representative, but it should be taken into account in the analysis stages.

A similar consideration is that of projective answers. This is where the reply of an individual when asked for their thoughts on the feelings of their colleagues may actually reveal or project their own ideas. Careful analysis of the results and comparison to other findings may address this.

One of the main issues is avoiding bias and pre-conceptions. This is not always easy, as this may happen subconsciously. Myrdal illustrates the danger of this:

“As social scientists we are deceiving ourselves if we naively believe that we are not as human as the people around us and that we do not tend to aim opportunistically for conclusions that fit prejudices markedly similar to those of other people in our society” (1983: 43)

Perhaps the most important limit, and it is also unavoidable, is the time and word limits that are (necessarily) imposed due to the nature of the study. This is partially addressed in Chapter Seven where suggestions for further study are suggested.

2.8 Summary

Through thorough planning and continual reassessment, it is hoped that this study will produce a useful, interesting, and hopefully revealing body of work. It has been stated that research design can “feel like a mess” (Barbour & Schostak 2005:43). This is certainly true, but it is an essential part of any scholarly work.

Chapter Three - Background Information and Review of Literature

3.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the background of IT use and its effect on staff in libraries, other relevant literature, and similar research to that undertaken by this study.

3.2 An Information Society and Economy

Access to information and knowledge is required for socio-economic development of individuals and communities. This is especially true now we live in a period of economic change from an industrial/manufacturing based economy into a service economy.

Information is becoming a valuable economic commodity. The social consequences of access to information are fundamentally interlinked to the growth and development of communities (Dutta-Bergman 2005). Participation in the economy and improved social connections for members of the community can be attributed result of greater access to information (Hopkins & Thomas 2004).

A major contribution to the increased access to information has been the emergence of the Internet. The Internet can provide practically unlimited access to equally unlimited information (Dutta-Bergman 2005).

There are important sociological aspects to the issues of information access. The Whose Net Report (Foley 2000) examined the types of households using the internet and found that access to internet in deprived areas was below the national average.

The difference between the sectors of society with and without this access forms the basis of what is called the digital divide. This has been described as “the troubling gap between those who use computers and the internet and those who do not” (Mehra, Merkel, Peterson Bishop 2004:782).

3.3 Public Access to IT and the Internet in Libraries

Social exclusion and social inclusion are challenges faced by all sectors of society. The MLA (2005) defines them as follows. Social exclusion relates to groups and individuals who do

not have access to services and facilities, or are disenfranchised from society. Social inclusion occurs once these groups and individuals gain access to the mainstream. With an increase in the amount of information available, so the importance of possessing information literacy skills increases. Information literacy, that is the ability to evaluate and assess sources of information, is essential in dealing with the increased utilisation of knowledge in the information economy.

Evans (1999) describes the elements of information literacy as follows:

- The fact that information is needed;
- What information is needed;
- How to describe it;
- What resources to use to retrieve it;
- How to use those resources;
- How to judge the value and validity of what has been found;
- How to organise and integrate the selected information.

As stated earlier, this is of ever more importance with the increase in electronic information resources, and contributes towards the digital divide.

As well as promoting social inclusion and addressing information literacy, Beenham & Harrison (1990: 3) identify other aims within public libraries as being:

- Education - to foster and provide means for the development of the individual/group at all levels of educational ability
- Information - to give the user quick access to accurate information
- Culture – to be a chief centre for cultural life and actively promote participation and appreciation of all the arts
- Leisure and recreation – to play a positive part in encouraging an active use of leisure and recreational time

One way of addressing these aims and needs is through the provision of public access to IT and the internet. It is possible to argue that this provision of the Internet in libraries was inevitable. Sierpe (2004:180) states that “librarians have always relied on the use of tools to fulfil the needs of the communities they serve”, such as typewriters, microfiche, and now the Internet.

The aims of providing access to IT, and in particular addressing the digital divide have been addressed in the UK through the People's Network. This was launched in 1999 with the aim of allowing access to ICT and the web through public libraries. By 2002 all public libraries had access to these services (People's Network Evaluation Summary 2004).

The arrival of internet access in public libraries has not been easy. It has generated further challenges to librarians, such as assessing information. The rise of the internet, and particularly search engines such as Google, has massively increased the amount of information available. This increase in the volume of available knowledge leads to the potential for an information overload. Also, an increase in information does not necessarily mean that there is an increase in the quality or suitability of the information and knowledge. Information professionals are skilled at selecting and searching these information sources, can analyse information needs, and extract and summarise information (Choo 2000). However there are difficulties in transferring this knowledge with the other demands that are placed on library staff.

(Ashcroft 2004) notes that librarians have been able to decide what materials are available in the library. The Internet allows access to an enormous amount of information and resources, much of which is uncensored.

To attempt to control or restrict access to these websites, filtering software can be used. There are technical problems with these though as they can be hacked or avoided, and may block access to legitimate sites. A more open approach is to have an acceptable use policy. These are not easy to implement though as they require staff to monitor usage, leading to possible tensions amongst staff as to what is acceptable, along with difficulties in approaching people who are misusing their access.

3.4 Negative Attitudes

Arguably the most important development with regards to information seeking and information sources has been the emergence of the internet and search engines. As identified by Jay and Webber (2005) use of the internet has affected reference services in libraries in general. It is no longer as important to have specialist knowledge of information storage and retrieval. Web search engines allow almost anyone to search for the information they require by simply entering keywords or phrases. Also, geographical constraints have been removed, so that information can be viewed from the workplace; it is no longer necessary to visit libraries to use their resources.

With many people now having the means and ability to access information directly, including via public access PCs within the library, the question of whether intermediaries such as librarians are needed can be raised. This process can be described as disintermediation (Lowe 1999). It can be argued that there is less need for libraries and librarians to act as intermediaries between the information source and the enquirer.

Lowe goes on to identify the following reasons for disintermediation (Lowe 1999:259):

- It can be faster, more convenient, cheaper
- The end user is the subject expert
- Much information is a couple of key strokes away from many business people
- Many sources are user friendly, targeted at end users
- Web browsers, search engines, interfaces etc. facilitate selective information gathering from a wide range of sources

This erosion of the traditional role of library staff may contribute towards a certain amount of resistance towards the presence of PCs in libraries.

Also, negative attitudes amongst the staff are identified by Schofield, McMenemy & Henderson as being due to “the labelling of some activities as social or recreational [which] can result in them being misconstrued as worthless or a waste of time” (2004:165). This is often especially true with regards to children and young people using the internet for game playing.

The PCs themselves may also reinforce negative perceptions as many are now slow and outmoded (Spacey, Goulding, and Murray 2004b).

Personal experience of working in public libraries has shown that accessing the Internet is of increasing importance to library users. It is not universally popular, especially among older users who do not view it as a resource that has a place in a library. This view is often echoed amongst the staff, which can be a result of a skills gap (Spacey, Goulding, and Murray 2004a). Monk (2004) recognises ICT training as contributing factor, as in some cases this is insufficient or inappropriate. A lack of confidence and/or skills will be a large contribution towards negative perceptions of public access to IT.

3.5 Positive Attitudes

Although there are negative views on this topic, equally there are a number of positive views also.

As well as identifying the process of disintermediation, Lowe also identifies the advantages of intermediaries as they can:

- Carry out tasks requiring specialised information skills
- Achieve advantages of scale and of division of labour in carrying out processes
- Translate problems into information solutions
- Identify appropriate sources from the vast range available, and evaluate alternatives
- Effectively retrieve information from complex, variable and diverse sources
- Synthesise information from various sources, and repackage it in the form required
- Promote information sources and services to the organisation and its members
- Assist and train individuals in their direct use of sources and systems

(Lowe 1999: 259).

Realisation and promotion of these skills can help staff to feel that access to the internet is simply an extension of the services that libraries have always provided.

Similarly, the internet has allowed self-searching and access to a large range of resources. Library staff are in a position to help users to identify the most appropriate sources and also use these resources more efficiently (Broadhurst 2003).

Public library staff can also help with the issue of what the internet can not show as well. This refers to the invisible web; the large areas of content that can not be found through search engines (McGuigan 2003).

There is also a positive effect in attracting new users, in particular younger users, traditionally a difficult sector to engage. The Research Study of 14-35 year olds for the Future Development of Public Libraries (MLA, DCMS, & Laser Foundation 2006) identifies the fact that not only does public internet access bring in users without access at home, but also brings in users with slower connections. Similarly, free internet access often appeals to students.

Another positive development is the way in which IT has been accepted and embedded in day-to-day and backroom tasks (Big Lottery Fund 2004). This demonstrates that negative attitudes towards public access to IT may be a separate issue to a general resistance to IT.

3.6 Other Research

There have been various attempts to study the effects of IT on public library staff; however this literature is not extensive.

The first group are evaluation summaries, such as Books and Bytes (Big Lottery Fund 2004) and The Peoples Network Evaluation Summary (Big Lottery Fund 2004). These reports are mostly concerned with reporting the performance of the People's Network, in terms of both users and staff. Similarly, policy documents such as Framework for the Future (DCMS 2003) and the follow up Framework for the Future: Action Plan 2006-08 (MLA 2006) outlines the aims of IT within public libraries.

Amongst the journal articles on this area, Spacey, Goulding, and Murray provide a number of related points, particularly around the staff issues. They identify the importance of addressing staff attitudes, stating that:

“staff with positive attitudes are desirable, and negative attitudes undesirable, in relation to implementing and using information and communications technology (ICT)” (Spacey, Goulding, and Murray 2004a:270)

This positive attitude is fundamental to the success of projects such as the People's Network.

They also identify differences between different groups within the staff. They highlight the difference between professional staff and other frontline members thus:

“Library assistants might have inferior computer skills because, traditionally, their use of computers has been limited and restricted to use of a library management system for issuing and returning materials loaned by users, whilst librarians often have experience using databases, PCs and CD-ROMs to access information. In addition, recently qualified librarians might have undergone computer training during study at university or attended professional

development courses to improve their skills.” (Spacey, Goulding, and Murray 2004a:273)

Similarly, they claim that there are differences due to age and gender:

“women and older staff were less confident about their skills, with the latter group perceiving the Internet as more difficult to use than the younger staff.” (Spacey, Goulding & Murray 2004a:275)

These theories are examined further in later chapters.

The final group of literature consulted was previous dissertations. These included:

- Butler (2002) Trained or terrified: an investigation into the impact of ICT training on public library staff
- Ingham (2003) The Attitudes of Paraprofessional Library Staff in Relation to Public Access to the Internet
- Piasecki (2004) An investigation into the impact of ICT on small branch libraries.

These studies were not directly related to this study, but contained certain elements which were similar.

3.7 Summary

The study of this literature has helped to provide background information on the reasons for introduction of IT, and in particular public access to it, into libraries. The causes of positive and negative attitudes have been identified, along with other research in this area. These reasons and claims can then be compared to the findings of this study, determining if there has been any change in the acceptance of IT within the service.

Chapter Four – Questionnaire Survey

4.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the results of the questionnaire survey. This was distributed via email to Sheffield Library Service. There were a total of thirty six responses. The results and analysis for this section of the study reflect the structure of the questionnaire.

4.2 Age, Sex, and Position - Results and Analysis

The questions in this section were included to give an indication of the backgrounds of the respondents. The results are shown in the following tables.

Table 1: Age

Age Group	Total
Below 30	8
31 – 40	5
41 – 50	8
51 and Above	5
Average Age	39

Twenty six people included their age in their responses; the mean average age was calculated from these responses only. The lowest age recorded was twenty two.

Table 2: Sex

Sex	Total
Female	30
Male	5
No Response	1

The majority of the respondents were female, which reflects the make-up of the workforce.

Table 3: Position

Position	Total
Frontline Staff	33
Frontline Manager	3
Middle Manager	0
Senior Manager	0
Other	0

All the respondents described themselves as frontline staff.

This data was included to be used to broadly identify the sample. The sample includes a fairly even spread of ages, and the mix of sex reflects the staff. The responses were only from frontline staff.

4.3 Perceptions of the People's Network and Computers in the Library - Results and Analysis

This section of the questionnaire was divided into fifteen statements. These were then marked one to five to show the strength of agreement or disagreement. The results were collated and coded as described in Chapter Two.

The results are shown in appendix B as a series of graphs. It should be noted that these graphs show the responses sorted in ascending order; the respondent number on the X axis does not correspond with each graph. However, this study is concerned with the general trend as opposed to the comparison of individual responses (say for instance respondent MQ20 shows a positive response for the first question negative for the second etc). Therefore these graphs are a useful way of showing the results and revealing the trends, rather than vigorous statistical instruments.

The following section describes the responses shown in appendix B. Further analysis of these results is included in the summary of results, Section 4.7.

1) The provision of internet access by the library is a good idea

The majority of responses to this question were positive, with two disagreeing and two giving a neutral response. The importance of internet access in providing information seems to be appreciated by the large majority of the staff surveyed.

2) The people using the internet have no access to PCs at home

The majority of the staff responded with a neutral or unsure response to this question. This contrasted with the responses in the interviews in Chapter Five, where the interviewees felt that lack of access to IT at home was a major contribution to the reason for use in the library.

3) The People's Network and internet access helps address social inclusion

4) The People's Network and internet access helps address lifelong learning

5) The People's Network and internet access helps people gain employment

These three questions can be linked in that they all are part of the aims of the library service. The majority of responses to these questions were positive. Each question had a similar response pattern, which due to the interlinked nature of the questions is to be expected.

6) The People's Network and internet access helps brings in new users

7) The People's Network and internet access deters existing users

The responses to these questions can also be linked. The results can be summarised as showing that the staff feel that public access to the People's Network and the internet have had a positive effect on bringing new users to their libraries. They also show that they do not think that the presence of the computers deters existing customers from using the library.

8) Provision of computers for offline services e.g. word processing

This question seemed to cause some confusion in how to respond to it. This is examined further in Chapter Six, Evaluation. For the purposes of the survey, blank responses were regarded as being neutral/unsure, and given a score of 0. This means that the responses to this question should be regarded as an indication, rather than a statistical representation. The results were generally positive. It would be expected that there would be a greater positive result if the question had been interpreted correctly, as a result of the positive reaction to the other statements about public access to IT in the library.

9) Internet access should be free of charge

There was a strong agreement with this statement. This can be linked to the responses to questions three, four and five; the provision of internet access is helping to address issues of social inclusion. A charge for these services would not contribute to achieving these aims. Also, many library staff feel that the core services of the library, such as information provision, should be free.

10) The People's Network is an effective way of providing IT access to the public

The majority of the respondents strongly agreed with this statement. This is an interesting response, as the additional comments and interviews revealed a certain amount of dissatisfaction. As examined later, this dissatisfaction appears to stem from issues surrounding the management of public access to IT, and the perception that there is little in the way of alternatives.

11) The people who need IT access are being catered for

There was a spread of opinion for this statement, with just under a quarter disagreeing, a quarter giving a neutral/unsure response, a quarter agreeing, and the remaining responses strongly agreeing.

The following quote from the comments section of the questionnaire illustrates the positive opinions:

“Members of the public without internet [access] are severely disadvantaged. The PN helps us address this.” (MQ15)

These responses can be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, it could be argued that the majority of the staff felt that the people who need internet access are being catered for, as around half the responses agreed with the statement, and under a quarter disagreed.

Taking the neutral/unsure responses into account though, then it is not as certain to state that there is as strong an agreement with the statement. Ways to achieve greater access for everyone are discussed in the suggestions for further action (Chapter Seven).

12) Internet access in the library provides access to a wider range of resources

Two respondents disagreed with this statement, two were unsure, with the majority agreeing.

With the enormous amount of information available through the internet, it is initially unclear as to the reasons why people would disagree with this statement. A possible explanation may be that although the library can offer the internet to people without the means to access it, this does not address the issue of people being unable to access the web due to a lack of skills. The move by many publishers to electronic forms of reference material will continue to worsen this problem.

13) Inappropriate use of the internet is a problem

Half of the responses disagreed or were neutral, with the other half agreeing. Inappropriate use is often considered to be one of the main problems with public access to IT and the internet in particular. Therefore, it could be expected that there would be more agreement with this statement. However, it is possible that the way that the system is managed, e.g. implementing the acceptable use policy, helps prevent inappropriate use, hence the lower agreement than initially expected.

14) The hardware (e.g. PCs, printers) need to be updated

The most frequent response was agreement. The comments section and interviews illustrated this further. The main issues were the slow speed and incompatibility with external storage such as USB/Flash memory devices.

15) Internet access is not necessary in the library

Only two respondents agreed with this statement; thirty one disagreed. Despite the uncertainties and negative aspects surrounded with IT provision and internet access, the majority of the staff sampled appeared to recognise the importance of these resources to the library and its users.

4.4 Perceptions of Uses - Results and Analysis

This section of the questionnaire examined the uses of the PCs. The staff were presented with eight uses, and asked to rank them 1 to 8, with 1 being the most important, and 8 the least. These scores were then totalled, with the lowest score being the most highly used. For example the use of email receiving three scores of 1 (most important) gives a total of 3, compared with accessing the People's Network site receiving three scores of 8 (least important) giving a total of 24.

However, there was some misinterpretation of this question. A small number of the respondents ranked each individual use 1-8; for example they marked use of email and pleasure as both being 1. This still allowed the total scores to be used to place the uses in rank order. The results are summarised in table 4:

Use	Total
Internet access – email	73
Internet access – web searching for pleasure	86
Internet access – for employment (e.g. vacancies)	109
Internet access – education (e.g. homework)	123
Internet access – own study (e.g. family history)	137
Use of desktop packages (e.g. word processing)	158
Accessing information services (e.g. Know UK)	233
Accessing the People's Network website	252

These results show that use of the internet is the most popular, with email being particularly popular. Some of the more 'worthy' uses are lower in the table. However, although they may

not be 'worthy', this does not mean they are not 'worthwhile'. This was identified in the further comments section:

“Everyone’s needs/interests are different – some will feel PN should be used primarily for study/education. However, email might be the only way for some people to keep in contact with distant relations so this equally important for them.” **MQ18**

It can be argued that the one of the roles of the library is to provide information and access to information. How the users then decide to utilise this is their own choice. Public access to IT is provided for a number of reasons; however it is not the function of the library to determine what individuals decide to use it for.

The use of online information services is the lowest, especially the People’s Network. Many people automatically use search engines such as Google to find the information they need. For most people, most of the time, this is sufficient. Nevertheless, websites such as Know UK, Oxford Reference Online, and the People’s Network have the advantage of offering the authority of their information – they can be regarded as being high quality.

The lack of use may be due to people finding that search engines are sufficient. It may also be due to a lack of marketing. Many of the staff were unfamiliar with these sites, in particular the People’s Network site which some of them had not encountered at all (See Chapter Five Interviews). These uses reflect those in the People’s Network Evaluation Summary (Big Lottery Fund 2004).

4.5 Perceptions of Training - Results and Analysis

This section of the questionnaire tried to identify how the staff felt about the training they had received, and how appropriate this had been.

The first question asked whether the staff felt that they had enough training to support the provision of IT access. The results are shown in the following table:

Table 5: Sufficient IT training

Do you feel that you have had sufficient training to support the provision of internet access and other PC uses?	Total
Yes	17
No	18
N/A	1

This shows that approximately half felt as though they had sufficient training, and half did not. The library service provides training for its entire staff, including the ECDL qualification. This split between the yes and no responses may be due to the varying confidence levels, and therefore appropriateness of the training received.

The next section examined areas where the staff felt that further training was required. The results are summarised in table 6.

Table 6: Further training needs

Do you need feel that you need further training in:	Total (out of 36)
Use of software packages through informal in-house workshops	20
People management skills e.g. implementing acceptable use policies	16
Delivering help and advice e.g. assisting with word processing	13
Use of software packages through formal training e.g. ECDL	12

These results show that the most popular training need is in using software packages in informal in-house workshops. This may be due the staff wishing to refresh their skills (for example after completing the ECDL) or because they are uncomfortable with the more formal, exam based training (ECDL).

The second most popular need does not directly correspond with IT skills. One of the problems identified, especially in the comments section, is how to deal with aggressive or frustrated users of the PCs. Further training in this area would be transferable to all aspects of dealing with the public.

The third choice was in delivering help and advice. It was anticipated that this may have been higher, as many staff expressed concern in this area. However, this may be due to a lack of confidence in IT skills rather than a lack of skills in helping users.

Formal training was the least popular, which may be due to the exam based nature of the training. An alternative is simply that as the staff have already completed this training then they do not feel that further training in this manner is required.

4.6 Other Comments – Results and Analysis

This section of the questionnaire offered the chance for the staff to present further opinions on the topic. This was surprisingly popular, with just over half (19/36) of the respondents adding comments. The full list of comments are included in Appendix C.

To allow ease of comparison, the comments were divided into similar areas as those used in Chapter Five.

The People’s Network, Internet Access, and IT in Libraries

The comments in relation to this were not very positive. Examples included:

“I think the main reason staff may have negative feelings about the People’s Network is not because they fail to see the benefits it brings for the service and the service users but because of the amount of time and energy it takes to administer the system on an already busy counter.” **MQ2**

“Lack of a central booking system means that the same few people are hogging the people’s network machines. It is impossible for staff to prevent this without a central booking system of some kind.” **MQ2**

“I have been sworn at by more PN users in one year than in my working in libraries, usually if a PC is not instantly available. Only a minority behave badly, but a sizeable minority and staff perceive the problem to be worse than it is. Getting action from management dealing with problems is long-winded and cumbersome.” **MQ9**

“Booking and allied problems cause considerable friction. The public ‘demand’ what they want even though they can see there is no possibility of being able to use a machine for example, because they are all booked or occupied. Public attitude problems day after day cause misery not had in such concentrated form pre PN.” **MQ15**

These reactions are all based upon the problems of incorporating public access to IT within the library. **MQ2** identifies the problem as being one of managing the facilities whilst carrying out their other duties. This reflects this researcher's experience of employment in a public library. Other staff members did not necessarily object to the presence of the computers, it was the perceived extra workload that they created.

The second comment, from **MQ9** is perhaps more worrying. This individual may have suffered unfortunate incidents which have given them this negative perspective, as they state that the problem is perceived to be worse than it is. However, the quote from **MQ15** appears to support this view. The situation is causing a problem, and they do not perceive the library management to be supporting them. A possible solution to this would be people management training in how to deal with difficult customers, followed by a review of how the service is managed.

The views of the staff on how their colleagues felt was also examined:

“First reaction of some staff to this survey was ‘we’re not allowed to criticise the People’s Network.’ That is very much the general feeling.” **MQ9**

This is quite a negative attitude, but may be attributed to projective answering, as examined in Chapter Two.

Perceptions of Usage and Users of IT in Libraries

Opinions about the usage varied. An example of a positive attitude was:

“Everyone’s needs/interests are different – some will feel PN should be used primarily for study/education. However, email might be the only way for some people to keep in contact with distant relations so this equally important for them.” **MQ18**

Where as the negative views included:

“A lot is not really library related e.g. if so many people want to use email it might have saved a few post offices by putting PN in there. Of course people come in to use libraries if you put PN in – they would come in any where that did. Pity is that most of them won’t use other library facilities.” **MQ9**

In general, the questionnaire showed people's attitudes to be favourable, but additional comments were perhaps more negative. This is likely to be due to the tendency for individuals with strong views being more motivated to communicate them.

Perception of Training Needs

Comments on this area included specific training needs:

“More training with Internet searches would be helpful.” **MQ1**

“On the whole the provision of the PN is fantastic but I think staff need more training or to be made more aware of how to deal with customers who misuse it.” **MQ36**

These tend to reflect the results in Table 6, with an emphasis towards further training in software packages and people management.

The issue of advising users, and how much assistance to offer was also raised:

“I would like more training but not sure that it's entirely appropriate that front line library staff should spend their time teaching computer skills. PN is a service provided by libraries, but only one amongst many. Perhaps a bit more clarity about what we are expected to be providing to the public is necessary.” **MQ24**

“As far as I am aware our stance is that we presume patrons have a basic awareness but if this isn't the case (which is quite frequently) then we need to promote more courses.” **MQ36**

The split between those who were confident with their IT skills, and those who were not was also raised:

“PN does provide library staff with IT skills they wouldn't have had. PN and especially internet access opens a whole new information source to be learnt by existing staff who haven't been able to master them at school. Hardware and IT sources aren't easy to learn quickly and the service is temporarily poorer until

the school-trained computer literate staff can come in to posts as they will be able to concentrate more on evaluating sites etc”. **MQ15**

“As a younger member of staff I am aware of a number of computer procedures that my older colleagues are not. Although a number of them have had formal training (ECDL) they do not feel confident enough or remember enough to help with customer enquiries.” **MQ36**

It would be possible to argue then that in the long term, the issue of IT literacy amongst the staff will resolve itself as new staff enter the service with existing skills. This is not really satisfactory, and the need for further training by individuals who require it should be addressed.

The Future of IT and the People’s Network within Public Libraries

This section included comment on possible ways of easing the demands on the staff:

“I feel it would be especially helpful if we had either paid workers and/or university students. Students (for example) floating around at times - for the public to make use of their recent I.T experience.” **MQ5**

The practicalities of this solution are examined in Chapter Seven.

There were very few mentions of the use of IT within the day-to-day duties of the staff, with the exception of this comment:

“Information is now provided to staff on computers and not in paper form – this means it is not always accessible but managers don’t always realise this.”

MQ15

The main issue appeared to be with the replacement of the existing hardware:

“We need greater investment in People’s Network as the equipment is in need of updating.” **MQ12**

“The applications on the People’s Network are limiting – the USB ports, which we have the hardware for, need to be activated. Users should be able to use the

CD Rom drives. At the moment the only removable storage device available is outdated floppy disc. They should all have headphones for multimedia.” **MQ32**

“All our PCs are well used, and the public love having them to use. However, the computers are so slow that they are causing the public to go elsewhere!”

MQ34

4.7 Summary of Results

These questionnaire responses give an insight into the thoughts of the library staff on these issues. They were then examined in greater detail through the use of selected interviews (Chapter Five).

The results for each section of the questionnaire are summarised as follows:

4.7.1 Age, Sex, and Position

These results show that the results are representative of the age and sex make-up of the service. However, not all the respondents added their age, so these figures can not be held to be entirely representative. Some of the problems surrounding the inclusion of age/sex data in questionnaires are identified by Lewin (2005). Similarly, the responses were only from frontline staff. The results may have differed if there had been responses from more senior managers.

4.7.2 Perceptions of the People’s Network and Computers in the Library

In general, responses to these questions revealed a positive attitude towards IT in the library, for example **question 1) The provision of internet access by the library is a good idea** gave a positive response. The staff appeared to recognise the importance of these resources; however there are unresolved issues with the management of them.

4.7.3 Perceptions of Uses

There appears to be a perception that the uses are mainly email and web searches, which reflect those identified in the People’s Network Evaluation Summary (Big Lottery Fund 2004). The ‘validity’ or ‘worthiness’ of these uses does not appear to be an issue for the staff.

4.7.4 Perceptions of Training

There is a fifty-fifty split on whether there had been sufficient training. There was a preference for informal training and people management training. ECDL training would

appear to provide the computer skills required, but further additional training or refresher courses are required.

4.7.5 Other Comments

These comments appeared to be more negative than the impression gained from other parts of the questionnaire. This is likely to be due to the opportunity for free expression to lead to more extreme views being aired. However, many of the comments also backed-up other sections, for example the need to replace hardware.

4.8 Overall Summary

The questionnaire survey revealed the thoughts of the library staff on the use of IT in libraries, and in particular public access to it. There were some limitations, such as the lack of response from senior managers. Another problem was with elements of the survey design. Question 8 and Section 2 seemed to prove a problem, despite pre-testing and approval from the library management before distribution.

In general, the staff attitudes displayed to the People's Network and IT provision in public libraries were positive. There were some negative elements to the additional comments, but these appear to be problems implementing public access to IT. There was almost no mention of the use of IT within their daily duties.

Chapter Five – Interview Survey

5.1 Introduction

The interview section of the study allowed further insights into the perceptions of the staff. This chapter examines the opinions and views of the staff at three branches within the service. The reasons for these particular sites and interview techniques being chosen are examined in Section 5.2 and Chapter Two.

The interviews were carried out using a similar structure, covering the following areas:

- The People's Network, Internet Access, and IT in Libraries
- Perceptions of Usage and Users of IT in Libraries
- Perception of Training Needs
- The Future of IT and the People's Network within Public Libraries

The interview comments and analysis are summarised at the end of the chapter.

5.2 Background Information for Branches Chosen

As outlined in the Methodology (Chapter Two) three branches were chosen to carry out the interviews. Each branch was situated in a different socio-economic area to the others. The staff interviewed ranged from frontline staff, through frontline management to middle managers.

The libraries included:

Library A – this library is located in an area with an ethnically diverse population. It is in a low income area, and included in the non-British residents are a number of temporary residents (refugees/asylum seekers). The participants in these interviews are labelled **A1**, **A2**, and **A3**.

Library B – this library is located in one of the poorer areas of the city. Many of the residents are low-income, and social exclusion is a problem. The participants in these interviews are labelled **B1**, **B2**.

Library C – this library is in an affluent area. This branch is comparatively new. A dedicated area for the public access computers was incorporated into its design and build. The participants in these interviews are labelled **C1**, **C2**, and **C3**.

5.3 The People’s Network, Internet Access, and IT in Libraries - Comments and Analysis

This section examines the attitudes of the interviewees towards the necessity of IT access within libraries and how they feel towards its presence.

Is the provision of IT and internet access by the library is a good idea? Why should libraries provide this?

Responses to this question were generally positive. The following quotes illustrate this:

“People expect it, we are information providers. An awful lot of information is available [on the internet]; this isn’t available to people who have not got the internet themselves.” **C1**

“There’s no way we can keep up with factual information the way the internet can.” **A1**

“Libraries in general should be providing access as it’s a natural extension of what we do in the provision of information.” **A3**

Most of the interviewees felt that the availability of public access to the internet was the most important aspect of this question. As examined later, use of word processing etc was felt to be important also, but the vast amount of information available through the web was regarded as being integral to the role of libraries as information providers.

The only negative views were with regards to the perception of extra work and pressure on staff time that public access to PCs caused:

“It has created a lot of work, a big increase in the workload we do, monitoring all the time who’s on, who’s off; it is a lot of work. It’s very time consuming on the staff’s part.” **A2**

“The booking system does take up your time and can be a bit of a nuisance. I don’t really have a problem with that, but when you phone up the helpline I don’t find them particularly helpful. That is the one thing I’ve got against it.”

A1

It is interesting to note that any negative attitudes are due to issues on how the PCs, and the internet especially, is incorporated into the library and the staff workload. The perceived problems arise from the way the system is managed (e.g. bookings) as opposed to issues with the presence of the internet as an information source.

What is the attitude of other staff towards PCs, is it positive or negative?

Again, most interviewees felt that there was at least acceptance of the People’s Network machines, and most people were fairly positive:

“Generally positive, with a couple of exceptions! You will always have people who are afraid of computers and don’t feel confident with them. It’s such an important part of what we do; generally we are all positive towards it.” **A3**

“One member of staff doesn’t like them at all. I think she’s a bit scared of them. The majority of them though are pretty good, and tolerate them at the very least!” **A1**

This reflected the findings in Chapter Four, where most of the responses in the questionnaire showed a positive attitude towards these issues.

It should be noted that throughout the questionnaire and interview survey, most attention was focussed on the People’s Network and internet access. The use of library management systems and OPACs or other computer catalogues was barely mentioned. This may be that they are accepted as an integral part of library staff working routine, where as PN and internet access are not regarded as traditional library activities.

Is the People’s Network is an effective way of providing IT access to the public?

The questionnaire survey showed that 3 of the sample disagreed, 3 had a neutral stance and the rest (30 out of 36) agreed or strongly agreed. However, response to this question in the interviews was less conclusive. The responses were muted, with **A1** stating that the “back-up

service” (i.e. technical support/helpdesk) is not good enough, although this is not an issue with the People’s Network but the way the Council implement it.

The impression gained by the interviewer was that despite any issues the staff may have with the People’s Network (as a way of providing access to IT services), there is a perception that there is no other way of achieving the aim of public IT provision.

Many people feel that libraries are about books, to what extent do you agree with this?

This was generally met with responses indicating they disagreed, typified by this response from **A3**:

“The perception of libraries just being about books is a dated perception, and I’m not sure what sort of percentage of the population would hold that view now. Perhaps it’s just older people?”

A similar response was:

“To begin with, like anything new, people were a bit daunted. We had people say ‘I don’t see what it’s got to do with us in libraries, libraries are about books’. A few years down the line though and people are accepting of it.” **C1**

This is not always reflected by other sections of the community. The view expressed by **A3** that it is ‘just older people’ that have this attitude is perhaps not fully correct. Authors such as Tim Coates and other contributors in the media (e.g. writers in broadsheet newspapers) have objected to the presence of computers in libraries, and are likely to continue doing so. However, a positive attitude towards these resources from the staff may help to change any negative perceptions.

There are a number of aims for libraries, for example addressing social exclusion. Do you think that the People’s Network and internet access helps fulfil these?

This was regarded as being one of the important aspects of internet and computer access.

Responses on this topic included:

“I’d like to see the evidence of it [achieving social inclusion], but I would say yes.” **A2**

“It provides information to people who would otherwise be denied it.” **C1**

“Employment – it’s definitely the case, you very often get users who are searching the council job site, and you get others who are printing off CVs, using Word to put CVs together. It is a very significant usage.” **A3**

“In terms of lifelong learning, perhaps to an extent.” **A3**

B2 gave an example of a user getting cheaper insurance and so saving money, which they regarded as an example of contributing to social inclusion.

It was generally regarded as an important instrument in addressing issues of social inclusion, lifelong learning, and helping to gain employment. However, it was not mentioned as contributing to the local community, for example e-government. Similarly, there was no mention in its role in helping to address issues for people with access difficulties.

5.4 Perceptions of Usage and Users of IT in Libraries - Comments and Analysis

This section looks at who the staff feels are using the PCs in the library, and what they are using them for.

In general who would you say are using the computers? [For example young/old, male/female]?

Most of the respondents stated that there was a mixture of users, but with less elderly people, for example:

“A lot of younger people use it, up to 30’s and students, but still a mixture. A separate section for the children works well.” **A2**

“Very mixed, we have a lot of people use it. We’ve got eastern European refugees who are a significant group, but we get a mix of different backgrounds. They are representative of the community.” **A3**

The exception to this was in Library B. **B1 and B2** both agreed, stating that internet access in the library was “mostly children using it with a few older users.” This may be for a number of reasons. There is a smaller ethnic community, who are regarded as one of the main user

groups, using the machines for email. Also, there may be lower standards of computer literacy in this area, and so therefore less demand.

The people using the internet have no access to PCs at home.

Most of the interviewees agreed quite strongly with this statement, for example:

“A lot of the people around here can’t afford to buy their own PCs.” **A3**

“Vast majority don’t have the internet at home” **A1**

“The main reason is a lack of computers at home” **A3**

“Majority are computer is broken or don’t have access at home.” **C2**

However this does not reflect the views expressed in the questionnaire survey, where 58% of the responses were neutral, and 21% each for agreeing and disagreeing. The reasons for this are unclear, although this may be a result of the way the question was interpreted. This is demonstrated by the following response:

“Here, specifically, yes. If you go into different libraries you’d get a different answer.” **A2**

It is possible that in a similar situation a respondent may feel that their answer falls between agreeing and disagreeing, hence the neutral answer. It can also be noted that this particular reference was to libraries in more affluent areas. Although, as shown later, there are differences in the uses and the amount of usage between the libraries, a lack of access to PCs at home is seen as the main reason for use in all the areas studied.

Do the PCs attract new users and/or deter existing users?

The consensus of opinion here was that the public access to PCs encouraged new users, and that deterring existing users was not really a problem:

“Brings in lots of new users, we get a lot of people who join just to use the computers. Some of them will then take a book or DVD.” **A1**

“I don’t really think that it deters users.” **A1**

“People come in to use computers and end up joining” **C1**

It deterred users – “only right at the beginning [when PCs were originally introduced to the library].” **C1**

“We have brought people in who wouldn’t other wise have used libraries at all. I think this is an important factor.” **A3**

There is an element of concern though that these new users are only using the computer facilities:

“It brings people into the library but they don’t always use the books.” **C3**

What do you feel are the main uses of the PCs in your library?

The main reasoning behind this question was to examine what the staff perceived to be the uses of the public PCs. The People’s Network Evaluation Summary (2004) identifies the overwhelming use of the scheme as being for access to the web. This encompasses a range of activity though, from email, game playing, and through to searching for information.

Uses identified by the staff at the various branches included:

“Majority in this library use it for email and to read foreign newspapers” **A1**

“There’s a lot of booking holidays, a lot of looking for jobs, people keeping in touch with relatives abroad or elsewhere in the country, and looking for information.” **C1**

“A lot of people use the PCs to do their CVs.” **C3**

A development of the People’s Network has been the development of a People’s Network website. Potts states that:

“Through the developments we are planning and delivering, the People’s Network will be more effective in touching people’s lives. It will bring learning

opportunities and access to information to an expanding community of users. In this way it will compliment and build on the core strengths of the public library.” (2003:118)

More recently, the MLA Framework for the Future: Action Plan 2006-08 states that they have achieved a “People’s Network Service providing a 24 hour online enquiry service and access to reading and information”.

However, there was not a great deal of evidence for its use, or in fact awareness of it, with **A1** stating

“I don’t think I’ve ever been on it” and “I don’t know anything about it.”

This was also shown in the questionnaire survey, where email and general browsing were identified as the most popular uses. Accessing information service websites and the People’s Network site in particular, were identified as the least used.

Do you think these are valid uses?

After asking for their perceptions as to the main uses of the PCs, the staff were asked for their opinion on the validity of the uses i.e. whether there were some uses that could be seen as being more ‘worthy’ than others.

The interviewees displayed a relaxed attitude towards this, with typical responses such as:

“I don’t think it matters. If they want to search out how to solve one of the games or cheats that’s up to them, as long as they’re not using them inappropriately that’s fine with me” **A1**

“It’s a free service, and it’s up to the public how they use it.” **A2**

“Whilst they’re browsing for fun, they’re still learning” **A2**

In library C, both interviewees stated that the main uses were email and buying/booking holidays. When they were asked if these were valid uses, **C2** stated that

“No it’s not what it’s intended for, but who are you to go over and say that’s not very informative is it! Only thirty percent use it for what it should be.”

This quote appears to summarise the opinions of the other members of staff. Whilst the People’s Network has particular aims (e.g. helping provide internet access to all), which the staff approve of, it can be seen that which services the users choose to access is their own choice.

Is there a problem with inappropriate use?

Inappropriate use, for example accessing unsuitable websites, is one of the problem areas of allowing public access to the internet in particular. It is a complex area, including issues such as the balance between free speech and censorship to protect vulnerable groups. Measures to deal with the issue include acceptable use policies and technological measures such as filters.

Libraries A and C gave responses that showed they regarded incidents of unacceptable use as being rare:

“I don’t think inappropriate use is a problem.” **A2**

“Inappropriate use is unusual.” **A3**

They were also fairly comfortable with the measures used to deter inappropriate use:

“I would feel a bit awkward if I saw someone on an iffy website, but I would still approach them.” **A1**

However, **B1** and **B2** stated that they felt it was an issue in their library. This may be due to the larger proportion of children using it compared with libraries A and C. These children and young people may visit these websites to try and provoke a reaction from the staff.

5.5 Perception of Training Needs - Comments and Analysis

Negative attitudes in the workplace can be partially attributed to a lack of confidence or skills in a particular area. There are other factors such as morale, but the use of technology is often a cause for unease for individuals.

Do you need to offer help?

Whether to intervene or not when people need help using the computers is a question that frontline staff face daily. Many of the interviewees felt that offering advice was part of their role, but they were not employed to be IT trainers.

Library A is one of the busiest branches, and here many users are computer literate:

“A lot of our users don’t need any intervention, and you could say we might as well be an internet café, but a lot of users do need help.” **A2**

The ability to offer help and advice is identified as a positive:

“We’re different because we’re an information centre, not like an internet café. We can help out with other applications as well as the internet.” **A3**

The frontline staff appears to feel that offering help and advice is an essential part of their role. However some staff raised the issue of balancing time spent assisting PC users and their other tasks. Similarly, some of the staff are less confident using the PCs and so are reluctant to carry out these roles.

Is there a need for more training?

This part of the interview examined staff attitudes towards training, and whether they felt that this had been sufficient. Seven of the eight staff members interviewed had undertaken the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL). These responses illustrate the views of the interviewees:

“I can usually help people with their problems, but I don’t know how much of this is from our training. We had our ECDL but you gradually absorb information. I would say we’ve had sufficient training” **C1**

“I’m certainly a lot more confident using computers than I was a few years ago. I’ve completed my ECDL, and for the majority of things that are needed on the computer I don’t falter. The only thing I stumble on, and everyone tells me its simple, I’m not very good with the scanner. That is the one thing people come in and tend to be not able to do on their own.” **A1**

“I feel confident enough to do most things. If I had to start looking at spreadsheets and that sort of thing I’m not too sure, but it doesn’t worry me because that’s not what we’re about, we’re not here to teach people as such. But I’m quite happy I can get around the internet sites, I can get around most things.” **A2**

“We had a good training basis to start off with, with the ECDL, it was very useful. A lot of it is learning as you go though, there are some areas I’m not fully up to scratch though, say for instance the scanner, because I don’t use it very often.” **A2**

The interviewees appeared to be confident in using the PCs and in offering help and advice. Although they seemed initially satisfied with their training, as the interviews progressed the library assistants expressed a lack of satisfaction with the ECDL as a training method:

“We’ve had the funding to do ECDL training, but not all staff, in certain libraries; they don’t feel particularly confident about being able to give advice.”
A3

“I did ECDL to pass it but I don’t think I learnt anything from it.” **C2**

“I think I did, but if you don’t keep it up you forget it.” **C3**

The ECDL qualification is intended to provide skills in using the most common packages used on the PCs. The interviewees stated that some of their colleagues were reluctant to undertake the ECDL. This may be due to the formal examination nature of this training, or possibly because they do not think it is appropriate. Jones, Sprague & Nankivell state that “Staff in the focus groups made very few references to qualifications, being primarily concerned with getting the skills to do the job.” (1999:34).

This may be the case here, with addressing the lack of confidence in the skills needed being more important than completing a formal training course.

Informal training

Following on from discussing the ECDL, the interviewees were asked for their thoughts on any skills gaps and how they could be addressed. **A3** stated that

“Certain frontline staff are less confident than they should be. Perhaps there should be some refresher training.”

This would be a way of helping to address people’s confidence problems. Also, refresher training could be a way of ensuring staff IT skills are kept up-to-date. However, other staff interviewed felt that the opportunity to practise skills would be more useful than formal training courses:

“I might be able to work it [computer problems or unfamiliar packages] out myself, but there is literally no time. It would be a great idea to do it with everything, the information pages and Sheffield Council web pages.” **A1**

“We have the literature about UK Online and other information websites but actually having some practice time would be amazingly useful.” **C1**

Similarly, **A1** and **A2** in the previous Section 5.5 both expressed difficulties in using the scanner. This facility is not exceptionally difficult to operate; in fact it could be argued that a reasonably computer literate individual would be capable of learning how to use it without the need for a training session.

The idea of individual practice sessions was suggested to the staff, and was generally well received. This would allow staff to practice their skills and to familiarise themselves with information service websites, for example the People’s Network site. **B1 and B2** welcomed this, and they were also keen for further training.

When the idea of this practice slot was discussed in Library C, the response was less enthusiastic. **C2** stated that

“Personally I’d see that as a waste of my time. I wouldn’t benefit from it” **C2**.

The other interviewee, **C3**, also agreed with this. However, **C2** went on to state that

“There are more online information resources; we’re not aware of what they contain. We’re not that knowledgeable about them.”

This situation is precisely that which the practise sessions can be used to address. It is possible that that **C2** and **C3** were less keen on a timetabled session as opposed to an informal opportunity to practice applications or examine information resources. This opportunity to conduct private reflection and practice would not have to be compulsory, it could simply be offered to individuals to be undertaken when they feel it is necessary.

5.6 The Future of IT and the People's Network within Public Libraries - Comments and Analysis

This section of the interview examined how the staff felt that IT would be further incorporated into the library, and also how their roles may change. It also examines whether the People's Network will continue to be the way in which public access to PCs is provided.

What do you feel are the implications for the future? Will there be more emphasis on computers and electronic resources, and a change in the role of librarians?

All of the staff interviewed felt that there would be an increase in emphasis on the computers, and in particular accessing information online.

“More and more reference and information services are going to online versions. It will become more significant in the future.” **A3**

It should be noted that earlier in the interviews that the responses suggested that worries about a shift in focus away from books were unnecessary. There may be an underlying element of concern about this, consciously or not, as many of the responses included reference to the continued importance of the book-stock:

“If we don't [include IT and internet access] we will be left behind, internet and computers are the way forward. Its not that we're not still about books because we are, but if we don't [keep up with technology] we'll be in serious trouble.” **A2**

“Will there be more emphasis on computers in the future? There's got to be. There's no turning back. But, I know you can go on the computer and read, but you can't take your computer to bed!” **A1**

There were a number of comments on the changes that may occur within the roles of library staff, in particular frontline staff:

“In the future library assistants will have to be a lot more computer literate than my generation was. They probably will be better than some of the staff, and they’ve got to be because it’s the future. Everything is constantly evolving and changing, which is a good thing. We’ve got to keep up.” **A1**

Also, there was reference to the importance of communicating information literacy:

“People don’t realise that information on the internet can be put there by anybody” **A1**

The comments made in this section all related to the role of IT in public access. The only respondent to comment on the use of IT in daily tasks was **A3**. They stated:

“We are seeing a change in the role of staff, with self service issue and 24 hour services. There will always be a role for face to face interaction in a library, advisory, where to find things, they won’t get rid of library assistants as people like interaction with people. Our role will change, and technology is making this easier, for example self issue takes pressure off a busy counter.”

Do you think that internet access will continue through the People’s Network or will individual authorities take responsibility for it themselves?

During these interviews, a number of comments were made that dissatisfaction amongst the users was the result of problems with the hardware provided. The main concerns were with incompatibility with USB storage devices and CD and DVD-ROMs. The only external storage is floppy discs. The hardware is in need of updating, although how this would be funded is uncertain. One solution to the problem of updating the machines would be to withdraw them, and reallocate the budget to other areas. This was not regarded as a realistic solution though:

“I think if you separated it [libraries and public access to computers] it would be a backwards step. If we are going to continue we need to get more up to date though.” **A2**

“Without the computers we wouldn’t have a library in this day and age.” **B2**

There were concerns though as to where the funding for further upkeep and development of the services would come from though:

“I wonder what’s going to happen because its government funded. Once it starts to fail, what’s going to happen? People have got used to a free service.” **A1**

“Who pays for it, and will they upgrade them?” **A2**

“The computers are slow, and what will happen when the People’s Network funding stops?” **B2**

“The funding will be the main decider. Now we’ve introduced something like this [internet access] I don’t think we should dare to take it away. If the funding does cease from one source we should find it from another. When you’ve introduced something like this you’ve got to carry on.” **A3**

This last point illustrates perhaps the most likely solution, links to external partners. These could take the form of government, charitable, or commercial partnerships; and should be investigated as soon as possible.

5.7 Summary of Findings

These interviews allowed an insight into the thoughts of the library staff, and their perceptions of the role of computers in public libraries. The results of the interview sessions are summarised as follows.

5.7.1 The People’s Network, Internet Access, and IT in Libraries

The attitudes revealed in this section were generally positive. The staff members interviewed recognised the importance of public access to computers, both for access to the internet and for using applications such as word processing. They also identified the role that this access can play in helping address issues such as social inclusion.

Negative aspects were related to the perceived extra workload involved, for example with bookings and helping to offer advice to users. This may be due to it being a non-traditional element of the work load of the frontline staff. This was less true in the case of newer staff,

who may accept it as another part of their role. Also, in general, newer and younger staff may be more familiar with the use of computers.

5.7.2 Perceptions of Usage and Users of IT in Libraries

All the interviewees felt that the presence of public access to computers had brought in new users, but they did not think that all these new users utilised the other services offered by the library.

The staff identified the users as being made up of a mixture of people, without access to PCs at home, and perhaps with the exception of elderly people. In addition, Library B felt that its main users were children. Despite feeling that the users had no access to IT at home, the interviewees felt that the users reflected the make-up of the areas they served.

With regards to the usage, again it was felt that there was a mixture, with internet access being the most popular. Many of those interviewed felt that the PCs were not necessarily being used in the way they were intended (e.g. education, social inclusion) but this was not a problem as the main purpose was to provide access, allowing the individual to choose what they used it for.

Inappropriate use and how to address it are important considerations in planning the provision of public access to IT, especially to access to the internet. It is therefore interesting that it was not perceived to be a problem in libraries A and C. The interviewees in Library B stated that there was a problem, but it was due to children engaging in low level anti-social behaviour, usually as a form of attention seeking.

5.7.3 Perception of Training Needs

The staff interviewed felt that they had the basic skills to deal with the computers. Some were more confident than others, which they attributed to experience and 'learning on the job'. The ECDL qualification was felt to provide the skills in how to use the main packages, but more training in delivering help and troubleshooting would be desirable.

The idea of 'learning on the job' and gaining confidence and experience could be helped through informal refresher courses and practice sessions. This was welcomed by the majority of the staff interviewed.

5.7.4 The Future of IT and the People's Network within Public Libraries

There was a perception that there would be an increased emphasis on IT resources within the library, especially information access through the internet, both for users and the staff. With this increased emphasis on online information was an associated emphasis in the role of frontline staff in advising on information literacy, such as assessing the quality of a website.

There were also concerns about the standard of the current hardware, and where the funding to upgrade it would come from. The interviewees agreed that removing public access to IT would be a backwards move, and should be avoided. External partnerships to continue funding were suggested.

5.8 Overall Summary

These interviews examined libraries from differing socio-economic areas. They also included staff from different levels. Most of the views presented were fairly similar, despite quite large differences in the demographics of the communities served by the libraries. This may be due to the recognition of the importance of the role of IT in libraries.

There was no mention in seven of the eight interviews of the use of the library management system, computerised catalogues, or internal communication by email. These uses of IT appear to be integrated into the daily routine of work and accepted.

There is still an element of unease with regards as to the presence of public access to IT within the library. However this is less to do with its role as a resource, and perhaps more related to the way it is integrated and implemented within the library service, and in some cases a lack of confidence within individual members of staff.

In general, the staff attitudes displayed to the People's Network and IT provision in public libraries were positive. The importance of these resources were recognised, and although there is an element of caution, its increased emphasis in the future is welcomed.

Chapter Six – Evaluation and Recommendations for Future Study

6.1 Evaluation of the Study

In general, the study went as planned. The basis of the study was inductive. This allowed the data and case studies to be examined, and the conclusions drawn from this.

However, there were some elements that could be improved. The first example was the lack of geographical comparisons. It was anticipated that the questionnaire would be distributed to other authorities, allowing differences or similarities between the different authorities to be examined. This would also have improved the sample size, allowing the study to be more representative.

The questionnaire element also did not go entirely as was intended. In Section 2, question 8 caused confusion, resulting in some blank answers. Fowler states that a good question involves

“all the people understanding it should understand it in a consistent way and in a way that is consistent with what the researcher expected it to mean.” (1995:2)

This question appeared to meet the requirement as there was no confusion during pre-testing or pre-approval. This illustrates the complexities of questionnaire design.

Similarly, Section 3 involved ranking statements in order. Ranking questions are identified by Powell and Connaway (2004) as being open to different interpretations. This occurred in this section, but the data was still usable.

The study was concerned with the thoughts and perceptions of the library staff. These are difficult to quantify. However, a greater element of quantification could be used as more evidence to qualify the findings.

6.2 Recommendations for Further Study

- The inclusion of staff in higher management roles would provide a comparison with frontline staff. There may be differences in the way IT is integrated into other library services between these groups.

- There could be an examination of the role and acceptance of IT in the day-to-day duties of library staff (library management system, catalogues, administrative uses) compared with attitudes towards public access IT.
- A Comparison between the user survey (currently in preparation within Sheffield Public Libraries) and the staff perceptions of its use.
- Widening of the study sample geographically, to examine the feelings of staff in other authorities. Particular reference could be made to libraries facing closure partly as a result of funding issues. This would allow the survey to be more representative.

Chapter Seven - Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

The following chapter attempts to draw together the separate elements of this study.

7.2 Questionnaire and Interview Surveys

This section is divided into the areas addressed in both surveys.

7.2.1 Perceptions of the People's Network and Computers in the Library

The attitudes revealed in both surveys were generally positive. The staff members surveyed appeared to recognise the importance of public access to computers, both for access to the internet and for using applications such as word processing. They also identified the role that this access can play in helping address issues such as social inclusion.

However, there were negative elements. Although there appears to be an appreciation of the benefits of public access to IT, there are still reservations:

“First reaction of some staff to this survey was ‘we’re not allowed to criticise the People’s Network.’ That is very much the general feeling.” MQ9

Despite the assertion that this was the ‘general feeling’, there was little other evidence for this, especially in the interview stages. This could be an example of projection answering, where the individual projects their feelings onto the other staff. However, this researcher has experienced more examples of this feeling in previous work experience. It may be that this is not the general feeling within Sheffield Library Service. However, the responses may stem from issues of trust, where respondents may open-up more with colleagues than an independent outsider. This is worthy of further investigation.

The majority of negative feelings due to the perceived extra workload involved with managing public access to the IT facilities, for example bookings and helping to offer advice to users. This may be due to it being a non-traditional element of the work load of the frontline staff. This was less true in the case of newer staff, who may accept it as another part of their role. Also, in general, newer and younger staff may be more familiar with the use of computers.

There was little mention of the use of IT in fulfilling the daily duties of the staff, it appears to be accepted and taken for granted.

7.2.2 Perceptions of Usage and Users of IT in Libraries

Both surveys revealed that the main uses are perceived to be email and web searches, which reflect those identified in the People's Network Evaluation Summary (Big Lottery Fund 2004). Again, both surveys agreed that the presence of public access to computers had brought in new users, but they did not think that all these new users utilised the other services offered by the library.

Many of those surveyed felt that the PCs were not necessarily being used in the way they were intended (e.g. education, social inclusion). This was not regarded as problem as the main purpose of public access to IT is to provide access to information and resources, allowing the individual to choose what they used it for.

7.2.3 Perceptions of Training

The ECDL qualification was felt to provide the skills in how to use the main packages, but more training in delivering help and troubleshooting would be desirable. All forms of training can be seen as one of the most important ways in which negative attitudes can be addressed. Spacey, Goulding & Murray state that:

“if training is employed, an appreciation of the individual needs of staff are fundamental to its planning” (2003:61)

With this in mind, the training needs expressed by the staff should be acknowledged. Many of the staff felt that the ECDL qualification, though useful, was not always entirely appropriate, partly due to its exam based formal assessment. This is echoed by Jones, Sprague & Nankivell, who note that in their study

“Staff in the focus groups made very few references to qualifications, being primarily concerned with getting the skills to do the job.” (1999:34)

Another aspect to this is the perceived lack of opportunity to practice their skills. This view echoes that suggested by Bii & Wanyama, who feel that

“Training for the sake of training is quite dissatisfying to the library staff. After training, librarians should be offered an opportunity to practice what they have learned.” (2001:310)

This is also noted by King, McMenemy & Poulter:

“Essentially, ICT courses can never provide answers for all of the questions library staff are likely to be asked, however, they can provide a solid grounding in ICT fundamentals, which can then be built on through ongoing training and practice and ‘learning-on-the-job’.” (2006:274)

The idea of ‘learning on the job’ and gaining confidence and experience could be helped through informal refresher courses and practice sessions. This was welcomed by the majority of the staff surveyed.

7.2.4 The Future of IT and the People’s Network within Public Libraries

There was a perception that there would be an increased emphasis on IT resources within the library, especially information access through the internet, both for users and the staff. With this increased emphasis on online information was an associated emphasis in the role of frontline staff in advising on information literacy, such as assessing the quality of a website.

The literature review makes reference to the process of disintermediation and intermediation within the roles of library staff. There was no real evidence that worries about disintermediation were regarded as an issue in this survey. In terms of access to information, the internet is regarded as an important addition to the services offered by the library.

There were concerns raised about the standard of the current hardware, and where the funding to upgrade it would come from. This is an issue raised by Schofield, McMenemy & Henderson, who note that:

“Users can become easily frustrated by older and slower technologies, and thus the facilities must be modern and easy to use if they are not to discourage customers.” (2004:164).

These concerns were shared by almost all the staff surveyed.

7.3 Comparison to Other Studies

As noted in the Literature Review (Chapter Three), there have been similar studies in this area. The following points are taken from the People’s Network Evaluation Summary (2004)

and can be used as a comparison with this study, allowing examination of any changes in perception associated with this area. The statements in bold type are those from the Evaluation Summary.

The People's Network has been markedly successful in broadening the library's user base: young people and teenagers are a major user group.

The evidence collected would suggest that this is only partially true. The survey found that the staff felt that these resources have brought in younger users, but they mainly use the IT facilities. There do not tend to use other library services, particularly borrowing of books.

The credibility of the library service has been enhanced helping libraries to reposition themselves at the heart of the local community.

This would appear to be true to a certain extent. The interview survey showed that the users generally reflected the communities that the libraries served. A majority of those surveyed in both the questionnaire and interviews felt that the presence of public access IT was a positive contribution to addressing issues of social inclusion. However, as explored in the next statement, problems with the hardware can be seen to reduce the credibility of the library.

Users are overwhelmingly positive about ICT in libraries, especially the free internet access, speed of the connection and state-of-the-art technology.

This is the main area where there is a difference between the findings of this study and those published. There are problems with the external storage of the PCs which is causing frustration, along with the internet connection, as illustrated by the following statement from the questionnaire survey:

“The speed of machines is poor and I think could contribute to a negative image of libraries amongst users.” **MQ1**

These issues were raised in both the questionnaire and interview surveys. Without further investment it is difficult to see how this aspect will improve.

In addition to developing users' ICT competence and confidence, the People's Network is enabling value-added services such as portals to validated information sources and interactive reader development initiatives.

These initiatives are proceeding, with the Framework for the Future Action Plan stating that it will

“Ensure ‘products’ (inc Vital Link and UK Online) are embedded in service provision to maximise impact and support advocacy”

and

“Explore opportunities to develop more coherent offers with existing partnerships (inc. UK Online).” (MLA 2006)

At present though these do not appear to be well marketed, with very little or no perceived usage, and in some cases no knowledge of these resources by the staff.

Users would like more learner support (especially for novice users) and better on-site technical support.

This raises two issues. Firstly, the staff interviewed were unsure as to what level of support was appropriate. Also, they perceive it to be difficult fitting this role into their other tasks. Secondly, the level of support varies with the confidence and skills possessed by each individual. An alternative or additional form of training to ECDL, focussing on issue of support and troubleshooting would help address this.

Staff report positive benefits from completing ICT training but also a number of limitations with it, such as it not being strongly connected to work roles and activities.

These sentiments were echoed in this study, and again training focussing on support and troubleshooting would help address this.

The biggest challenge facing the further development of the People’s Network is the need for organisational capacity to drive forward the vision of ICT within the modern public library.

From the perspective of this survey, it would appear that the staff consider the main challenge to be continued funding of the facilities offered.

7.4 Recommendations for Addressing Negative Attitudes

As outlined in the aims of the study, there are suggestions as to how some of the issues raised can be addressed. Many of these have been developed from suggestions by the surveyed staff. It should be noted that these solutions assume that there is an available budget; unfortunately this will not always be the case in the real world.

7.4.1 Separate machines for internet and offline services, with different time limits

This could be used to allow users who wish to word process CVs, job applications, or essays (of any level i.e. from school age to adult learners) access to machines at busy times. This would reduce the conflict between people browsing the internet for pleasure as opposed to these more 'worthy' uses. However as it is unlikely that extra PCs would be put into the service points, this could actually limit internet access, worsening the problem.

A possible alternative would be 'quick use' machines with limited time slots, integrated with a central booking system. These could be available for shorter periods (for example fifteen minutes) allowing users to check email etc, increasing the availability to more users.

7.4.2 Automatic/central booking system

One of the main causes of negative views of public access to IT is the extra workload that is caused managing it. An automated system would reduce the staff time needed on this, and a central booking system would allow users to visit different sites which may be less busy than the one initially chosen, maximising usage in quieter branches.

7.4.3 Individual help

One way of increasing the support to users would be for dedicated support workers for the PCs. These could be employed on a part-time basis to cover the busiest times. They could be funded by external partnerships, or through the use of volunteers, for example local students (school, college, or university) on IT courses. This could also help build links with other organisations in the community.

7.4.4 Training

This is possibly the best way of addressing negative attitudes, but also one of the most difficult to implement. Training needs will vary between staff as a result of their background and confidence/skills in using IT. By recognising this, through a mixture of formal and informal training, staff will become better equipped to offer improved services. In addition, opportunities for individual practice sessions, allowing familiarisation with hardware such as the scanners or information web sites, were welcomed by many of the staff.

7.4.5 Partnerships

Commercial partnerships could be used as a way of supplementary funding of the IT resources, allowing the necessary upgrades. Charging for services is an alternative, but does not really fit with the aims of social inclusion. The commercialisation of library services is

controversial, but may be incorporated in an acceptable way such as branding on individual machines or an initial advertising screen or screen saver.

7.4.6 Measures of Impact

This is perhaps more difficult, as it involves a change in deep seated attitudes. Many of the staff felt that although there were more users, they were not using books. Perhaps though there should be a shift away from traditional measures such as book issues to reflect the changing nature of libraries. This has been suggested by Markless & Streatfield (2006).

7.5 Overall Conclusions

The first part of the final conclusion examines whether the initial aims have been met. They are considered as follows:

1. Who do the staff feel are using the public access PCs?

In general it appears that the staff felt that these PCs are used by a mixture of people, reflecting the communities they serve. The exceptions to this were the elderly and Library C, where there were more young users.

2. What do they perceive users to be using it for?

The main uses were identified as email and web browsing, although the more 'worthy' uses such as CV writing and information seeking were also identified. There was less of a problem with inappropriate use than was perhaps expected.

3. Are attitudes to IT in general positive or negative?

Overall, most views were positive. The use of IT in the daily routine, such as the library management system or internal communication through email were very rarely mentioned, an indicator of their general acceptance.

4. Are attitudes to public access to IT positive or negative?

The overall impression from the questionnaire and interview surveys was positive. Most respondents identified the importance of access to information for everyone, which can be provided through schemes such as the People's Network. Negative views were in the minority, but were more vocal. This may be due to the fact that where problems are perceived; they are seen as having a large impact on the individuals concerned.

5. Are negative attitudes a result of the way access is managed or due to the presence of this resource in a library environment?

In the majority of cases, negative views stem from the problems of incorporating public access into the other tasks. Booking times for users, offering support, and dealing with frustrations over lack of availability or technical problems such as printing seem to be the main issue. If these issues could be addressed, there would be an increase in positive views.

6. Are there any training issues identified by the staff?

The main issue with training is the varying levels of skills and confidence, even after training such as ECDL. Some staff would benefit from refresher courses or more informal training. The opportunity to practice these skills would help boost confidence.

7. Do these attitudes vary between employee level and geographical locations?

Unfortunately, due to the reasons outlined earlier, this has only been partially addressed. The recommendations for further study suggest ways to achieve this aim.

8. Are there any recommendations to address these issues?

These are outlined in Section 7.4.

7.6 Summary

There was little mention of the use of IT in general, for example the library management system, computerised catalogues, or internal communication by email. These uses of IT appear to be integrated into the daily routine of work and accepted.

The comments and interviews naturally came to focus on public access to IT and the People's Network.

There is still an element of unease with regards to the presence of public access to IT within the library. However this is less to do with its role as a resource, and perhaps more related to the way it is integrated and implemented within the library service, and in some cases a lack of confidence and skills within individual members of staff.

In general, the staff attitudes displayed in the surveys towards the People's Network and IT provision in public libraries were positive. The importance of these resources in contributing to the community were recognised, and although there is an element of caution, the increased emphasis on IT in the future is welcomed.

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Appendix A – Questionnaire Survey

A study of library staff attitudes to the People's Network and ICT provision in public libraries. MA Librarianship Dissertation Information Sheet

1) What is the project's purpose?

The objective of the study is to examine the attitudes of public library staff towards the People's Network (a scheme for public access to ICT and the internet in public libraries), analyse their responses and propose recommendations to improve acceptance and enthusiasm towards ICT and the People's Network in particular.

2) What will happen to me if I take part, and what do I have to do?

This study is looking to examine staff attitudes towards the People's Network. To achieve this you are asked to fill in the attached questionnaire, and return it to the address shown at the end of this sheet. These results will then be collected and analysed. All results will be treated confidentially.

3) What if something goes wrong?

If you wish to make any complaint please contact Nigel Ford, the supervisor for this project, via the Department of Information Studies on 0114 222 2630. If there is a need to take any complaint further then you can contact the University's Registrar and Secretary through the University of Sheffield Main Switchboard on 0114 222 2000.

4) Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

All the information that is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications.

5) What will happen to the results of the research project?

The project will be finished in September 2006. As stated earlier, you will not be identified in any report or publication.

6) Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This project has been reviewed by the Department of Information Studies ethics review procedure. The University's Research Ethics Committee monitors the application and delivery of the University's Ethics Review Procedure across the University.

Thank you for your cooperation and involvement in this project.

Part One – Background Information

Your age:

Your sex: M [] F []

Your position: please indicate which of the following describes your post

1. Frontline staff []
2. Frontline manager []
3. Middle management []
4. Senior manager []
5. Other (please state) []

Part Two – How do you feel about the People’s Network, internet access, and computers in libraries?

Please complete this section, marking how strongly you agree or disagree with the statements as follows:

1 = strongly agree; 2 = agree; 3 = uncertain; 4 = disagree; 5 = strongly disagree

1. The provision of internet access by the library is a good idea
1 [] 2 [] 3 [] 4 [] 5 []
2. The people using the internet have no access to PCs at home
1 [] 2 [] 3 [] 4 [] 5 []
3. The People’s Network and internet access helps address social inclusion
1 [] 2 [] 3 [] 4 [] 5 []
4. The People’s Network and internet access helps address lifelong learning
1 [] 2 [] 3 [] 4 [] 5 []
5. The People’s Network and internet access helps people gain employment
1 [] 2 [] 3 [] 4 [] 5 []
6. The People’s Network and internet access helps bring in new users
1 [] 2 [] 3 [] 4 [] 5 []
7. The People’s Network and internet access deters existing users
1 [] 2 [] 3 [] 4 [] 5 []
8. Provision of computers for offline services e.g. word processing
1 [] 2 [] 3 [] 4 [] 5 []
9. Internet access should be free of charge
1 [] 2 [] 3 [] 4 [] 5 []
10. The People’s Network is an effective way of providing IT access to the public
1 [] 2 [] 3 [] 4 [] 5 []
11. The people who need IT access are being catered for
1 [] 2 [] 3 [] 4 [] 5 []
12. Internet access in the library provides access to a wider range of resources
1 [] 2 [] 3 [] 4 [] 5 []
13. Inappropriate use of the internet is a problem
1 [] 2 [] 3 [] 4 [] 5 []
14. The hardware (e.g. PCs, printers) needs to be updated
1 [] 2 [] 3 [] 4 [] 5 []
15. Internet access is not necessary in the library
1 [] 2 [] 3 [] 4 [] 5 []

Part Three - What do you feel are the main uses of the PCs in your library?

Please rank the following 1- 8, with 1 being most important and 8 least important.

- Internet access – email
- Internet access – web searching/browsing for pleasure
- Internet access – web searching/browsing for own study
(e.g. family history)
- Internet access – web searching/browsing for education
(e.g. homework)
- Internet access – web searching/browsing for employment
(e.g. vacancies, CVs)
- Use of desktop packages (e.g. word processing)
- Accessing the People's Network website
- Accessing information services
(e.g. Know UK / Oxford Reference Online / Britannica Online)

Part Four - Training

Do you feel that you have had sufficient training to support the provision of Internet access and other PC uses?

Yes No N/A

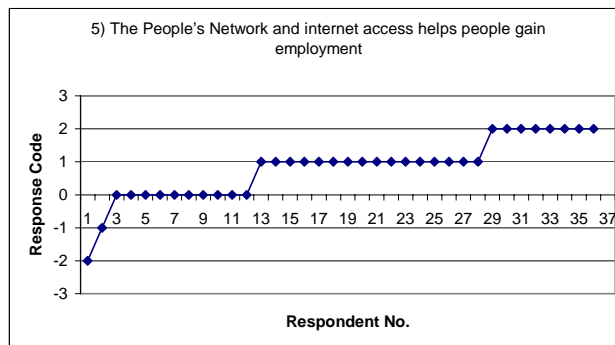
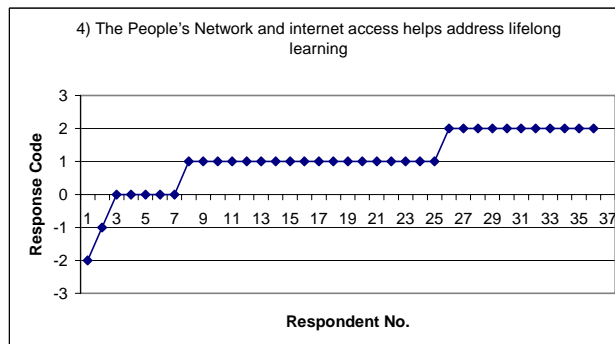
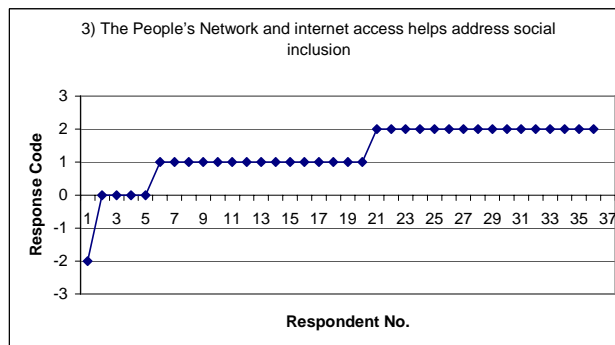
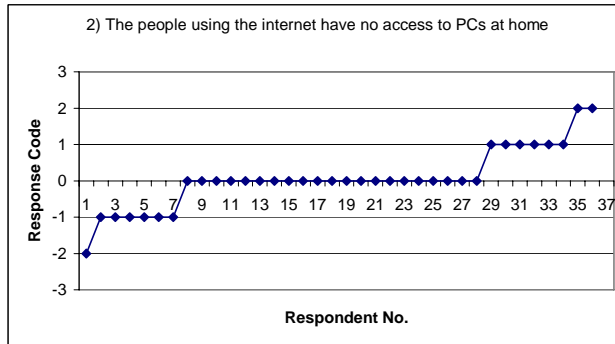
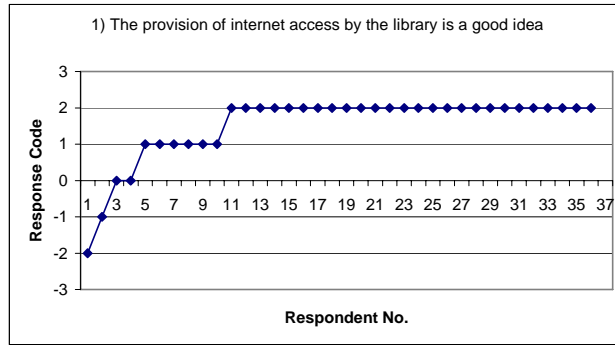
Do you feel that you need further training in:

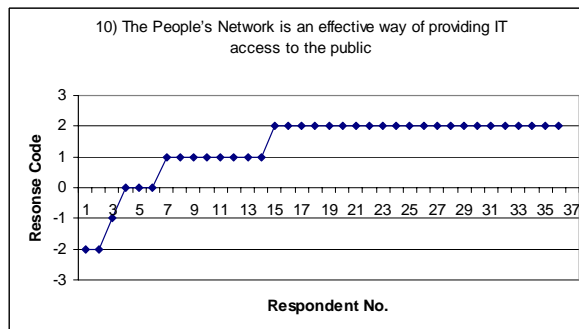
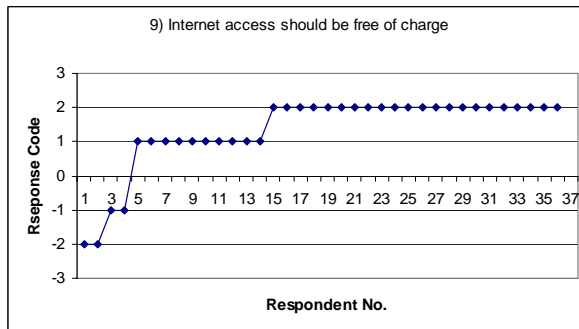
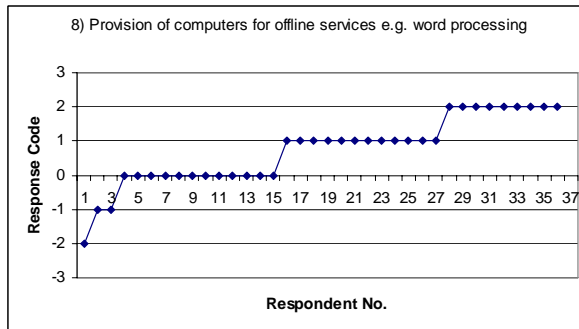
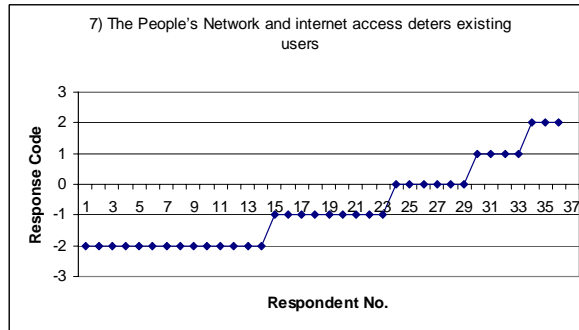
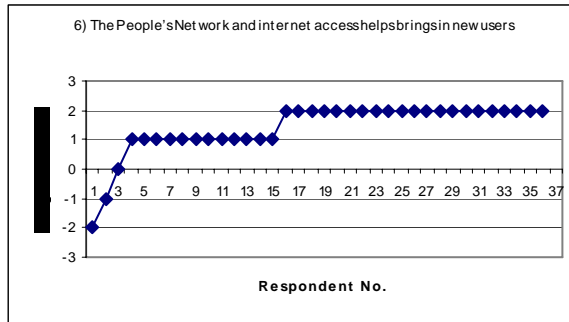
16. Use of software packages through formal training e.g. ECDL
17. Use of software packages through informal in-house workshops
18. People management skills e.g. implementing acceptable use policies
19. Delivering help and advice e.g. assisting with word processing

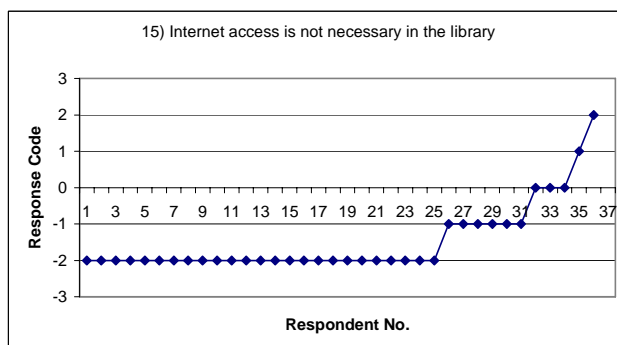
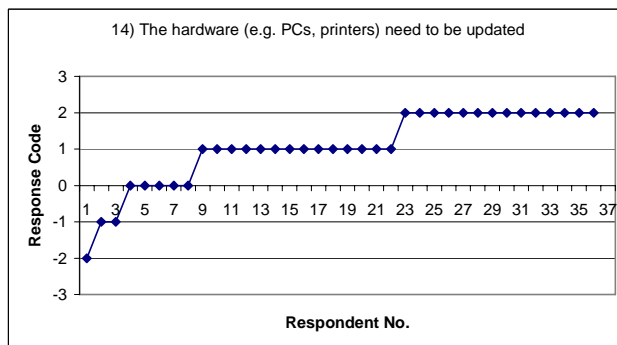
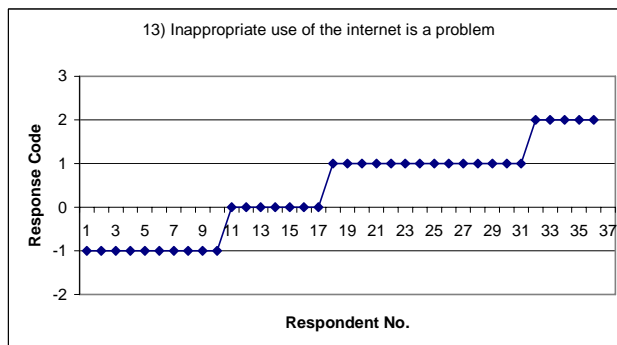
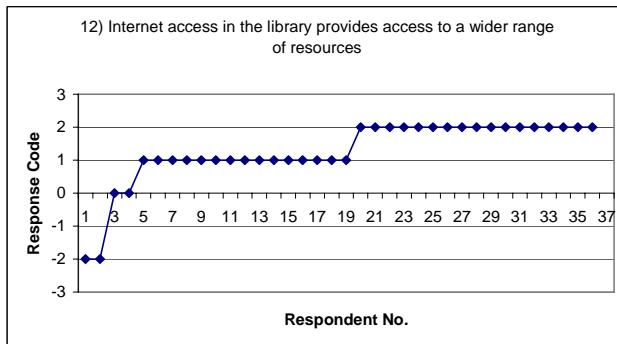
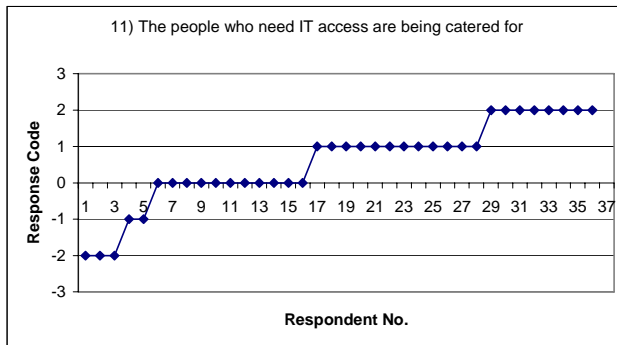
Part Five - Do you have any other comments?

Please use this space for any comments that you feel are relevant

**Appendix B
Questionnaire
Section 2 Results**







Appendix C - Questionnaire Comments

MQ1

More training with Internet searches would be helpful

The PN is a potentially great resource that may have brought in many new users. However, the speed of machines is poor and I think could contribute to a negative image of libraries amongst users.

MQ2

Lack of a central booking system means that the same few people are hogging the people's network machines, particularly in the central library building, by booking 1 hr slots at each of the different service points, e.g. SIS / MV/ CL/ AS/ CST.

This means that there are no free PCs for people who only want an hour slot.

It is impossible for staff to prevent this without a central booking system of some kind.

I think the main reason staff may have negative feelings about the people's network is not because they fail to see the benefits it brings for the service and the service users but because of the amount of time and energy it takes to administer the system on an already busy counter.

MQ5

The support from the help line is often not very helpful. As frontline staff we are the ones who invariably spend much of our time 'troubleshooting' – which at the moment is a big problem as staffing levels are very low.

I feel it would be esp. helpful if we had either paid workers and/ or uni. Students (for example) floating around at times - for the public to make use of their *recent* I.T experience.

MQ6

In my own base library the PN PCs are used for legitimate purposes i.e. email, word processing, searching for information, job searches.

However, I also work at times in other libraries where the PCs are used by children just for messing about basically because they bored and don't know what else to do.

I'm sure that's not what the government's intention was in giving internet access to all!

MQ9

First reaction of some staff to this survey was 'we're not allowed to criticise the People's Network'. That is very much the general feeling. A lot is not really library related e.g. if so

many people want to use email it might have saved a few post offices by putting PN in there. Of course people come in to use libraries if you put PN in – they would come in any where that did. Pity is that most of them won't use other library facilities. Have often had users sitting waiting intently for next PC to be free – will sit doing nothing for 20 mins, won't use other library material, even if it is offered while they are waiting.

I have been sworn at by more PN users in one year than in my working in libraries, usually if a PC is not instantly available. Only a minority behave badly, but a sizeable minority and staff perceive the problem to be worse than it is. Getting action from management dealing with problems is long-winded and cumbersome.

MQ10

The facilities available to the public need to reflect the technology that's also available to buy, regardless of the cost, such as USB drives, colour printers, Microsoft XP.

MQ12

We need greater investment in People's Network as the equipment is in need of updating.

MQ14

The main problem we have is with the speed of the internet due to the fact we use the council's server which particularly on Friday's is very slow due to departments running off large weekly reports.

MQ15

PN does provide library staff with IT skills they wouldn't have had. PN and especially internet access opens a whole new information source to be learnt by existing staff who haven't been able to master them at school. Hardware and IT sources aren't easy to learn quickly and the service is temporarily poorer until the school-trained computer literate staff can come in to posts as they will be able to concentrate more on evaluating sites etc. Booking and allied problems cause considerable friction. The public 'demand' what they want even though they can see there is no possibility of being able to use a machine for example, because they are all booked or occupied. Public attitude problems day after day cause misery not had in such concentrated form pre PN. Collecting of prints is seen by them to give them the right to push in front of any queue.

Much of society is now internet literate and more and more deals are cheaper online.

Members of the public without internet are severely disadvantaged.

Staff don't have enough time to serve at counter, find books and information, and help with PN user's problems.

Existing users resent time spent on helping PN users and doing bookings. PN users want more up-to-date facilities e.g. ability to use USB's/CD ROMs which are not part of the Governments' PN provision and authorities can't provide it.

For the large proportion of PN users they are emailing relatives, booking holidays or writing letters and it is very helpful.

Information is now provided to staff on computers and not in paper form – this means it is not always accessible but managers don't always realise this.

MQ17

Booking system is a problem!! For education may not always be enough.

Too much staff time is spent on PN booking, booking, help, and printing.

It may disturb other users/readers if unsupervised young children bang the enter button when they play simple games. Waste of money!

MQ18

Everyone's needs/interests are different – some will feel PN should be used primarily for study/education. However, email might be the only way for some people to keep in contact with distant relations so this equally important for them.

Some users are very rude/impatient if they cannot access a PN immediately or feel someone has impinged on their time, which can lead to difficult situations for staff.

Some user expect/almost demand assistance from staff for long periods which can prevent us from carrying out counter duties as we would wish.

Printer not always able to cope with the large volumes of printouts sent by several people at the same time, again leading to frustration and mix-ups.

MQ24

I would like more training but not sure that its entirely appropriate that front line library staff should spend their time teaching computer skills. PN is a service provided by libraries, but only one amongst many. Perhaps a bit more clarity about what we are expected to be providing to the public is necessary.

As far as modernising PN goes, a lot of people find it frustrating that the service isn't set up for anything other than floppy discs. Whether money should be spent on this is however debateable. Personally I'd prefer resources to be spent on book collection. PN provides an invaluable service for many of our customers but its not the be all and end all of the library service!

MQ26

Email, job searching, word processing, and browsing for pleasure are the most common uses, and all are equally as important.

I have not had any training, but I am very computer literate so this isn't a problem for me. However, other members of staff feel that they would benefit from more training. Training should be given on how to manage customers who abuse the PN.

MQ29

Most people do not need help but occasionally I have been asked about using a scanner (of which I have no knowledge).

Some problems are just a matter of explaining English meanings to foreigners- so not an IT problem but a language problem.

MQ31

Customers often ask about the use of memory sticks.

Need to be trained on scanner.

MQ32

The applications on the People's Network are limiting – the USB ports, which we have the hardware for, need to be activated. Users should be able to use the CD Rom drives. At the moment the only removable storage device available is outdated floppy disc. They should all have headphones for multimedia.

MQ33

People often require basic skills support in the use of both the operation of the computer and the navigating of websites.

There are often complaints about the computers being slow to respond and slow at loading websites.

New users often think there is a charge for the service.

MQ34

All our PCs are well used, and the public love having them to use. However, the computers are so slow that they are causing the public to go elsewhere!

MQ36

As a younger member of staff I am aware of a number of computer procedures that my older colleagues are not. Although a number of them have had formal training (ECDL) they do not

feel confident enough or remember enough to help with customer enquiries. Also we are not sufficiently staffed to spend prolonged periods of time with customers who need our help. As far as I am aware our stance is that we presume patrons have a basic awareness but if this isn't the case (which is quite frequently) then we need to promote more courses. On the whole the provision of the PN is fantastic but I think staff need more training or to be made more aware of how to deal with customers who misuse it.

Appendix D – Interview Schedule

Interview Guide

Hello, my name is Owen Coxall. I'm doing research for my dissertation about the Peoples Network, Internet access and ICT, and how public library staff feel towards these. All your answers will be treated in confidence and at no time will your name be revealed. There are no right or wrong answers, it is your opinions, thoughts and feelings that are more important.

(NOT TAPED)

Background Information

Your position: please state which of the following describes your post

Frontline staff, Frontline manager, Middle management, Senior manager, Other (please state)

(START TAPING)

People's Network, internet access, and computers in libraries

I'd like to start with some questions about the impact of computers in libraries. If we can look at how you feel about the Peoples network and internet access and also the users.

1. Would you say that the provision of internet access by the library is a good idea?
Why should libraries provide this.
2. Following on from this, is the People's Network is an effective way of providing IT access to the public.
3. Internet access in the library provides access to a wider range of resources than before it was introduced.
4. In general who would you say are using the computers? [young/old, male/female?]
5. The people using the internet have no access to PCs at home
6. The people who need IT access are being catered for

7. There are a number of aims for libraries, do you think that the People's Network and internet access helps fulfil these?

Social inclusion

Lifelong learning

Employment

Brings in new users or deters existing users

What do you feel are the main uses of the PCs in your library?

Internet access – email

Internet access – web searching/browsing for pleasure

Internet access – web searching/browsing for own study (e.g. family history)

Internet access – web searching/browsing for education (e.g. homework)

Internet access – web searching/browsing for employment (e.g. vacancies, CVs)

Use of desktop packages (e.g. word processing)

Accessing the People's Network website

Accessing information services (e.g. Know UK / Oxford Reference Online / Britannica Online)

8. Do you think these are valid uses?

9. Is there a problem with inappropriate use?

10. Do you think that there should be a charge for these services? Would this be a way of deterring inappropriate use or would this have the effect of reducing access for people who need it.

Training

11. Do you feel confident about using computers?

12. Do you feel that you have had sufficient training to support the provision of Internet access and other PC uses?

13. Do you think you have been given the opportunity to practise skills after any training?

14. What do you think users expect of you?

15. A variety of people use public libraries - do you think that the training is flexible enough to deal with all users?

16. Do you think your ICT skills have helped benefit users?

The future

17. Do you think that ICT is important?

18. Do you think that internet access will continue through the Peoples Network or will individual authorities take responsibility for it themselves?

19. What is the attitude of other staff towards PCs, is it positive or negative?

20. Many people feel that libraries are about books, to what extent do you agree with this?

21. Do you think that ICT helps to change the image of public libraries in any way? For example a change in users.

22. What do you feel are the implications for the future? Will there be more emphasis on computers and electronic resources, and a change in the role of librarians?

23. Any other comments?

THANKYOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION