

**The impact of *Framework for the Future* on the promotion of
reading to adults in Sheffield Public Libraries**

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Abstract

In 2003, the UK's Department for Culture, Media & Sport introduced *Framework for the Future*, a major national strategy for public libraries which outlined a ten year 'vision' for the service. The active promotion of reading to adults was emphasised, and many advocates of reader development welcomed the strategy, believing it had the potential to increase the priority given to adult reading promotion. Other library professionals disagreed and expressed far more scepticism to *Framework's* treatment of reading promotion. As yet there has been no detailed evaluation of *Framework's* effects, and this study aimed to address this by examining the impact of *Framework* on the promotion of reading to adults in Sheffield public libraries.

Because the research was exploratory and intended to examine Sheffield libraries' position in depth, a broadly qualitative approach was adopted. Interviews were conducted with management based at the central library, frontline desk staff working in four different branch libraries and an intermediary level of staff with responsibility for reading promotion in several branches. In order to assess the opinion of wider range of frontline staff questionnaires containing fixed-response items were distributed, so some qualitative elements were included in the research.

The study concludes that at the management level, *Framework* has had a profound impact on adult reader development work. Reading promotion is now approached strategically and a major staffing restructure has been put in place to support this strategy. A range of new initiatives aimed at adults has also been introduced, although it is not clear if these are attracting new audiences or simply supporting existing readers. It does not seem that the strategy has cascaded down to frontline levels of staff as yet however; some desk staff are aware of the new promotion, but their working culture and interactions with readers have not generally been affected. Recommendations for future research and practical suggestions for Sheffield libraries are then discussed.

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1 Introduction

1.1 *The Value of Reading*

The demise of pleasure reading in the face of increasing alternative leisure options has frequently been predicted (Shearer, 2001). Yet reading for pleasure remains a popular activity for large numbers of adults and children, to the extent that something of a 'reading renaissance' has occurred with a noticeable growth in interest (Denham, 2003). When the benefits and value of pleasure reading are considered it becomes easy to see why this is the case. Manguel (1996) for example evocatively describes how reading transports him to another world, and how it enriches his perceptions and experience. More objective research also testifies to its impact, as demonstrated by Usherwood & Toyne (2002). Following extensive interviews, their study concluded that imaginative literature plays a vital part in reader's lives and can even, on occasion, transform those lives. O'Rourke (1993) too found that readers derive experiences of real quality and worth from their reading choices, regardless of what kind of material was chosen; in her view, even the slightest romance can serve to broaden the reader's horizons.

1.2 *The Promotion of Reading*

Libraries and librarians are well placed to support the burgeoning interest in reading, and can offer various forms of reading promotion designed to further the reading habit. Reading promotion can take many forms, and is defined simply as "any means by which libraries encourage people to read or to widen their reading horizons" (Kinnell & Shepherd, 1998:7). In recent years, reading promotion has been characterised by a 'reader development' approach. Although this is by no means the only method of promotion available to library staff, Forrest (2001) suggests that the phrase has become "part of the everyday vocabulary of public libraries" (*ibid*: 168) to the extent that 'reading promotion' and 'reader development' seem to be used interchangeably by many library professionals. To advocates of reader development the experience of the reader is all-important. The emphasis is on

the enhancement of reading for enjoyment and pleasure, and on the individual reader's interpretation of the book. The librarian actively assists the reader by making the library collection accessible and broadening choices, aiming to create an engagement between book and reader. It is the quality of this engagement, and not the quality of the book in itself that matters.

1.3 *Framework for the Future and Reader Development*

Children's librarianship has always been underpinned by formalised reading promotion schemes but, for reasons that will be explored in the literature review, support for the adult reader has been weak until relatively recently. During the last decade there has been considerable growth in adult reader development work (Train, 2003a), but there were concerns that the significance of this work had been neglected by policy makers and key government reports. In 2003 the much-anticipated publication of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) document *Framework for the Future* seemed to herald major improvements in this respect.

Following extensive consultation with major stakeholders in the library sector, *Framework* presents a strategic ten year vision for the modern library service. Three 'strands' are regarded as crucial to the modern mission of public libraries:

- The promotion of reading and informal learning.
- Access to digital skills and services including e-government
- Measures to tackle social exclusion, build community identity and develop citizenship.

Certainly reading and reader development are not the only priority of *Framework*- and nor should they be- but the strategy proposes a very balanced service incorporating both traditional library principles and innovation. Unlike any previous significant reports into the public library service, *Framework* gives equal status to reading promotion, digital services and social inclusion. The benefits of reading are stressed, and the role of the library service in encouraging the desire to read is considered essential:

“In modern life reading is becoming more important than ever. Reading stimulates the imagination and develops creativity...reading draws the reader into a continual journey linking related interests” (*ibid*: 24).

“Public libraries’ mission to promote the skills, and even more importantly, the appetite, for reading is vital.” (*ibid*: 24).

Importantly, while *Framework* does encourage the provision of a wide range of quality book stock, it recognises that the promotion of reading does not end there. In accordance with the tenets of reader development, the active role of the library in supporting readers is regarded as critical:

“Libraries do not just provide a store of books: they help people experience and enjoy the pleasure of reading. In recent years there has been an important shift in how libraries view and plan their work with reading...reader development strategies have become far more widespread” (*ibid*: 25).

In many respects, *Framework for the Future* appears to represent an unparalleled advancement as far as proponents of the library’s role in adult reader development are concerned. The strategy emphasises the active participation of library staff in supporting readers and makes it clear that this support should be available to all readers, regardless of age, ability or tastes. Although reading as a passport to learning is a theme of *Framework*, the value of reading as a leisure pursuit, its worth to individuals as an activity in and of itself, is highlighted. The need to engage with potential readers beyond the library building as well as with committed library users is also considered vital.

1.4 *The Research Context*

Framework promises much in the area of adult reader development, but has it delivered and has it really made a difference to the way public libraries approach their reader development work?

As yet there have been no in-depth evaluations of *Framework for the Future's* impact, so it is impossible to ascertain if its goals with regards to reading promotion have been fulfilled. This study was motivated by the lack of assessment of *Framework*, and was intended to address the gap in research to some extent. Because *Framework* is just that- a framework- it is considered flexible to some extent and therefore open to interpretation by individual library authorities (Ruse, 2003). Given this and the absence of previous work to build on, it seemed appropriate to explore in some depth how *Framework* has been interpreted and implemented by one particular library service. Due to the established relationship between the city's library services and Sheffield University's Department of Information Studies, Sheffield public library was considered an ideal candidate.

1.5 *Aims and Objectives*

The broad aim of this study was to assess the impact of *Framework for the Future* on Sheffield library's adult reader development work. A number of more specific objectives guided the study, and these can be expressed in the form of the following research questions:

- Has the priority given to adult readers increased since *Framework*?
- Has library policy and strategy regarding adult reader development been changed as a result of *Framework*?
- Have any new means of promoting reading to adults been introduced? If so, are they targeting new or existing readers?
- If *Framework* has been implemented, to what degree had this affected frontline operations in libraries? Do all levels of staff feel that it has actually made a difference?

2 Literature Review

2.1 *The Public Library and the Reading Experience*

The history- and for many commentators, the future- of the public library service is intrinsically bound to the provision of books and the reading experience. As Train (2003a: 30) states, “Public libraries were developed in the mid-19th century to promote and encourage the act of reading. Despite considerable changes in appearance as a result of the introduction of Information Technology and electronic access to information, the original aim has been maintained”. On initial inspection this purpose seems clear and straightforward, yet further consideration of the development of the public library suggests that the service’s history has always been characterised by debate regarding exactly what type of reading experience should be encouraged. Public libraries were established during a time when reading for pleasure was frequently perceived as a waste of mental energy, and their initial primary purpose was to support the self-education of the working classes (Kinnell & Shepherd, 1998). Baker (2002) suggests that as a consequence, the library service’s support of leisure reading has long been a contentious issue and there are many who feel that fiction provision is irrelevant to the service; the focus should only be on the provision of educational material. Snape (1995) too asserts that ‘the great fiction question’ has troubled libraries for many years, and Kinnell & Sturges (1996) maintain that the debate is no less significant today than it was to the founders of the public library service: “At the heart of the issues surrounding public libraries, from their inception to the present day, has been an imprecise formal definition of their role. Should they be a medium of education, an information source, a cultural focus for communities, or an addition of people’s leisure pursuits through the lending of fiction?” (*ibid*: xiv).

While the contention surrounding the core purpose of the public library continues at the professional level, other evidence indicates that for library users at least the support of leisure reading is regarded as a vital aspect of the service. The Reading Agency, a charity dedicated to supporting libraries’ work with readers, identifies public libraries as the “UK’s most significant providers of the reading

experience". The Agency's statistics indicate that public libraries lend 341 million books each year; of these 168.5 million are adult fiction. Many authors, including Snape (1996), Sturges (1996) and Van Riel (2003) also point to the high proportion of loans that are accounted for by fiction and suggest that this demand for leisure reading deserves to be taken seriously by those in the library profession. In addition to such quantitative information, qualitative evidence also supports the assertion that users value their library's support of reading for pleasure: Toyne & Usherwood (2001) used rigorous qualitative techniques to examine the views of library staff and users with regards to the library's role in reader development. The research indicates that in spite of the increasing emphasis on IT, book lending is still perceived as the key function of the public library and that the imaginative literature the service provides contributes significantly to users' development as readers. It seems then that although it may not have been the original goal of the public library, the support of leisure reading has become a valued attribute.

2.2 *The Reluctance to Promote*

Given the service's long, if contested, relationship with leisure reading it is perhaps surprising that traditionally public libraries have offered little in the way of promotion and advice aimed at the adult reader. While guidance for younger readers is an established and valued feature of the library service, support for adult leisure readers has generally been restricted to the simple provision of materials (Chambers and Stoll 1996; Van Riel 2003). The librarian is happy to respond to factual reference enquiries, but reluctant to extend the same advice to the reader who seeks support regarding their leisure reading. The public library service's somewhat ambivalent attitude to the encouragement of reading for pleasure may well have contributed to this reluctance, and a number of more specific factors are identified in the literature. Van Riel (1993:81) suggests that the "complicated taboos and snobberies which surround attitudes to reading fiction" have strengthened the prevailing unwillingness to support leisure reading, a view which is echoed by Shearer (2001). Saricks & Brown (1997) also acknowledge the impact of negative attitudes towards fiction and leisure reading, but add that more practical issues should be considered too. Arguably more so than dealing with reference enquiries,

recommending new directions for leisure reading can prove a challenging task which requires a considerable degree of product knowledge; it is perhaps understandable that library staff feel cautious. Finally, it has also been suggested that librarians have remained wary of providing promotion or guidance for fear of compromising the perceived neutrality of the library service and giving the impression that they are somehow trying to limit people's freedom of choice (Train, 2003a).

Any or all of these factors could plausibly explain the historical reluctance of the librarian to offer support, but it seems a moot point if adults are content to make their own choices and would prefer not to have assistance. It could be argued that if adult users wanted help they would seek it out, and that there is little reason for librarians to make reading recommendations unless specifically asked; however, Saricks & Brown (1997) argue that a fear of appearing frivolous or 'wasting staff time', rather than a lack of need, prevents many people from seeking advice regarding their leisure reading. Van Riel & Fowler (1996) and Ross (2001) suggest that the wide choice of books available can be daunting to the reader, and attempting to select a suitable title from the myriad available often proves a frustrating and time-consuming task. Not surprisingly, one reader observes that "life's too short to make a lot of mistakes. Advice about where to start would be welcome" (Van Riel & Fowler, 1996:119). Furthermore, Toyne & Usherwood (2001) found that readers increasingly wanted and expected guidance from library staff, and felt that "choosing a good read is a skill, which library staff should help to develop" (*ibid*: 3). By no means all library users would welcome or require support; committed readers, for example, develop their own systems for choosing new material (Ross, 2001) and would perhaps find unsolicited advice unhelpful if not intrusive. For inexperienced readers, people seeking new directions and those who are unsure if reading is for them, however, some form of guidance could be extremely valuable in narrowing down choices from the huge range of available books.

2.3 *A More Active Role*

In spite of adult users' desire for increased support from librarians, for many years the traditional stance of neutrality and non-intervention has endured. However

there are signs that during the past ten or fifteen years the situation has changed, and in order to understand why this is the case consideration of the turbulent recent history of the public library service is necessary. Successive local government reorganisations throughout the eighties and nineties impacted negatively on the public library service and “inevitably meant that much time which would have been used in providing services has been absorbed into restructuring to meet new geographical boundaries or changed management structures” (Kinnell & Shepherd, 1998). During the same period libraries bore the brunt of cuts in public expenditure to a disproportionate extent and this, in combination with the rising cost of books, led to a decline in investment in new book stock. Adult book issue figures- particularly fiction- were adversely affected as a result, causing some to question the continued existence of the public library. Train (2003a) describes these external demands on the library service but, with hindsight, is able to recognise that perhaps the pressure had at least one positive effect: “an increasing professional awareness that public libraries in Britain were not engaging adults as much as they could- and should” (*ibid*: 32). A growing number of professionals recognised that in order to reverse the library service’s declining fortunes a cultural shift and an increased focus on the library’s role in leisure reading was necessary.

Reading the Future (Van Riel, 1992), a conference held in 1992, is considered to have played a significant early role in the shift towards a greater professional awareness of reading promotion to adults (Kinnell & Shepherd, 1998). For the first time librarians, booksellers and publishers were brought together to examine the place of literature in public libraries. Delegates emphasised their desire to move away from IT provision and back toward a more traditional role: “It’s time we fought back, it’s time we reasserted the fundamental facts that libraries are actually about books, about culture and about creativity” (McKee, 1992: 38). The need to provide a broad range of fiction was a running theme of the conference, but more than this passive contribution to leisure reading the active and valuable role of the library in supporting its users was underlined: “We can help to lead people on, to lead people to develop their reading interests. We can lead people to what I would call an active choice” (Coleman, 1992: 33).

Reading the Future urged librarians to take a more proactive role in the promotion of reading, and it seems that to some extent this recommendation has been fulfilled: “reader development, with adult readers in particular, has experienced a dramatic growth in recent years”. (Train, 2003a: 30). McKearney, Wilson-Fletcher & Readman (2001) agree that libraries are working far more closely with adult readers and sums the situation up with “There’s so much more energy now, so much more thinking going into how librarians buy and display books, how they talk to people about their reading, how they plan to get reading to people who can’t, or won’t, get to the library” (*ibid*: 116). More specific examples of these reader development projects and popular methods of reading promotion will now be considered.

2.4 *Methods of Reader Development*

2.4.1 *Interactive Techniques*

Reader development work encompasses a wide range of tools, ranging from personal and interactive to impersonal and passive (Ross, 2001). The most personal approach must surely be the one-to-one conversation between the librarian and the library user, in which the librarian listens as the reader describes their tastes and current reading habits and then suggests further titles that might be of interest. For Saricks & Brown (1997), ‘suggest’ is the operative word- the librarian should not make personal recommendations as they would to a friend, but *suggestions* based purely on what that particular reader has told them, unclouded by their own feelings and interests. The personal interaction has advantages in that it is tailored to the individual reader, and if successful can truly lead the ‘right reader to the right book’. The challenges must be acknowledged too, however (Towey, 2001). Firstly, although a variety of reference tools are available to support staff, the librarian must have considerable knowledge of a wide range of genres including those which might be of little interest to them on a personal level. Good interpersonal skills and confidence are vital, and the time consuming nature of the exercise cannot be denied. In an ideal world, the service would be on offer to all library members at all times, but realistically the constraints of time and budget must be considered.

Like the one-to-one conversation, membership of a book group provides a good opportunity for those readers who enjoy sharing their experiences and view reading as an interactive, communal activity. Unlike the interview however, reading groups demand far less individual time from the librarian and thus represent a feasible way of generating enthusiasm for new material among greater numbers of readers. The librarian's role is to coordinate, to establish the group and offer space for members to convene (Denham, 2003a), but beyond this the reading group can become self-regulating. Reading groups have experienced a tremendous surge in popularity in recent years (Train, 2003a), and the benefits to members are considerable. Kendrick (2001) describes the sense of camaraderie and pleasure derived by the members of her group, but beyond simple enjoyment it seems that the groups genuinely serve to change and broaden members' reading habits. Van Riel and Fowler (1996: 115), for example, feel that book groups provide a "stimulating catalyst" for those wishing to expand their reading. Similarly, research by Hartley, presented in Denham (2003a), indicates that book groups read a wide range of material, and that members are often motivated to try books they would not otherwise consider.

2.4.2 *The Passive Approach*

While many people view reading as a shared process, it is important to recognise that not every individual will welcome this approach- as Kendrick (2001) and Elkin (2003) emphasise, reading remains a personal, private activity for many people and attempts to intrude on this would be questionable. However, the librarian can also offer guidance via a more passive approach, which Towey (2001:134) sums up neatly as "the act of grouping, displaying or highlighting books to make them accessible to readers seeking to self-select titles". At the most basic level, every library engages in this form of intervention to some extent because, as Kinnell & Shepherd (1998) explain, the general layout, presentation and arrangement of stock will affect how the reader makes their choices. Simply presenting some titles in a face-out arrangement, for example, will make them more accessible to the library user. Segregating fiction by genre is commonly employed, and evidence suggests that this is both popular and effective (Saricks & Brown,1997). However, while

useful to some extent, this technique alone may not be enough to render the collection truly accessible; readers may feel they should only be browsing in ‘their’ particular genre area, hardly the widening of choices successful intervention hopes to achieve.

One way of overcoming this limitation is through the use of themed promotional displays, annotated book lists and bookmarks to draw attention to particular areas of the collection. Judicious selection of themes can show readers the extent of a library’s stock, not just new or popular titles (Kinnell & Shepherd, 1998). In accordance with this, Saricks & Brown (1997) have found an ongoing ‘Good Books You May Have Missed’ exhibit to be very well-received. The possibilities for themed promotions are considerable, with a seemingly endless array of ideas. Film and TV tie-ins and book award themes are common, but Ross & Chelton (2001) also recommend attending to how readers select their books to develop more innovative approaches. For example, their research found that readers choose fiction to suit their current mood, and so a selection of titles aimed at “Vegging Out” might appeal to readers who are feeling particularly stressed.

Statistics presented by Kinnell & Shepherd (1998) suggest that a large proportion of libraries employ such passive intervention techniques, but are they effective? Evidence seems to suggest they are, prompting Van Riel (1993: 82) to state that such promotion “always shifts stock”. More specifically, Train (2003b) examined the factors affecting reading choices, and concluded that while promotional displays are by no means the only factor, they are influential and a valuable means of bringing wider reading choices to library users. Significantly, the impact need not be limited to established readers, as Wilson & Train’s (2005) account of the *Give Me a Break* initiative demonstrates. The promotional displays in this project were designed to target people using libraries but not necessarily to borrow fiction, such as computer users. User surveys elicited many positive comments, and 81% of users choosing from the display responded that they had been encouraged to try something new.

2.4.3 *Beyond the Library*

While the techniques described above are put into practice within the library, a significant aspect of reader development work can involve reaching those who do not- or cannot- use the library itself. Reading promotions can be used to extend the reading habits of established readers, but also to foster and promote the reading habit in the first place. Mayo (2001) describes the wide range of options offered by one American library service to adults and children who do not use the library for social reasons or because of disability. Services include Books-By-Mail, a bookmobile, collections for new adult readers and an extensive Talking Books library. The librarian makes an active, vital contribution to the success of these initiatives in that staff must consider the needs and tastes of the readers and make appropriate suggestions. The Books-By-Mail service, for example, is often used by committed readers who have a clear idea of the kind of books they enjoy. These choices are quickly exhausted however, and then staff must successfully introduce new areas of reading.

Many libraries provide such services at a local level, but recent developments in the UK at least have been characterised by larger scale projects and partnerships with other agencies. Though not exclusively concerned with social inclusion work, many of the projects supported by the DCMS/Wolfson Public Libraries Challenge fund have targeted 'hard to reach' potential readers. The Vital Link, for example, aims to develop partnerships with the basic skills sector in order to support and encourage the leisure reading of emergent adult readers (Denham, 2003a). The challenges of such work should not be underestimated, and it is unrealistic to expect huge changes to happen overnight. Nonetheless, evaluation indicates that the initiative is certainly beginning to reach the target audience and break down the barriers between the different partners involved (Train, Usherwood & Brooks, 2002). Public libraries also have considerable involvement with the BBC's Reading and Writing (RaW) campaign to improve adult literacy skills. Although not exclusively concerned with reading for pleasure, the encouragement of leisure reading is a significant aspect of the RaW initiative and the BBC provides relevant advocacy materials and fiction collections, such as *Quick Reads*, to public libraries.

2.4.4 The Impact of New Technology

There have been concerns that growth in the use of IT may overshadow more work with books and readers. However, Saricks (2001) cautions against creating an artificial dichotomy between the book and IT- rather the relationship can be complementary. Recent developments seem to vindicate this view, for if anything new reader development initiatives have been supported and enhanced by the use of IT, to the extent that new technologies may overcome some of the problems associated with conventional methods of intervention.

As discussed previously, providing suggestions to the individual reader can be demanding, and electronic reference tools offer valuable support to the librarian. For example, Saricks & Brown (1997) speak with enthusiasm about the NoveList electronic database, which facilitates the librarian's task by providing access to a wide, searchable range of book reviews and annotations. The Internet too offers many possibilities, such as the popular Fiction-L listserv on which librarians can discuss queries and promotion techniques. Electronic resources can be of great benefit to readers themselves too, and librarians can provide tools to help individuals make their own reading choices. Denham (2003b) provides a notable example- the successful AskChris website, developed by staff at Essex Libraries. Designed to meet the needs of both confident and emergent readers, the site allows users to explore the difficult 'what should I read next?' by selecting reviewed books from a wide range of themes. More sophisticated still is whichbook.net, which categorises books by mood rather than genre and provides the option of specifying details such as book length and the preferred gender of the lead character.

Such tools address some of the fundamental challenges to successful intervention, in that readers receive a service that can be highly tailored to their own interests without the practical limitations imposed by a lack of staff time and resources. In addition, electronic databases are not restricted by genre classification- a title can appear in more than one category, and so the user can be introduced to a far wider range of material than would be achieved by browsing the shelves alone.

This is not to say that IT will replace personal contact, or that people would want it to- the rising popularity of book groups, for example, suggests that many readers enjoy sharing their experiences and these services should always be on offer. But electronic tools do provide viable support, and serve as a surprising ally to more conventional means of reading promotion.

2.5 *Reader Development at the Policy Level*

The literature suggests that at a frontline level, reader development work with adults has increased considerably during the past ten or fifteen years. However, evidence also indicates that this growth has not necessarily been reflected in library planning and policy. In a general sense the public library has always suffered from something of a 'policy vacuum' (Muddiman & Black, 1993), and the absence of a single national policy (until the introduction of *Framework* in 2003) has no doubt contributed to this problem. With regards to reading promotion specifically, the lack of policy at even a local level seems a particularly acute problem- Van Riel (1993) criticised public libraries for their failure to develop adult reading promotion policy, particularly in view of the fact that sound policies generally underpin work with children in this area. Six years later, in spite of the rising awareness and application of adult reader development that had transpired in the mean time, it seems that little had improved; Kinnell & Shepherd's (1998) extensive national survey of public library authorities indicated that while 93 % rated reading promotion as important, just 31 % included it in their overall policy statement. Furthermore, only 18 % of respondents had developed a specific reading promotions plan. One authority's comment seems to sum up the situation aptly: "though we are doing all these things the policy isn't yet there" (*ibid*: 22).

Since the growth in reader development began- and these criticisms of the lack of policy were made- a number of reports into the public library service have been published. These, strictly speaking, are not policy documents as such; as the UK's first national library policy, in many respects *Framework for the Future* has no precedent. Its closest counterparts appear to be the reports on the public library service produced by the government and other bodies, which typically provide an

overview of the service, goals for the future and recommendations for how to achieve these goals. Several recent key documents will now be discussed, with specific consideration given to their treatment of reading for pleasure and reader development work.

The Comedia report, *Borrowed Time?* (1993), questions the survival of public libraries in the future and suggests its purpose must be re-evaluated if the service is to remain appreciated and well used. Consideration is given to the value of leisure reading and public libraries' contribution to such 'cultural enrichment' is felt to be one of five key spheres of influence. The guidelines provided by *Borrowed Time?* do recommend that libraries work to display books more effectively in order to promote their use, although no active promotional techniques are discussed.

Conducted for the Department of National Heritage, the Aslib *Review of the Public Library Service in England and Wales* (1995) represented the largest piece of research into public libraries at the time. The report acknowledges that pleasure reading remains one of the primary reasons for library use, and finds that people would like more funding to be invested in the book stock. In terms of recommendations for the future, however, the emphasis is firmly on the need to change and innovate, a need for libraries to focus on the provision of the 'information superhighway'. Despite recognising that reading is a core part of the library's remit, little consideration is given to the role it could play in the future of the library service. A second Department of National Heritage report, *Reading the Future: Public Libraries Review*, was issued in 1997. Perhaps to an even greater extent than its predecessor, there is great stress on the need for libraries to make better use of IT. While libraries' role in children's pleasure reading is briefly considered, no treatment is given to either adult reading or the significance of reading promotion.

The Audit Commission's 1997 report, *Due for Renewal*, presents a more rounded picture and recognises the need to balance innovation with the maintenance of traditional library services. The steady decline in book loans gives cause for concern, but this is attributed to poor stock rather than a lack of demand for reading materials. More effective book acquisition and management is therefore seen as a

priority for the future, and though reading promotion itself receives only brief coverage this report clearly feels that books and reading are an essential part of the library service's future.

The Library and Information Commission (LIC) was established in 1995 to provide a single source of advice to the government on issues in the library field. One of the LIC's earlier key reports, *Prospects: A Strategy for Action* (1998) presents a strategy for research and development that would move libraries effectively into the twenty first century. *Prospects* includes the *2020 Vision*, its outline of how the effective library service of the future will function- and it seems this vision has little room for the role of reading or reading promotion. There are obtuse references to the provision of "universal access to the products of the human mind" and "the information, knowledge and works of creative imagination" (*ibid*: 2), which presumably encompass materials for leisure reading. This treatment is superficial however, and the main focus of the whole report is on the supply of information as key to future economic success and the need to use new technology in order to achieve this; reading as a pleasure in itself is not considered. It is worth acknowledging that the LIC was founded in order to provide information on all types of library, not only the public service. Given that it must cover academic and specialist libraries too, the remit of this report is necessarily different from that of the other documents considered here. Nonetheless, its coverage of reading and reading promotion seems remarkably sparse.

Building Better Library Services (2002) was published by the Audit Commission, and expands on their earlier *Due for Renewal* report. The later report reiterates that the provision of books and support for reading remains a valued aspect of the public library service, but observes that loans have continued to decline despite an increasing interest in reading as a leisure activity. While the provision of IT has increased significantly, spending on book stock has continued to fall and again the need for greater investment in this area is stressed. Unlike previous reports, *Building Better Library Services* discusses reader development specifically and observes that there "has been an increasing focus on 'reader development' work, with a range of local and national schemes designed to promote reading and library use" (*ibid*: 6). The need for change and continued provision of IT is certainly a

major aspect of this report, but it is felt that this can stand comfortably alongside more traditional aspects of the service and reading promotion is given more serious consideration than it receives in the preceding documents.

Emerging partly from research commissioned to help prepare *Framework for the Future*, Leadbeater's *Overdue* (2003) report stemmed from a "commitment to the ideals of public libraries and a frustration at the state they are in" (*ibid*: 4).

Leadbeater suggests that over-diversification is at the root of the problems faced by the library service; it has taken on many roles related to other community services, such as social inclusion, and needs to restate its core values in order to ensure future success. The promotion of books and reading is by no means the only core goal libraries should be striving towards, but to Leadbeater it is clearly a significant aspect: libraries should have "stretching and general goals that spread the love and habit of reading, learning, asking, enquiring and thinking" (*ibid*: 18).

The final report, Tim Coates' *Who's in Charge?* (2004) strongest advocate for role of libraries and books. *Who's in Charge?* argues that reading is still the primary motivation for library use and, like the earlier Audit Commission documents, suggests that falling issue figures are due to dilapidated, limited book stock rather than a lack of public interest in this area. If anything, public demand for reading and books has increased, but while bookshops have capitalised on this by offering a wide selection of stock that can be browsed in comfortable surroundings, libraries have mistakenly channelled their energies and resources elsewhere. In order to address the fall in library usage, improved provision of traditional services rather than a move towards new roles and IT provides the answer: "The public does not want a new kind of library; they just want a good efficient library that is up to date and pleasant to use". (*ibid*: 7). Interestingly, in spite of Coates' vehement defence of the library service's role in reading, reader development and reading promotion as such are not actually discussed. There are recommendations regarding the provision of reading materials and the need to offer books that will appeal to current users and non-users alike, but the significance of promotion of this material or work with the readers themselves is not examined.

When all the literature is considered a rather confused picture of adult reading promotion emerges. Recent years have seen a move towards greater acceptance of the promotion of reading to adults and a rise in reader development activities aimed at adult users, although lack of policy necessarily means this work has been inconsistent. This movement is not generally reflected in higher level documentation though, and a number of significant reports cover the area very superficially if at all. Even those reports that do consider leisure reading to be an important part of the future of public libraries tend to focus on the acquisition of materials, not their promotion. Undoubtedly library services must always evolve with changing times in order to provide a relevant, valued service, and a knee jerk reaction to this evolution based on nostalgia for how libraries used to be would serve little productive purpose. However, as some reports suggest, there are grounds for arguing that the public would prefer reading to remain on the library agenda, and evaluations of reader development projects suggest that such work is appreciated by library users. In the midst of this debate, *Framework for the Future* was introduced.

2.6 *The Response to Framework for the Future*

As previously discussed, *Framework* places far greater emphasis on the need for active library support of adult readers than any of the past reports had recommended, and it was hoped by many professionals that it might bring some clarity to the situation. The literature published in the months following the release of *Framework* indicates a mixed reception on the part of the library profession to the document as a whole. Ruse (2003) welcomes the report, arguing that its flexibility and absence of prescriptive detail should be considered a positive feature; other commentators interpret this same lack of specificity as a weakness. A *Library & Information Update* news item (2003) describes the report as bland, although the article concedes that its simplicity does make it a valuable basic guide for enthusing potential partners with little library knowledge. Usherwood (2003) is more sceptical still regarding *Framework's* lack of detail, and in support of this view states that one professional he consulted described the document as “motherhood and apple pie but with no recipe book or ingredients” (*ibid*: 306).

One aspect of *Framework* which has been better received is the document's emphasis on reading and reader development work as a key priority for public libraries. Ruse (2003: 88) suggests "it's fantastic that the book is the first part of this modern vision", and expresses confidence that *Framework* will allow libraries to make the most of reading promotions work. Stevens (2003:35) agrees that within *Framework* "the promotion of reading and learning is at the heart of public library service", and provides examples of how this vision will be implemented. These include an "annual programme of innovative library activities based on reading" (*ibid*: 35) and the strengthening of partnerships with the book trade. *Framework's* position regarding books and reading has been greeted with particular enthusiasm by organisations concerned with reader development work, such as The Reading Agency. In McKearney (2004), TRA's director praises the opportunity to refocus on what she considers to be libraries' core purpose- reading and reader development.

For a number of commentators then, at least one feature of *Framework* is considered a genuine achievement with wide-ranging ramifications. Elsewhere in the literature however, a little more cynicism regarding the document's stance on reading is evident. Usherwood (2003), for example, acknowledges that the renewed focus on reading is much appreciated by those who feel that the drive towards IT has had a detrimental effect on more traditional services; at the same time, *Framework's* treatment of recent reader development activities is described as "very unsophisticated" (Usherwood, 2003: 307). This article is also critical of the document's general lack of genuinely new ideas, a point which is expanded on by Hicks (2003) with regards to reader services in particular. Hicks points out that one 'Vision of 2013' states that libraries will offer their users access to any book, regardless of whether or not it is currently in print. Admirable perhaps- but isn't this what libraries have been doing for the last half century? Finally, Garrod (2003) urges caution from those who claim *Framework* vindicates the view that reader development is to be libraries' main priority. Garrod (2003:3) asks if this means that "People's Network computers are to be used solely to promote books and reading?", and argues that the situation is far more complex. After all, the document indicates that libraries must concentrate on three main areas of activity- digital services and community identity, as well as reading- so to state that the latter is the major focus is an oversimplification.

As yet, no detailed evaluation of *Framework's* impact has been conducted; a full report was due in January 2006, but failed to materialise. The UK's national development agency working on behalf of libraries, museums and archives, the MLA Council, was commissioned with the task of devising 'action plans' in order to implement *Framework*. A progress report on these action plans was recently issued (MLA, 2006), and it indicates that the adult reading promotion aspects of *Framework* strategy are proceeding well: the goal of developing "offers to provide stimulating and contemporary reading experiences for adults" have been fully achieved. However, the progress report is very brief, and while it comments on the initial foundations of the work- the development of partnerships, for example- it says nothing about how reader development work is progressing at more specific, local level. Until further research has been undertaken it is not possible to gain any real understanding of *Framework's* impact on the promotion of reading to adults.

3 Methodology

3.1 *The Appropriate Methodology*

As the literature review indicates, opinion regarding *Framework for the Future* is diverse and does not lend itself to summation into one clearly-defined theory. While the literature review certainly informed the research questions, it was inappropriate to test any specific hypothesis; currently there is simply insufficient research into the implementation and impact of *Framework* to justify this. Consideration of these factors indicated that a qualitative methodology was appropriate. The research would necessarily be exploratory and rely on inductive logic rather than any pre-formulated assumptions, and qualitative enquiry is orientated toward projects of this nature (Patton, 1990). The research had other features Gorman & Clayton (2005) identify as characteristic of a qualitative approach, in that participant perspective and preservation of context were of great interest; the intention was not to create a theory that can be applied in any library setting, rather I aimed to understand how *Framework* been implemented in this particular library service by these particular staff.

It is recognised that this approach limits the research in terms of generalisation to a wider population, but as Patton (1990) explains, a ‘trade-off’ between depth and breadth is inevitable when choosing a qualitative methodology over a quantitative approach. Indeed the aim of qualitative investigation with a small sample is not to measure its incidence but understand it in depth (Slater, 1990), and the lack of a wider application should not be considered a drawback. However, authors such as Silverman (2005) and Patton (1990) stress that the two approaches should not be considered mutually exclusive, and that although an overall approach may be qualitative in nature it can contain quantitative aspects too. Such triangulation of methodologies may actually strengthen a research design, because “The researcher is able to compensate for inherent weaknesses in each approach” (Gorman and Clayton, 2005: 13). Therefore, although the emphasis of this research was firmly on a

qualitative methodology and an inductive approach, some quantifiable elements in the form of numerical data were also included.

3.2 *Methods of Investigation*

With regards to the data gathering methods themselves, interviews are highly appropriate for exploratory, inductive enquiry in that they offer unexpected insights and very rich information. Gorman & Clayton (2005:41) describe the interview as the “cornerstone of qualitative research” and identify several advantages of the technique in addition to the rich information they provide: responses are immediate, ambiguities or queries can be easily addressed and the approach seems more personal and friendly. However interviews have associated limitations too, including the potential for researcher bias, their time consuming nature and the fact that they may be perceived as *too* personal to encourage discussion of confidential issues. In order to address the deficits of any one technique, triangulation of methods is considered valuable and so questionnaires were also used to gather information. Policy documents and secondary statistics such as issue figures were also considered. Patton (1990:247) states that “triangulation strengthens a study by combining methods”, and it was anticipated that using multiple methods would add to the credibility of the research.

3.2.1 *Interviews*

Standardised open-ended interviews were conducted, as this form of interview has no pre-set answer categories and allows people to respond in their own terms. At the same time, the use of a standardised interview schedule ensures that the same questions are asked and the same ground is covered in each interview, so comparison of response is facilitated (Stone, 1984; Patton, 1990). It is acknowledged that some flexibility of response is lost compared to a wholly unstructured interview, but Gorman & Clayton (2005) strongly advise the inexperienced interviewer against attempting a more unstructured approach.

In total twelve interviews were carried out; five with senior staff based at the Central Library, three with area Reader Development Champions, and four with frontline Library and Information Assistants (four branch libraries were involved in the research, but two of the branches came under the remit of one area Champion and so only three staff at this level were interviewed). Although where possible similar topics were discussed with each group of staff, inevitably different groups had different areas of knowledge- the management team were able to discuss policy and strategy in depth, for example, while frontline staff where able to give insight into the day to day running of their own library branches. Separate interview schedules were therefore developed for each staffing level. (See Appendices 1, 2 and 3).

The schedules were devised according to principles set out in Gillham (2000a), Oppenheim (1992) and Stone (1984). Questions were worded clearly and kept singular to reduce confusion. Crucially, they were phrased so as to avoid signifying the desirability of any specific response; Gorman and Clayton (2005) believe that maintaining such neutrality is particularly important if the reliability and validity of the research is to be established.

3.2.2 *Questionnaires*

Questionnaires were distributed to frontline library staff at each of the four branch libraries involved in the research, and were considered a particularly appropriate data gathering method for this group of staff for two reasons. Firstly, responses to questionnaires are often more candid than response to interviews (Burton, 1990), and it was important that frontline staff expressed their honest views even if these might contradict the opinion of senior staff. Secondly frontline staff are much greater in number than higher level staff, so while it was feasible to interview the entire management team and relevant area Reader Development Champions it would only be possible to conduct interviews with a small proportion of frontline staff. Therefore, in order to include the opinion of a representative range of frontline staff, questionnaires were deemed more practical.

The questionnaires contained a mix of open-ended questions and closed questions with fixed response categories (see Appendix 4). Largely due to the more complex analysis required it is sometimes argued that questionnaires are not ideally suited to open-ended questions, but Burton (1990) feels that their inclusion is entirely acceptable. Ultimately it was felt that a blend of both question types would prove useful to respondents; staff with little time could reply to the closed questions, whereas those who wanted to express their views more fully could also make use of the open-ended option.

Like the interview schedules, the questionnaires were carefully phrased in order to minimise the use of ambiguous wording. A small pilot was conducted with former colleagues at another public library service to confirm the clarity of the questionnaires, and some changes to wording were made accordingly. The content of the questionnaires was also discussed with senior staff to ensure that no major issues were omitted.

Low response rates are recognised as one of the major drawbacks of the questionnaire method and so two techniques were employed to reduce this risk. After Oppenheim (1992) the questionnaires were kept as short and succinct as possible, as it is felt this encourages people to complete them. Burton (1990) feels that meeting potential respondents in person rather than postal distribution also maximises response rate, and so questionnaires were delivered by hand to each of the library branches involved. This also gave the researcher opportunity to discuss the aims of the study at greater length, and staff the opportunity to ask questions or discuss any concerns.

3.3 *Sampling*

Because the aim of this study was to examine one library service in depth rather than create a generalised theory, probability sampling was not an issue. Instead purposive sampling was applied, and information rich cases were sought (Gorman & Clayton, 2005). However, although qualitative sampling techniques are more flexible than quantitative techniques, good principles should still be applied

(Slater, 1990) and so the sample was stratified so as to represent different levels of library staff. Obtaining a range of perspectives can be considered another form of triangulation, and again enhances the credibility of the findings (Patton, 1990; Gorman & Clayton, 2005).

In addition to the central library, Sheffield library service consists of twenty eight local branch libraries. It was not possible to include every local library in this research so four branches were selected. Each branch is situated at a different location in the city, serves a different demographic and has different usage and issue rates. To illustrate this variety some background details are provided below:

Library A: a popular library located in a residential suburb approximately two miles from the city centre. The proportion of ethnic minority residents in the area is slightly below the Sheffield average and a very small proportion of households live in social housing. The library is well used, with high adult fiction issue rates; 59% of residents are regular library users.

Library B: a small city centre library in one of Sheffield's most culturally diverse neighbourhoods. The neighbourhood has been identified as one of the most deprived areas of the city and over half the residents live in social housing. 36% of residents make regular use of the library and adult fiction issues are relatively low.

Library C: a large library situated in a relatively new township development seven miles beyond the city centre. The majority of properties in the neighbourhood are privately owned and the proportion of ethnic minority residents is very small. Although just 35% of residents are regular library users, adult fiction issue rates are very high.

Library D: a fairly popular library located just outside the city centre in an area which is well-served by local services and transport. It is in the same area as Library B, and served by the same area Reader Development Champion, but while still ethnically diverse a higher proportion of neighbourhood residents are able to own their own housing. 49% of residents are regular library users, and adult fiction issues are reasonably high.

3.4 *Ethical Considerations*

While the research did not target any vulnerable groups of people, ethical concerns related to qualitative research in particular were given consideration. As Gorman & Clayton (2005) explain, typically participants are subject to in-depth investigation, and information which has the potential to compromise an individual is elicited on occasion. Patton (1990:406) states that “Interviews are interventions. They affect people”, and adds that interviews can prompt a reflective process whose outcome is difficult to predict. The questions involved in the research were not of a personal nature, but there was one area of concern- some library staff might feel uneasy if asked to express any disagreement with policy or management attitudes. Adherence to the University ethics policy addressed this problem to a considerable extent, because participants were fully informed as to the nature of the project before taking part and were free to withdraw at any time. An information sheet and consent form was provided with both the interviews and questionnaires, and respondents were encouraged to discuss any concerns prior to participation. Finally, all data were treated confidentially and although in some cases the researcher was aware of personal details such as names, such details were removed prior to analysis and the respondents were assigned a letter. Participants are identified only by this anonymous letter in the report itself, and once the research was completed all information was destroyed.

3.5 *Analysis of Results*

The qualitative data gathered from the interviews and open-ended items of the questionnaires were subject to content analysis. Finch (1990), Gillham (2000a) and Gillham (2000b) explain in detail how this method can be usefully applied to qualitative information, and the purpose of this analysis can be described in two stages: the identification of key, substantive points and the division of these points into categories. Essentially, the researcher aims to draw out the key themes and patterns of the raw data and present them in a logical fashion. It is recognised that relying on memory and brief notes can be detrimental to an accurate, reliable

analysis and result in the loss of context (Gillham, 2000a), so each interview was fully transcribed.

Given the small amount of quantitative data collected by the questionnaires and the fact that the sampling technique was not structured according to the rigorous procedures needed for meaningful statistical analysis, the numerical information was not subject to any type of statistical test. It was felt it would be misleading to display the quantitative information in any form other than actual numbers, so answers to the fixed-response questions were simply counted.

3.6 *Limitations and Difficulties*

In spite of the measures taken to improve the response rate to the questionnaires, just fifteen were returned in total. A number of factors may account for this, not least a lack of staff time, particularly during a period when many people are taking holidays and staffing levels are lower than usual. Some staff also expressed concern that they were ‘not qualified’ to answer questions about policy; although the questions examined practical changes rather the actual content of *Framework for the Future*, a number of staff commented that they knew very little about the document and were wary of giving an opinion on it. Ideally a new questionnaire with more explicit reference to their practical experience and less to *Framework* itself would have been developed and distributed, but in terms of time scale this was simply not an option. Instead, to gain more insight into the opinion of frontline staff, one member of desk staff from each of the four branches was interviewed. Their views cannot be considered representative of all staff at each branch and this is an unavoidable limitation to this approach, but on the positive side the interviewees proved very candid and provided detailed information. The questionnaire results are discussed in the results section, but there is less emphasis on this aspect of the research than had been originally planned.

Initially it was intended to analyse policy documents and secondary statistics in order to evaluate the impact of *Framework* and any new reading promotions initiatives. However, the majority of the senior staff thought doing so would be

inadvisable in the absence of any direct impact measures, and given the complexity of factors affecting library usage rates drawing any inferences from these would be unsound. This aspect of the research was therefore largely abandoned, although staff were asked for their own personal evaluations and some formal documentation is discussed in the results sections.

4 Reader Development Prior to Framework

In order to illustrate the background context and facilitate comparison, this brief results section describes the state of adult reading promotion in Sheffield libraries prior to introduction of *Framework for the Future*.

4.1 A Lack of Strategy

Each member of the senior staff team stated that prior to 2003 and the introduction of *Framework for the Future*, there was no formal adult reading promotions policy in place. As was the case with many public libraries, reader development work with younger readers was well structured and much in evidence. With regards to adults however, the senior staff team agreed that promotions work was limited and conducted on an arbitrary basis:

“Very little guided adult reader development, erm, most library services were extremely strong on children’s reading, but those skills have never really transferred over to the adult sector...”. (Management Team - A).

“It wasn’t a sort of, erm, departmental policy decision that we would have [adult] reader development, we’d have some kind of activity take place but it was who was interested as opposed to a kind of plan as to how that might fit into the service...and I think more activity took place within the children’s side of things”. (Management Team - B).

“It wasn’t strategic I think in those days, there wasn’t a specific post at that time”. (Management Team - C)

When asked if they felt Sheffield Library services’ work with adult readers was satisfactory prior to 2003, typical comments from the senior staff team included:

“I think it was minimal at best” (Management Team - A).

“It was piecemeal” (Management Team - E).

4.2 *A Haphazard Approach*

This is not to say there was no adult reader development work at all, but the absence of a formal policy meant that work was patchy and very much influenced by the personal enthusiasms of individuals:

“There was some reader development in place, that was being done by a group of people who I think were interested in it and they’d led some things around reader development...looking at opportunities for new ways to display books...it was the lead of one member of staff, but she was doing it on a sort of unofficial basis”. (Management Team - B).

“I think individual interests of individual members of staff guided it [reader development]. We did have, erm, probably four or five years before Framework, we had a small group of people who, erm, sort of led on reader development, but it was just interested members of staff who joined that group”. (Management Team - C).

Although area Reader Development Champions and frontline staff did not discuss policy- or the lack of policy- as such, comments from staff at all levels supported the opinions of senior staff and indicate that adult reader development work was inconsistent at best. Work was conducted, but it was very much guided by the individual interests of staff and therefore not at all consistent between different branches:

“Before I think it was sort of haphazard, I think it was more, erm, perhaps somebody in a particular area had an initiative and they’d run with that but perhaps it wasn’t across the whole service” (Champion - Branches B & D).

.“There were no formal reading groups...people had asked...but there was no, erm, staffing that would enable that to happen, there was nothing in the structure that would make it happen...Broomhill Library had established one years ago, but that was really on the goodwill of the staff”. (Champion - Branch C).

On a more positive note, frontline staff and area Reader Development Champions offered insight into the nature of the promotions work that did take place under the guidance of enthusiastic staff:

“We’ve always had displays and, you know, perhaps topical, or you tried to change things, erm, make the displays inviting”. (Staff - Branch A).

“I think people tended to do it naturally, they would pick a topic like I suppose they would have done the Queen’s 80th birthday or whatever, something relevant, and they would do one.” (Staff - Branch D).

However, these descriptions were often qualified by observations on the limitations and infrequency of the promotions work:

“You know, you’d put a display on, you might get an author in now and again, but it was very passive”. (Champion - Branch C)

“We used to have like, odd displays, I remember we had a few author visits and things, but nothing very major to be honest”. (Staff - Branch C)

4.3 *Informal Interactions*

One particular example of reader development work tended to be cited frequently by frontline staff and Reader Development Champions, but less so by senior staff- the informal interactions between desk staff and regular library users. In many cases this form of reading promotion was happening naturally, in spite of the absence of formal policy:

“In a very informal way, all branch libraries did do reading promotion because the nature of the work in a little local library is that you get to know the customers...in a branch where you know Mrs So and So comes in every Thursday and takes X books on crime or whatever, you are talking to them and you’re saying “Oh, have you seen so and so, this is the latest one by your favourite author or, you know, have you tried this one, it’s a bit different?” (Champion - Branch C)

“ We all know, erm, our core of regular readers and over a period we’ve all got to know which authors they like and what they’re likely to have read and so as new stock comes in we’ll see them and think “oh, Mrs So and So would like that one”. (Staff - Branch B).

However, it is also important to acknowledge that this again depended on individual interests of staff:

“Interactions did happen, but again it depends on the individual.” (Staff - Branch C)

And that for more practical reasons it did not take place at every branch:

“Erm, there was some of that [informal recommendations] in the quieter branches. When we opened up here it was impossible, absolutely impossible...you couldn’t see out the front doors for people!” (Staff - Branch D).

4.4 *Reasons for the Lack of Structure*

Staff at all levels discussed possible reasons for the informal, piecemeal approach to adult reader development. For some staff, cultural taboos were seen as the major issue:

“I think it was due to the historic cultural boundaries, where we put things on shelves and just expected people to make the best use of them. We weren’t actively seeking to support people with their reading” (Management Team - D).

Another interviewee pointed to the increasing emphasis on IT provision:

“In recent years with the focus on introducing the People’s Network and IT I think most libraries took their eye off the ball in terms of adult reading” (Management Team - A).

Other staff discussed the negative effects of budget cuts during the eighties and nineties:

“I think Sheffield in particular has had tough times a few years ago with budget shortfalls”. (Champion - Branches B & D).

“There was some work going on, but then when we got to the budget cuts, that was when it really went”. (Staff - Branch D).

4.5 *Summary*

For a number of reasons Sheffield library services did not have a formal adult reader development strategy prior to *Framework*. As a consequence work was haphazard, guided by the personal enthusiasms of staff. Informal interactions did take place, and the value of these should not be underestimated, but even in this area a great deal of inconsistency between different library branches was evident.

5 Framework at the Strategy Level

The findings from the interviews with the senior management team, based at Sheffield's central library, are presented in this chapter. The impact of *Framework for the Future* on strategy and policy decisions is examined, and management discuss how they intend to put *Framework* into effect with new promotions and increased staff involvement in the area of adult reader development.

5.1 *The Impact of Framework*

All members of the senior team feel that *Framework for the Future* has had a significant impact on the promotion of reading to adults, firstly in the way that the priority given to reading and reading promotion has been raised:

“From my point of view I feel that when framework came out, that was one of the positive things about it, that it did put an emphasis on reading and the value of reading and, um, the value of our skills in terms of promoting books and reading.”
(Management Team - E).

“That's how *Framework* has worked, in resetting priorities and it has emphasised the importance of reader development.” (Management Team - B).

“It [adult reading promotion] has gone, it's gone from the bottom of the priority list to sort of up near the top now”.
(Management Team - C).

This is not empty rhetoric, rather the senior team maintain that *Framework* has led to the introduction of concrete changes to the management of Sheffield Library Services. The team is highly aware of need for a more strategic approach to adult reader development work:

“We have completed a reader development strategy, erm, much more focus, much more coordinated activity so instead of lots of little promotions across the city, we’ve put our resources into two or three major promotions a year which have more impact on the public” (Management Team - A).

One member of staff described how this will be taken further, with the development of a formal policy statement to be introduced in the near future:

“We’ve hit the strategy and we need a policy to underpin that...um, obviously it’s got to be anchored in Framework or it doesn’t really make any sense at all.” (Management Team - D).

A draft copy of the reader development policy indicates that it’s broad vision will be to “promote the pleasure of reading”. In order to deliver on this, five key areas are outlined:

- Enhance reading awareness, experience and enjoyment.
- Widen access and the appeal of our libraries to readers and potential readers.
- Enable and encourage staff to use and develop their skills, knowledge and enthusiasm for books and reading.
- Participate fully in national, regional and city wide reading promotion.
- Work in partnership with other agencies.

5.2 *Restructure*

Each member of the management team stated that one of the most significant effects of *Framework* has been on the library service’s staffing structure. Although some form of restructure was planned prior to *Framework*, the exact nature of the changes was strongly influenced by the document and as such reader development has risen to the fore. The creation of a senior post concerned specifically with reader

development and the introduction of area Reader Development Champions was considered a key aspect of the restructure:

“Framework had a big impact on the way we restructured, so that was why we created Reader Development Champions, so we tried to build stock and reading back in as part of the core service”. (Management Team - A).

“Reader development is one of the three strands within Framework, certainly our restructure was built around those three strands and reader development has come out strongly in that, that we have Reader Development Champions who work to deliver reader development, erm, we have key people at the strategy team level and below who lead on reader development so it's embedded in the service” (Management Team - B).

In addition to the area champions, each library branch now has a frontline champion who takes responsibility for reader development and will, theoretically, promote the importance of this work to other members of staff:

“In each of the libraries the aim of the restructuring was to have at least one person who took a sort of lead around books, materials and reader development.” (Management Team - E).

“The reader development champion at the frontline is someone who has the direct route in, if you like, to the reader development champion scene, to people like myself. So they act as a channel, they're an advocate as well, but they have that additional role of channel.” (Management Team - D).

However, with regards to the branch champion post, two interviewees expressed doubts as to how much has been achieved as yet:

“I think so far we haven’t got very far with that to be honest, one of the difficulties is clearly we don’t have lots of staff and they’re actually on the counters a lot of the time, they don’t have a lot of developmental time.”. (Management Team - E).

“No, it’s not working at the moment because we, we've only just really, erm, decided what people's specialisms will be and we haven't actually done any, erm, serious training.”
(Management Team - B).

5.3 *New Reader Development Initiatives*

At a practical level, the increased emphasis on adult reader development work has been put into effect with the introduction of new forms of reading promotion. When asked to provide examples of these new promotions, all senior staff discussed how more resources have been put into the purchase of temporary collections and accompanying display material. These include static collections themed around book events of current media interest, such as the popular Richard & Judy Summer Reads and the Booker and Orange prizes. Other collections such as *Free Spirit*, *Free Fall* and *Get a Life* circulate round the branches and remain in each for an allotted amount of time:

“The buying of particular collections of material...there’s a great deal more focus on them and so it’s bringing people’s attention to them and people getting them throughout the city so they’re get to see material they might not have seen before.” (Management Team - E).

“Since *Framework* there's much more national promotions that we can buy into, and publicity.” (Management Team - C).

The introduction of adult reading groups was also considered a significant and direct effect of *Framework*:

“There were no reading groups in Sheffield before *Framework* and I think now we’ve got about twenty nine, I loose track cause there’s so many...and that’s totally, and that really is all down to *Framework*”. (Management Team - A).

“Reading groups have been very very successful everywhere, erm, they really have grown across the city and in a lot of service points, and there's a lot of staff input into that.”

(Management Team - B).

In addition to the more traditional reader development tools, the senior team described examples of innovative approaches that have been implemented as a result of *Framework*-generated interest in reading promotion. One interviewee discussed the recent partnership between Radio Sheffield and the library service:

“Radio Sheffield are running monthly sessions with our reading groups...they did a big one in the central library where they asked groups around the city to read the same book, and then they came into the central library and we had Radio Sheffield do a live broadcast”. (Management Team -E).

The senior staff felt a particularly important development to be the creation of Readers' Day, a new part of Sheffield's annual *Off the Shelf* literary festival. Supported by the publishers, Hodder, the public is invited to share their passion for reading, take part in a book swap and attend talks from a wide range of authors:

“Off the Shelf grew out of libraries and became a separate thing on its own, but the reader's day is very much around libraries. Now the events that we do on that day, we tend to have an open invitation to people”. (Management Team - D).

The use of electronic reading promotion was also discussed, and the primary example raised by all management staff was the use of Sheffield Library web pages, which are currently part of the Sheffield City Council website. Although the site serves a useful practical purpose in that readers can browse the catalogue and renew loans, its use as a reader development tool was regarded as restricted:

“I mean I think libraries are just sort of paddling in the water on this one at the moment” (Management Team - A).

“There are limitations as to how we can use the website because there’s structural limitations as to how you can do the layout, because its not our website, it’s the city council’s”. (Management Team - E).

Plans to improve the reading promotion aspects of the website have been initiated however, and staff involved with reader development are now having increased input in its design:

“We’ve reformed our website working group and we’ve identified the reader development group will take responsibility for the reader development pages. I think some of them are going on training for web development, and I think that will improve what’s on there”. (Management Team - E).

“We’re putting stuff on the website now...we’re putting recommendations on, we’re putting what groups are currently reading, we’re asking for feedback...we want to make it s lot more whizzy than it is at the moment, so that’s in development”. (Management Team - D).

5.4 *New and Existing Readers*

All the management team were confident that work with existing adult readers has increased following the changes made as a result of *Framework for the Future*:

“They were our captive audience, and so when you do anything new like this they’re the first people that sign up” (Management Team - D).

“We’re much more involved with those active readers, who want to read”. (Management Team - B).

The new promotions are considered to have real benefit to established readers, as they broaden the choice, support selection and enhance the enjoyment already gained from making use of the library service:

“They're already there, they're not new users, you're actually widening the pleasure of the experience of reading by what we're doing.” (Management Team - B).

However, while this aspect of the work is undeniably valuable, two senior staff expressed the concern that to focus solely on existing readers diminishes the real worth of reader development:

“I think the true value of reader development is when libraries go beyond that point and you actually start to get engaged with other people. Otherwise it’s senseless, because it’s just going round in a self-complacent circle”. (Management Team - D).

Framework was considered to have affected reader development work aimed at new readers, but to a lesser extent. It certainly raised awareness of the need to engage more with people beyond the library, but the practical difficulties of doing so were a major issue:

“I think the real problem in attracting new readers is one of marketing resources or lack of, because you can put brilliant collections in the building but then if they don’t come in how do they know it’s there, and the really hard thing is, is marketing” (Management Team - A).

Nonetheless, there have certainly been improvements in the area and a far greater focus on the area:

“I mean we do a lot of marketing now compared to what we used to do, and we've got a dedicated marketing officer...and by doing that you hopefully are reaching people who are non-users.” (Management Team - B).

“I think it has increased and it’s, you know, staff going out to talk to groups, to tell people about reading groups and different services...going out to talk to clubs and societies, or, you know, wherever there’s a group of people you can talk to”. (Management Team - A).

While it was felt that the reading groups tend to appeal to dedicated readers, two interviewees felt that some of the new book collections might be attracting a new audience:

“We have done things to attract different types of users, things like the Quick Fiction collection that people can leap in at lunchtime and just grab a quick read to read on the bus or on the train... I think we did get new users from that”. (Management Team - A).

“Because we're widening the range of choice that we have in libraries, non-mainstream titles that we've gone for, I suspect- but I've no evidence yet- that that is appealing to a slightly different audience.” (Management Team - B).

Where reader development work with emergent adult readers was concerned, two staff highlighted the importance of partnerships with local and national agencies. The support provided by The Vital Link and the BBC RaW projects were considered particularly valuable in the drive to encourage adults currently developing their literacy skills to branch out into pleasure reading:

“What’s helping us is the sort of national initiatives that are coming through, the Vital Link, the Reading Agency and things like that, so if nothing else they’re signposting where we should go to attract new audiences.” (Management Team - D).

“I mean obviously the biggest is BBC RaW and the emergent readers type of thing, we’ve tried to work with lifelong learning tutors and bring people in there”. (Management Team - C).

5.5 *Readers with Special Requirements*

While the management team feel that *Framework* has affected reader development work with existing and new readers, the document was considered far less influential in another crucial respect. *Framework’s* treatment of readers and potential readers with special needs was strongly criticised:

“From a social inclusion point of view Framework’s pretty weak. And so that would include the way it addresses issues with people with disabilities.” (Management Team - E).

“Well I don’t think *Framework’s* generated any additional work for special needs...because basically it didn’t tackle them”. (Management Team - A).

Reader development work in this area is happening in Sheffield libraries; a visually impaired reading group has been created, for example, and different language reading groups are to be introduced. It was not felt that *Framework* played any part in driving these initiatives however, and other factors have been more influential in guiding work based around social inclusion:

“I think because of the council’s agendas around social inclusion we haven’t lost sight of the need to engage with a wider group.” (Management Team - E).

“Obviously because of our user profile we're very keen to provide services to um all the different communities within Sheffield and that's been the pressure there. And city council targets, and their strategies on that affect that”. (Management Team - B).

5.6 *The Role of Frontline Staff*

When asked how they perceived the role of frontline staff in delivering the new reader development initiatives, it became clear that the management team consider all levels of staff to be vital:

“Well we can’t do it without them. I mean basically they’ve got to be our advocates, they are the people that the service is judged by.” (Management Team - D).

“Oh, it's key because you have to careful about reader development and just sort of saying "that is reader development", the whole of our service is reader development and it's as much about a member of frontline staff on the counter saying "have you read this?" and they've recommended it...that is as much reader development as putting on an event” (Management Team - B)

“It would be pointless if we came up with some kind of policy and the staff just didn’t do anything at the end of the day”. (Management Team - C)

In order for the staff to fulfil their role however, it was felt that a change in working culture might be needed, and that staff also need the skills to provide reader development:

“I mean what it has brought into focus is that a lot of the staff have lost what I would call those key skills, to, erm, provide readers with that kind of really solid information...we’re having to retrain people in how to support readers.”
(Management Team - A)

“I think staff need more product knowledge, they need to be more proactive in having a conversation with not just their favourite borrowers but every borrower.” (Management Team - B).

In some cases, a lack of confidence rather than a lack of knowledge was felt to hold staff back:

“They need to realise that they’ve probably been doing it for years, it’s not a new skill, that they just, but it could be a better skill...and staff are sometimes reluctant to recommend authors, but readers quite like it if you recommend things.”
(Management Team - A)

In order to address the issue and provide staff with the knowledge and self-assurance needed to support readers, extensive training is planned for the near future:

“We are taking part in the Opening the Book, the training course that they're doing...the frontline reader development training course...the reader development staff will be trained on that and that's an online training course and the idea is that ultimately all staff would have gone through that”
(Management Team - B).

5.7 *Summary*

At the management level *Framework for the Future* has been implemented and a significant on adult reader development work is apparent. The promotion of reading to adults has been formalised in terms of strategy and staffing structure and this progress is set to continue with further policy development and staff training. A range of new initiatives have been introduced, a number of which are based around strong partnership links with outside agencies. Although no formal impact measures have been applied, it is believed that the new promotions have proved effective in supporting existing readers and have begun to interest new readers. *Framework* has had little effect, however, on Sheffield Library's drive to develop socially inclusive reader development projects. Frontline staff are perceived as vital to the success of the new strategy, but it is acknowledged that the new frontline structure may not yet be operating effectively and that the skills and confidence of staff will need development before the strategy can become fully effective.

6 The Intermediary Level

Although initially the objectives of this research identified two levels of staff specifically, as the interviews progressed it became clear that a third group also play a major role and could offer further insights. The area Reader Development Champions provide an interesting perspective on the situation, as they form an intermediary staffing level between frontline staff and the management team. A vital part of the recent library restructures, the champions have knowledge regarding plans and implementation, but at the same time have far more contact with ground level staff than the senior team.

6.1 *The Champion Role*

The three area champions firstly offered insights into how they perceive their position:

“Our main role is on the enjoyment of reading, establishing reading groups, promotional displays and just basically getting the stock to move a bit more”- (Champion -Branch A).

One interviewee then clarified how the champions work to deliver the reader development initiatives in a practical way:

“I mean we- there's a team of us, champions- and the strategy person have meetings every month, six weeks, planning policies and what promotions we're gonna buy into, through *Opening the Book* say, or the national book clubs like Richard and Judy and the Orange Prize, all those sorts of nationally decided promotions. Then when we've decided that we go back to the branches and work out how they're gonna be done on the ground floor”. (Champion - Branch C).

6.2 *The Effects of Framework*

All three area champions agreed that the introduction of *Framework for the Future* had definitely increased the priority given to reading promotion aimed at adults. They felt this was best exemplified by the increase in reading promotion projects:

“We’re doing more, as much as we can, for adults. We have more display material, we have the Reading Agency collections, the book collections, things like that...then there’s the Reader’s Day, which we have, we started the first one last year and we’ve got another one this October”.
(Champion - Branch A).

“There’s a lot of new initiatives, I can say that for sure, that there are new things we’re trying” (Champion - Branches B & D).

It is not simply an increase in activity, moreover the nature and quality of the work that is being conducted has changed:

“We’re trying to be sort of more organised in our approach and more sort of strategic, and, er, directed in the way that we’re doing things”. (Champion - Branches B & D).

“Before Framework it [adult reading promotion] was very passive, it wasn’t directed, yeah, not so much. It wasn’t so active”. (Champion - Branch C).

Framework and its impact on adult reader development was viewed very positively by all interviewees, and a genuine sense of optimism was in evidence:

“I think Framework's sort of thrown down the gauntlet and given us a bit of a challenge. It's given us something to deliver and it's given us a bit of a mission, it's given us a bit more of an identity in...so yeah, definitely, I'm feeling like things are moving on” (Champion - Branches B & D)

“I think there's been a lot of enthusiasm from the people who weren't involved in reader development before, you know, we've got a very strong team.” (Champion - Branch C).

6.3 *New Initiatives*

Two of the interviewees believed that the establishment of reading groups had been a huge success and a genuine achievement of the new reader development drive:

“We have two adult reading groups, one of which has twenty three members and the other one has I think about fifteen...and we have waiting lists!” (Champion - Branch A)

The contribution of the groups to members' development as readers was emphasised:

“So it's actually challenging their reading habits... and you challenge them to read something different and then they find that that's helping them to choose differently when they're on their own, not just going to the same shelves every day.”
(Champion - Branch C).

The third area champion had a different experience however, indicating that reading groups had not proved a blanket success story:

“We really struggle here, we’ve got a reading group, erm we really struggle to retain members”. (Champion - Branches B & D).

This was attributed to the differing needs of the community served by the branch:

“I think it’s, I dunno, a difference in area that you could say it’s more of a middle class thing to be involved in a reading group and here that isn’t the community at all. Here people want to learn to read better...they want to improve their English skills and their language skills.” (Champion - Branches B & D)

Generally the collections of new material were viewed positively by the interviewees, and regarded as a welcome means of broadening the existing stock:

“It’s a different way of displaying the books in the library as well, but I think it’s a more interesting way of doing it, you know, having discreet collections.” (Champion - Branch C)

“They add a little bit of spice into the regular collections we have...they are quite quirky collections and I think there’s something different there”. (Champion - Branches B & D).

One interviewee expressed doubt regarding the public appeal of the themes and titles given to some of the circulating material:

“*Freefall, Freespirit, Get Lost, Get a Life*...you know, some of the catchphrases are a bit...obtuse. And if you put up a poster with somebody falling off a cliff or something like that, and it says *Freefall* or something like that, and the other one’s *Get Lost*...a bit pretentious!” (Champion - Branch C)

The material in some of the collections was perceived as far less mainstream than typical library stock, and as such it receives a mixed response from the public. This was not necessarily seen as a wholly negative quality:

“Some of them have gone better than others, there's been controversy about some of them but that's, you know, it's nice to have that in a way. Not when you're receiving the complaints, but it's good to have people reacting to things!”
(Champion - Branches B & D).

Controversial material aside, the collections were well-regarded in terms of their value as reader development tools. One area champion did raise a more practical concern however:

“It is more of a problem, these collections circulate, the Reading Agency ones, and it's difficult finding somewhere to put them. I have a particular hatred for dump bins, because they don't last as long as the collection by any means and especially when it's travelling round.” (Champion - Branch A)

6.4 Reaching a New Audience?

Like the management team, the Reader Development Champions stressed the distinction between promotions aimed at existing readers and work done to attract new readers. In their experience, the majority of people influenced by the new promotional initiatives are existing readers:

“But that's [the new initiatives] preaching to the converted really...as far as non-users are concerned, it's always difficult to get non-users to come in, isn't it?”. (Champion - Branch A).

“I have a feeling they [reading group members] might already be existing readers”.
(Champion - Branches B & D).

The need to do more work in this area was acknowledged:

“That's actually where I think we're not hitting it yet, we're not...what we need to be doing is, I mean the people who come in the library are a captive audience...but we need to be out there beyond the library and I don't think we do that as well as we should”. (Champion - Branch C).

The same staff member offered suggestions for how to reach people beyond the library:

“I think what we should be doing is we should be at other venues, you know, beyond the libraries in the shopping centres, you know Meadowhall, get a stand at Meadowhall from time to time”. (Champion - Branch C)

While this interviewee did feel this to be an area they would like to spend more time working on, it was also considered to be beyond the control of the Reader Development Champions in some respects:

“I think that that in a way, it's part of our remit, but it's also not really ours, it's really marketing, so I think it's side by side with the marketing and there's only one marketing person, you know”. (Champion - Branch C)

One area champion offered a contrasting view, and stated that there had been an increased focus on outreach work recently:

“When we go out we always sort of take, erm, take the message with us...community centres, erm, absolutely anywhere where people are basically...public meetings, fairs, festivals, anywhere that we can be where there's people who don't know that we're here, don't know what sort of services we offer”. (Champion - Branches B & D).

However, it was felt that perhaps this work bears less connection to *Framework* and reading promotion and more to the fact that social inclusion is given a great deal of emphasis in this particular area of the city:

“How I'd see it rather, is erm in a social inclusion kind of way than just pure reader development. Everything that's really done in this area is sort of underpinned by social inclusion all the way through”. (Champion -Branches B & D).

6.5 *The Role and Response of Frontline Staff*

As the liaison between management and library staff, the champions work closely with frontline staff and were able to offer perceptions of how they have been affected by the post-*Framework* changes. The champions agree with the management team as to the critical role of frontline staff, but one interviewee wondered just how realistic it is to expect everyone to be aware of *Framework*:

“I think it's really tricky actually, cause a lot of people on frontline, they're not after a career, they've got a job that pays them a wage and they come in and they do their job, you know...I think it's a bit unfair almost to expect people to be that interested in policy documents like that.” (Champion - Branch C).

Nonetheless, it was acknowledged that staff did not need awareness of the actual document to be aware of changes in their role, and accordingly two champions

believed that the increased focus on reading promotion was having an effect on the daily work of frontline staff:

“It is a new way of working”. (Champion - Branch C).

More specifically it was felt that reader development’s higher priority necessitated a new direction for frontline staff, with more stress on meeting readers’ needs:

“It’s altered the emphasis away from looking after books to looking after people.” (Champion - Branch A).

One interviewee felt that for the majority of frontline staff however, little has changed and that the new culture of increased interaction between staff and reader is by no means embedded:

“Erm, I would say [staff are affected] maybe only on occasions when there’s like an activity, like an author visit or a reading group, those sort of things, I think, erm, the staff who do have those sort of conversations with readers still doing them and perhaps the staff who don’t aren’t”
(Champion - Branches B & D).

The Champions also described the reactions of staff to the new reading promotion initiatives. All interviewees had experienced a mixed response from staff, although it was stressed that the majority of frontline workers welcomed the changes:

“Erm, I think the staff that’s been here for, say, a long time I think they tend to fall into two categories. Either, erm, they’re very glad that these initiatives are happening and that there’s some sort of progress in the libraries, are moving on, and things changing, things are getting better. And I think there are still some staff who think that it’s perhaps not part of their

job and that, erm, it's a heavier work load and perhaps they're not so accepting of it.” (Champion - Branches B & D).

There was sympathy toward the frontline staff, and one interviewee felt it was unrealistic for people to change their working habits in a short space of time:

“You might come across a certain resistance, I think it’s taking a lot of time to do these things, there are people who don’t want to get involved and you can’t force people to do something they haven’t done before”.(Champion - Branch A).

6.6 *Summary*

The restructure and introduction of champions was perceived as key to the implementation of the new reader development strategy. The champions clearly have a well defined image of their role and have certainly begun to put strategy into effect, with consultation with both senior and frontline staff and regular meetings to plan new initiatives. The experience of the area champions suggested that these initiatives largely appeal to existing readers and the need to take work beyond the library was acknowledged. With regards to frontline staff, opinion was divided as to how great an impact the new strategy has had on frontline role, and all the champions had observed a small amount of resistance to the new promotions.

7 The Perspective of Frontline Staff: Interviews

This chapter considers the results obtained from the interviews with library assistants. Frontline staff discussed the extent to which they have observed changes in adult reading promotion and how their own roles have been affected by these changes. As these staff have a great deal of contact with library users, they were also able to provide some insight into public response to the new initiatives.

7.1 *The Priority of Adult Reader Development*

Staff firstly discussed whether or not in their experience *Framework for the Future* had affected the priority given to adult readers and reader development work. Opinion was divided; two staff believed that the priority had definitely increased:

“I think it has, personally I think it has, yeah. I’ve seen a big improvement really, since *Framework*”. (Staff - Branch C).

One interviewee expressed more caution, and explained that while the priority given to adult readers might have increased to some extent there were still many other areas of work to be focused on:

“Er, a bit, a bit, I mean there’s lots of other things going on. I think in a way it’s protected the view of adult readers in the library”. (Staff - Branch D).

The fourth interviewee felt that reading promotion might be higher on the agenda at a management level but that at a frontline level there was little difference. If anything in fact, *Framework* raised the priority given to IT further:

“It’s not necessarily reader development, I think there’s been more emphasis on sort of computers”. (Staff - Branch A).

7.2 *Response to the New Promotions*

Three staff commented on the increase in temporary collections and the pre-bought promotional material that accompanies them:

“We do have different sort of themed things that come in, that come in and circulate...we do have more displays that way” (Staff - Branch C).

“We’ve had more collections and so forth. I think that’s likely Richard and Judy and stuff like that. Specific promotions”. (Staff - Branch B).

One interviewee did not think there had been any changes in this area however:

“Mmm, erm, I don’t think there's been a massive difference actually...no, I wouldn’t say there's been an increase. We've always had, erm, displays and, you know perhaps topical, or you tried to change things, erm, make the displays inviting, and encourage people to come in and look at these books, I don’t think that has changed” (Staff - Branch A).

This discrepancy in opinion might be explained in terms of the amount of promotional display work that was conducted at each library prior to *Framework*. As previously discussed, this work varied hugely between library branches and it may be of significance that the staff member who had not observed any differences was working at a branch considered particularly noteworthy for its individual display efforts before the changes were introduced.

The frontline interviewees were able to describe public response to some of these new collections, and commented on the relative popularity of the different material. Some reservations about the nature of the new collections and the consequent impact on readers were expressed. The content of the collections was not

held at fault, and staff felt that the quality of the material was generally high, but the titles of some collections were perhaps not as inviting as they could be:

“Some of them I’ve got to say are a little bit too obscure, and people don’t...they’re not going like they expected them to go.” (Staff - Branch C).

“If you think the library’s there telling you to *Get a Life*, what sort of impression is it creating?” (Staff - Branch D).

Nevertheless, it was acknowledged that different library users have different needs and tastes, and some positive public reaction was in evidence:

“What have we had...we’ve had two lots of *Get a Life*, we’re in for it, is it, *Free Spirit*? Yes the public like them...they’re not hotcakes but they do go out.” (Staff - Branch D).

Public response to other types of new material was unanimously viewed as very good. The Richard & Judy Summer Reads were singled out as a particular success:

“They’re always popular, I mean you just run out of those, the Richard and Judy type ones” (Staff - Branch B).

“The other displays, which they do send round, the Orange prize or whatever, they’re not so keen, but Richard and Judy!” (Staff - Branch D).

Overall the frontline staff felt that the new collections were appealing to existing readers and not a valid way of reaching a newer audience. Even collections aimed specifically at new readers were not seen to be reaching their target audience, perhaps because that audience is simply unaware of what is available:

“There's been some new books that we've been getting like er, *LiveWire*, for erm, sort of reluctant readers...that's a difficult one isn't it because people aren't going to just come in, you've got to get them in in the first place before that can take place.” (Staff - Branch A).

One interviewee believed that at least some of the material was reaching a different audience however:

“I think there's been a change in- a different group of people in, with the *QuicFic*, a set of books that's very light sort of fiction, and that seems to have took off pretty well”. (Staff - Branch C).

Although staff feel public response to the new collections is mixed, all who had observed a change in this area concurred that the collections were a valuable way of broadening stock and introducing more choice to readers. One interviewee, though in agreement with this view, did voice some concerns of a different nature:

“We have got a problem here with where we can put stuff, we've not really got much room...then they [the displays] have to be disbanded here, which you don't have the time to be doing”. (Staff – Branch D).

Once this work is complete however, the benefits of the collections to both staff and readers are clear:

“The collections revitalise your stock when you haven't got the time to do it, and change your choice of things when you haven't got the time to be picking out stuff”. (Staff - Branch D).

For most of the staff, one of the major changes and successes was the introduction of reading groups. Staff were enthusiastic, and believed the public felt the same:

“Certainly I don’t remember any reading groups, which has just been a massive, erm, massive thing...it is something that the public want, and I think it’s been brilliant, it’s been really good”. (Staff - Branch A).

“The reading groups have really set off, really got going... the reading groups are brilliant and I think it’s such a good idea”. (Staff - Branch C).

However, one interviewee offered a different perspective and described how, despite public interest in a reading group, their branch has been unable to offer one as yet:

“They would love us to have a reading group, but we cannot staff what we’ve got now- we can’t staff that...we haven’t got either the staff time, or the talent, or the ability to control the reading group”. (Staff - Branch D).

Overall, public reaction to the new initiatives was considered to be very appreciative:

“I don’t think, erm, the public see it as patronising...I think now its quite obvious that they do, they like some interaction, they like being involved with things, erm, and it’s been a really good response from them” (Staff - Branch A).

However, one interviewee felt that while many readers welcomed the changes, it was important to remember that some library users value their independence and do not want to make use of reader development tools:

“I think there’s a core of people, of borrowers who come in and who are always going to come in whatever you do. And they’re...they don’t particularly want you to interfere with it”. (Staff - Branch C).

7.3 *The Impact on Day to Day Work*

The experience of frontline staff indicates that new reader development projects are being conducted in each of the branch libraries in question. Unless the staff are directly involved with constructing a display or managing a reading group, it does not necessarily follow though that these promotions affect their everyday work, or that working culture has been changed as a result. Interviewees discussed this issue and again opinion was mixed.

For one member of staff, the answer was quite clear:

“I think we're working the same as we always have, really...we haven't necessarily been told to do anything different.” (Staff - Branch A).

There has been little effect on staff attitude, and the degree of interaction between staff and reader is still very much guided by individual interests:

“I think good staff, people who are interested in books, probably haven't changed that much, they still talk about books with the public and then other people at, I mean obviously you get library staff that don't read, and those people will probably still be the same, so I don't think a lot has changed” (Staff - Branch A).

Another interviewee offered a more positive view, in that while the relationship remains the same, the new material does support staff in their work:

“I think it's always been the staff's duty to sort of promote the stock that we've got, and I suppose the new displays have given us more to promote” (Staff - Branch C).

Beyond this though there have been no fundamental changes to the role:

“Personally, for myself, I’ve always chatted to borrowers and been interested in what they want and what they say...I think the job’s been basically the same”. (Staff - Branch C).

In some respects, the role of staff has changed- but not necessarily in a positive way. One interviewee felt frontline routine had been adversely affected by the extra workload involved with displays and collections:

“Yes, because it did create extra work initially.” (Staff - Branch D).

In other respects however, little has changed and staff still simply do not have enough time to devote to supporting readers:

“We don’t talk, we can’t talk about the books, occasionally the borrowers will talk amongst themselves but we don’t have chance”. (Staff - Branch D).

Just one interviewee believed that the new emphasis on reader development has had a profound and positive effect on daily working life. Reader development is now seen as a permanent aspect of day to day duties:

“The focus of the work has changed in that, you know, we’re looking, we’re constantly looking for means of reader development and expansion, renewal and stuff, of the stock, and the displays and the facilities we offer.” (Staff – Branch B).

7.4 Levels of Acceptance

Finally, staff levels of acceptance of the changes were considered. It was felt that most of the staff welcomed the new initiatives, largely because public response had been good:

“I think on the whole staff are glad because we do want people to come in.” (Staff - Branch A).

This acceptance was not universal however, and some negative reactions had been observed:

“*Generally* people are glad that there are all these new things going on...at the same time there are some people that are just so stuck in their ways, they don't like change and they don't see it as particularly progressive but something that's getting in the way of them doing what they've done for twenty years, you know. (Staff - Branch A).

A much bleaker outlook was provided by one interviewee, whose experience suggested that a considerable number of frontline staff felt some discontent with the new reading promotions work:

“ I think that really acceptance is driven by staffing levels...I think the public like them, I think the staff are unhappy cause it's more work...being told then that you are going to have a reading group, and you are going to do it, I do not think that goes down well with frontline staff”. (Staff - Branch D).

7.5 *Summary*

All frontline staff who participated in the interviews had observed the introduction of new reader development initiatives following *Framework*, and it was felt that these initiatives had generally met with a favourable public response. Criticisms included doubts about the themes of some of the new collections, and for one member of staff the practical limitations preventing the organisation of a reading group presented a significant problem. For the most part, the daily work and levels of interaction between staff and public had not changed significantly, and individual preferences still seem to be the motivating force behind staff involvement with readers.

8 The Perspective of Frontline Staff: Questionnaires

The quantitative data and supporting qualitative statements obtained from the questionnaires that were distributed to frontline staff in the four participating libraries will now be considered.

8.1 *The General Impact*

Awareness of *Framework for the Future* was reasonably high: 5 respondents were totally unfamiliar with the document, but 6 had read *Framework* and another 4 were aware of it. As noted in the methodology chapter however, lack of awareness of *Framework* might have discouraged some staff from answering questionnaires, so it is questionable if this figure is indicative of the general level of familiarity.

Two questions designed to include respondents with no awareness of *Framework* were included, so all participants were able to comment on the priority given to reading and any new reader development initiatives they had experience of. The responses to these questions can be seen in Figures 1 and 2. In contrast to the interview findings, the number of staff who had attempted new forms of adult reading promotion was lower examples than the number who had not. Respondents who had observed a difference provided instances of this work; typical examples included the reading groups, Richard and Judy Summer Read and the Orange book prize. Less frequently author visits and simply talking to users both inside the library and outside at community meetings were cited.

Perhaps surprisingly in light of the responses to the previous question, a greater number of staff believed that the priority given to adult readers had changed. The fact that supporting comments included statements such as “more media coverage of reading” might explain this apparently contradictory result, as it suggests some respondents were thinking in terms of wider experience rather than library experience. More specific comments from respondents who did believe priority had changed included: “reading has suddenly become higher profile in the library” and “I think libraries recognise the importance of our role in encouraging reading”.

Figure 1: In the last year have you tried any different ways of promoting reading to adults?

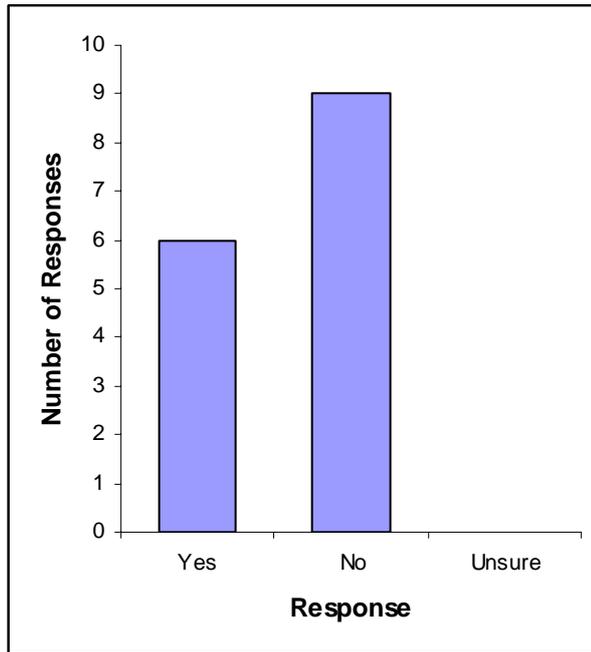
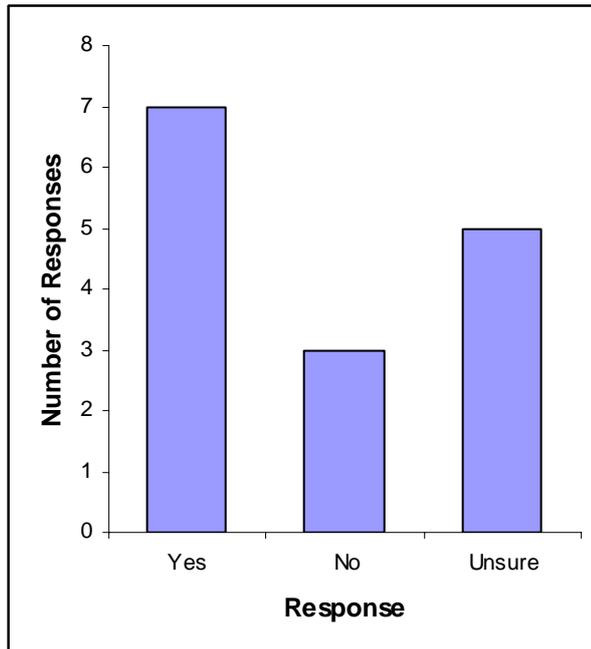


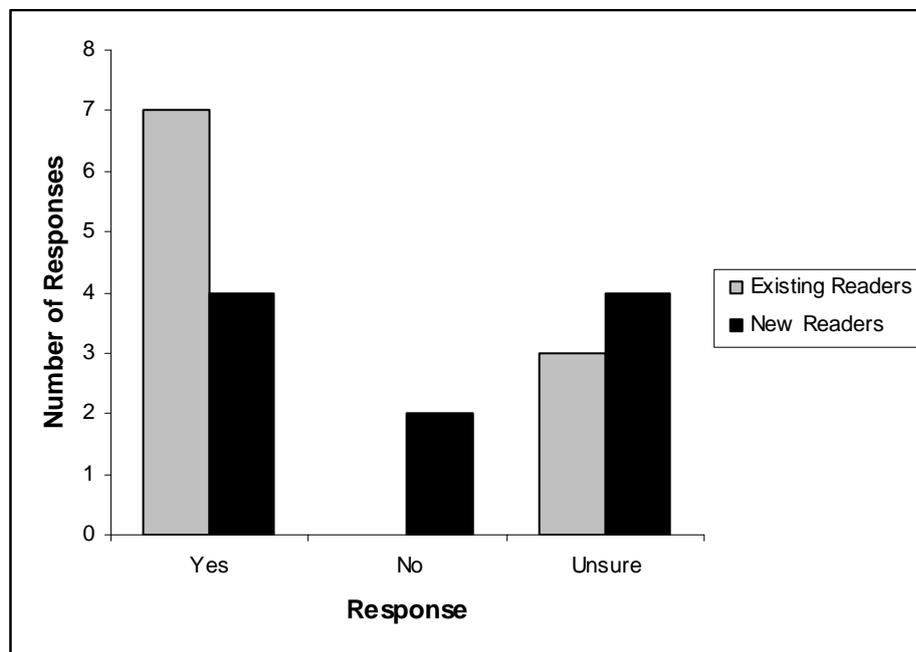
Figure 2: Do you think the priority given to adult readers has changed recently?



8.2 *New and Existing Readers*

The remaining questions considered *Framework for the Future* specifically and the ten respondents with some awareness of the document went on to complete the questionnaire. Staff were asked if they thought *Framework* had increased reading promotions work aimed at existing adult readers, and then the same question was posed but with regards to new readers. Figure 3 displays the contrast in responses to these questions.

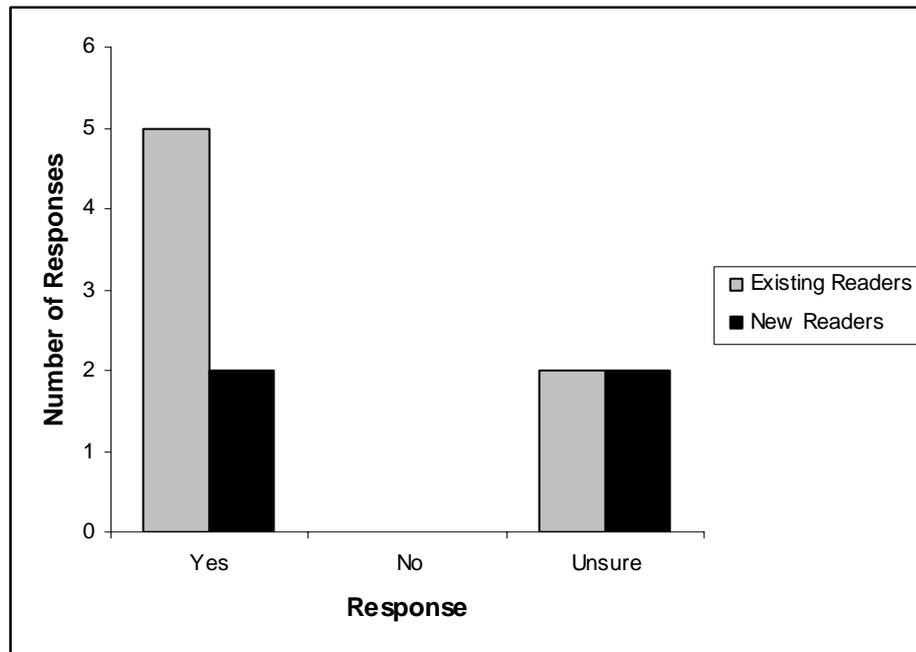
Figure 3: The increase in promotions aimed at existing and new readers.



It is clear that the majority of respondents believed promotions aimed at existing readers had increased, whereas a minority felt this was the case where new readers were concerned. Interestingly, the number of staff who had observed an increase outweighs the number who stated that they had not attempted new forms of reading promotion, despite the fact that at this stage fewer respondents were participating. This discrepancy could be explained in terms of a change in the amount of promotions, but not in their fundamental nature perhaps.

Respondents who did feel there had been an increase in promotional work were also asked to indicate whether or not they felt this work had been successful, again with respect to both new and existing readers. These results can be seen in Figure 4.

Figure 4: The relative success of promotions aimed at existing and new readers.



The majority of those respondents who had perceived an increase in promotion for existing adult readers believed that this work had been successful. In contrast there was less confidence where work with new readers was concerned. A range of qualitative statements expanding on respondents' views and examples of successful promotions were provided. Once again, the reading groups and new collections of materials were considered to have been well received by keen readers. Opinion as to new readers was more divided, and some respondents highlighted the challenges of work designed to engage with a new audience:

“This is a difficult group of people to reach and I personally feel that libraries are struggling to meet their needs”.

“I think there has been some good work in reader development, however marketing has been largely invisible”.

Three respondents did provide examples of activities in the area however, and believed that the following initiatives were appealing to a wider audience:

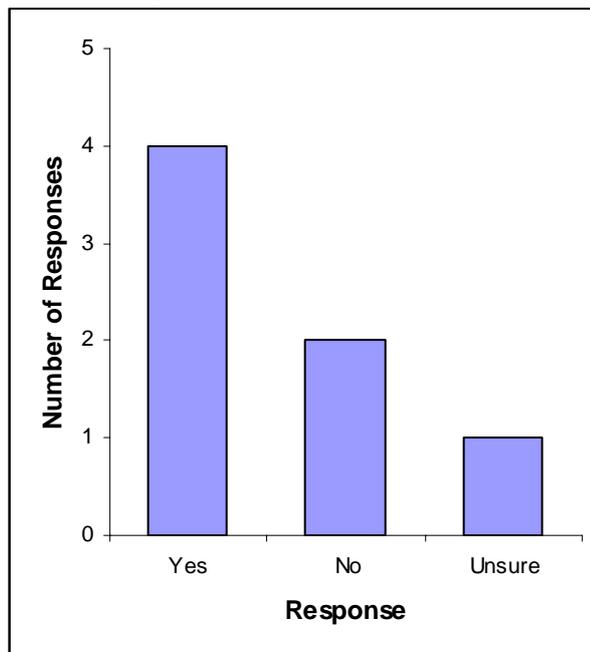
“Handing out leaflets at the shopping centre”

“New collections and reading groups”

“*Quick Reads* are very popular and graphic novels issue well”

8.3 General Public Response

Figure 5: The reaction of library users.



The next question concerned the response of library users in general to the new promotions work, rather than focusing solely on readers, and staff were asked if a positive reaction had been observed. Figure 5 shows the response to this question (three participants chose not to answer). The number of affirmative responses was not high, although twice the number of staff had observed a positive reaction than had not. Additional comments made by two respondents suggest that perhaps promotions are of interest to those who formerly used the library for purposes other than reading:

“We have a successful reading group- lots of interest from other library users”.

“New borrowers use *Quickfic*”

8.4 *Changes to Daily Work*

Finally staff were asked to indicate if they believed their day to day work with adult readers had been affected by any post- *Framework* changes. The results are displayed in Figure 6. It can be seen that response rates to this question were relatively low, and just five participants chose to give an answer. Clearly only a small number of respondents felt that their role had changed since *Framework*. The supporting statements included one comment from a staff member who they had been affected:

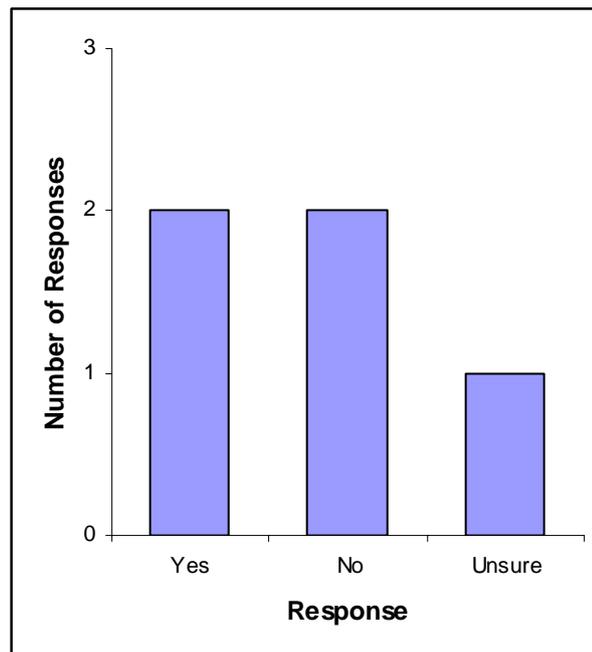
“I am much more aware of reading promotions nationally and have been able to read, obtain for borrowers and discuss these with some of our more avid readers”.

Other comments expanded on the absence of any change:

“No-because I’ve always felt that talking to users about reading has been one of the most exciting aspects of my work”.

“I am not directly involved with reading development, but I do work 18.5 hours as a library assistant and have not noticed any changes in my area”.

Figure 6: The impact of *Framework* on daily working life.



8.5 Summary

Overall the questionnaire responses suggested less frontline awareness of new adult reading promotions than the interviews might have suggested. Because interviewees provided concrete examples of new initiatives rather than stating simply that they had observed a difference in reading promotion, it is difficult to attribute this to any interviewer bias or tendency to provide more candid responses to questionnaires. Like the majority of interviewees however, most of the frontline staff who responded to the questionnaires did not believe that their day to day reader development work had changed. Respondents did feel that reading promotion has increased where adults are concerned and that this has proved reasonably successful, but the need for more work with potential readers- inside and outside the library building- was highlighted. Response rates to the questionnaire were not high, and so the results cannot be considered representative of all frontline staff; it may be the case that many staff do feel *Framework* has had a considerable impact. What can be said with some certainty however is that there at least a small number of frontline staff who have not been affected by the changes at the strategy level.

9 Conclusions and Recommendations

Prior to the introduction of *Framework for the Future* in 2003, adult reader development in Sheffield libraries was not formalised and had no underpinning strategy. Promotions aimed at adults, such as themed displays and personal staff recommendations, did take place but this was guided entirely by the personal enthusiasm of individuals. As such, work was not consistent between different library branches and considerable variation was the norm. This was not an exceptional situation or indicative of a particularly poor performance on the part of the library service; it substantiates past research such as Kinnell & Shepherd (1998) which pointed to a widespread lack of adult reading promotion policy in public libraries

9.1 *The Impact at Management Level*

At the management level, *Framework* has undoubtedly made a difference to this situation. The priority given to adult readers has increased significantly, and this is reflected in a major restructure which aims to ensure that reader development is represented at all staffing levels. It should be acknowledged that focus has not been solely on the reading promotion theme of *Framework*. Staff whose role is to advocate digital citizenship and social inclusion are included in the restructure, and the library aims to provide a balanced service. But it can certainly be said that adult reading promotion has now been given equal standing with other service areas, whereas before it was lower on the agenda. Overall the management team have adopted a far more deliberate approach to adult reader development, an approach that has been formalised in terms of policy and strategy.

9.2 *New Initiatives*

New reading promotion initiatives were considered to play a major role in the delivery of reader development, and the introduction of a range of new projects was considered to be a direct result of *Framework*. Reading groups were generally seen

as a great success by members of staff at all levels, and it was felt that as well as providing an enjoyable experience the groups proved an effective means of introducing new areas of reading to their members. This finding concurs totally with previous work such as Kendrick (2001) and Hartley (presented in Denham, 2003a). However, although the reading groups were described as a unanimous success by the management team, difficulties in establishing or maintaining groups were highlighted by a small number of library staff.

The purchase of temporary collections of material- and their use in subsequent themed displays- was also seen as a significant new development. Material designed to appeal to a wide range of readers has been introduced, including collections aimed at emergent readers, a range of lighter fiction and some more controversial collections. Opinion from frontline staff and reader development champions suggests that the latter are not always well-received by the public, and feeling towards them was mixed.

9.3 Supporting Existing Readers or Encouraging New Readers?

All levels of staff believed that by and large, the reading groups appeal to keen readers. There were some signs that new collections might attract a wider audience, but this was not always perceived to be the case. Generally both interview and questionnaire results indicate that while staff are confident that the initiatives are welcomed and utilised by existing readers, the impact on new and potential readers is less clearly understood. A range of innovative approaches has been adopted, such as the Reader's Day and partnerships with local radio. These certainly do take reading beyond the library and into the community, but the new promotions have not yet been evaluated formally. In the absence of any impact measures, it is difficult to conclude whether or not the new promotions are simply 'preaching to the converted'.

9.4 *A Success at all Levels?*

While the new initiatives were seen as significant, the management team made it clear that reader development must go beyond this: the active participation of frontline staff in delivering the new strategy was regarded as vital. Although there was some feeling among the area Reader Development Champions that the frontline role had changed, the majority of frontline staff- including those designated with responsibility for reader development- did not believe that their daily working lives had been much affected by *Framework*. Those staff who have always communicated with readers have continued to do so, likewise the staff who choose not to interact. It seems then that the personal interests of staff still play a major role in the delivery of reader development.

9.5 *Summary of Conclusions*

At the planning and strategy level, *Framework for the Future* has had a significant positive impact on adult reader development work in Sheffield libraries, but the changes have not filtered down to frontline staff in many cases. However, this study cannot be regarded as a final analysis of the situation- it was clear that the management team see the changes they have made as the start of something, not the end, and plans are continually unfolding. Staff training is planned, and it should be remembered that the restructuring is relatively new; it is perhaps inevitable that it has not been fully implemented as yet. The mood at Sheffield library service with regards to adult reader development work is generally one of optimism, and both management and area champions are confident that work will continue to progress in the future.

Given the lack of previous evaluation, it is difficult to relate these conclusions to past research in many respects. What can be said however is that the views of those who welcomed *Framework*, such as McKearney (2004) and Ruse (2003), have been supported by this study. Such commentators maintained that *Framework* had the potential to affect reader development work for the better and, in this library service at least, it has.

9.6 Recommendations

9.6.1 For Future Research

Because it focuses on the experience of Sheffield library service, this study indicates that *Framework can* have considerable impact; it does not follow that, beyond Sheffield, it necessarily *has*. A wider scale study, perhaps with more focus on a quantitative approach to facilitate the inclusion of a large number of public libraries, would be the next logical step. As previously discussed, *Framework* is regarded as fairly flexible so considerable variation in its implementation and impact would be expected. A broader study would allow examination of this variance and indicate if *Framework* has impacted on adult reader development in a general sense.

9.6.2 For Sheffield Library Service

A number of frontline staff had some simple, practical ideas that, if put into effect in the library service, would support their reader development work. Annotated bookmarks or booklists providing brief plot outlines or reviews of different books would be valuable. Some interviewees observed that many borrowers discuss how they use newspaper reviews to guide their choices, and comparable tools, available at the desk, would be of value to staff and users alike. ‘Staff Recommend’ slips similar to those used in bookshops such as *Waterstone’s* could be placed on the shelves, or inserted into books, providing brief descriptions of the title and explaining why it proved enjoyable. Doing so would complement the use of the themed promotional displays and ensure that items from the general stock as well as displayed titles are brought to readers’ attention.

Some of the new circulating collections received a mixed response from staff and they felt that public response was mixed too. There was some feeling that certain collections were ‘not right’ for particular branches, and certainly there is

considerable variance between the demographic different branches served. Staff at libraries in areas with large ethnic minority populations in particular were critical of the fact that the collections- and the accompanying promotional material- generally only contained English language material. Greater flexibility with regards to which branches receive which collections and how long the collections remain could be beneficial. Increased communication between frontline and higher level staff as to the needs of local readers would be necessary in order to support this.

Train (2003c) emphasises the need for systematic evaluation of reader development initiatives, and this need can be extended to the new promotions at Sheffield library service. As yet no evaluation of the projects has been conducted, and a user survey, to be carried out in September 2006, does not contain any specific questions on the initiatives. In order to demonstrate the value of the promotions, some form of impact measure should be conducted, preferably based on both qualitative and quantitative measures: in reader development work, where the quality of experience is deemed critical, statistics such as issue figures can only provide limited insight (Train, 2003c). Such evaluation could clarify exactly what audience the reading promotions are attracting and indicate where future efforts should be channelled.

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Appendix One Management Team Interview Schedule

1. What guided adult reader development and promotions policy before the introduction of *Framework*?
2. How would you describe Sheffield Libraries' work with adults before *Framework*?
3. Do you think this previous reader development work was satisfactory?
4. Have changes to adult reader development policy been introduced as a result of *Framework*?
5. How will the reading promotion aspects of *Framework* be implemented?
6. Has *Framework* affected the priority given to adult readers within the library?
7. Has *Framework* affected Sheffield Libraries' work with existing adult readers?
8. Has *Framework* affected work done to attract new adult readers?
9. How have you catered for adults with special needs?
10. Has *Framework* affected partnership work with other agencies?
11. How do you see the role of frontline staff in delivering the new adult reading promotions initiatives?
12. Have any training schemes been introduced?
13. Have changes been evaluated in any way?
14. How have the new initiatives been funded?

Appendix Two Reader Development Champion Interview Schedule

1. How would you describe Sheffield Libraries' work with adult readers before *Framework*?
2. Do you think the reading promotion aspects of *Framework* have been put into effect?
3. Has *Framework* affected the priority given to adult readers?
4. Has *Framework* affected the promotion of reading where adults are concerned?
5. Has *Framework* affected work with existing adult readers?
6. What about work done to attract new readers?
7. Can you provide examples of the kind of activities that have been introduced?
8. How do you see the role of frontline staff in delivering the new adult reading initiatives?
9. Has there been a perceptible staff reaction to the changes introduced as a result of *Framework*?
10. Do you think the changes have affected the day-to-day work of frontline staff?
11. Do you feel any changes introduced as a result of *Framework* have been successful?

Appendix Three Frontline Staff Interview Schedule

1. Did you carry out much adult reader development work before 2003?
2. How familiar are you with the *Framework for the Future* document?
3. Do you think the reading promotion aspects of *Framework* have been put into effect?
4. Has *Framework* affected the priority given to adult readers?
5. Has *Framework* affected the promotion of reading where adults are concerned?
6. Has *Framework* affected work with existing adult readers?
7. What about work done to attract new readers?
8. Can you provide examples of the kind of activities that have been introduced?
9. How do you see your role in delivering the new initiatives?
10. Do you think your day to day work with adult readers has changed since the introduction of *Framework*?
11. Has there been a perceptible staff reaction to the changes introduced as a result of *Framework*?
12. Have you observed any response from the public to the new promotions initiatives?

Appendix Four Staff Questionnaire

Where fixed responses are provided, please circle the appropriate answer. To gain further insight into your opinions, space has been provided for you to expand on your answers and any additional comments would be much appreciated.

1. Which branch of Sheffield Libraries do you work at?
2. What is the title of the post you hold?
3. How long have you worked for Sheffield Library service?
4. How familiar are you with the *Framework for the Future* (F4F) policy document?

Have read it / Aware but have not read it / Unaware

The following questions are related largely to Framework for the Future. If you are not aware of F4F, please answer Questions 5 and 6 only.

5. In the last year, have you tried any different ways of promoting reading to adults? *Please give examples if possible.*

Yes / No / Unsure

6. Do you think the priority given to adult readers has changed recently? *If so, in what way?*

Yes / No / Unsure

7. i) Do you think F4F has increased reading promotions work aimed at existing adult readers?

Yes / No / Unsure

ii) If so, do you think the new promotions work has been successful?

Yes / No / Unsure

Please provide examples of any relevant promotions work:

8. i) Do you think F4F has increased reading promotions work aimed at new adult readers?

Yes / No / Unsure

ii) If so, do you think the new promotions work has been successful?

Yes / No / Unsure

Please provide examples of any relevant promotions work:

9. If new reading promotions work aimed at adults have been introduced, have you observed a positive reaction from library users? *If so, please describe what this reaction has been. If you do not think any new promotions have been introduced, please do not answer this question.*

Yes / No / Unsure

10. If changes have been introduced as a result of F4F, do you think these changes have affected the way you work with adult readers on a day-to-day basis? *If you have not observed any changes, please do not answer this question.*

Yes / No / Unsure

Any other thoughts you have on the impact of F4F on the promotion of reading to adults would be most welcome.

Thank you very much for your time and participation.