

Framework for the Future (F4F): A Shared Vision?
Staff Perceptions and Cultural Issues Regarding Government
Policy Implementation.

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Abstract

The future mission and values of UK public libraries have come under increasing speculation by Tim Coates and other researchers and commentators. *Framework for the Future* is the Government's policy document, published in 2003, with the purpose of unifying, prioritising and advocating the values and core rationale for the public library service. It sets out several themes and a ten-year vision for how it needs to develop to survive and prosper.

As the first three years of implementation have passed and a further two years of funding have been granted, along with recent acceleration of the marketing phase, the impact on library staff at different levels of seniority, and an analysis of their attitudes toward the document and its practical usage need exploration.

A mixed method study involving interview and questionnaire data collected from across the organisational hierarchy and involving several different branches, including ordinal and semantic-scaling as well as open and closed questioning, was used to probe perceptions of *Framework*, its impact and influence. All questions were rooted in literature review, national policy context and extensive research, including commentary invited on opinions from professional literature. Stratification of staff and respondents added a further dimension to the mutually supportive quantitative and qualitative data collected.

Results focus on lack of communication and awareness of *Framework*, core theme prioritisations, strengths (Restructure and Reader Development) and weaknesses (financial and attitudinal). Debate over flagship examples, recruitment, retention and motivation post-*Framework*, and the failure to achieve a shared sense of purpose throughout the service, extending to local communities, proved critical. Recommendations are made for further studies and for countering weaknesses in implementation.

Sheffield's successes to-date, including champion role and restructure experiments, large-scale activity generation, People's Network and partnership developments, are highlighted throughout. *Framework* has enhanced Sheffield's service, and there remains much scope to build upon the current implementation through the next phases of *Framework* into 2013.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgement	iii
Table of Contents	iv
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1 Why Sheffield Public Libraries?	2
Chapter 2: Literature Review	5
2.1 The National Policy Context	5
2.2 Framework for the Future	7
2.2.1 A Weak Framework?	9
2.2.2 A Strong Framework?	10
2.3 The Staff Factor	10
2.4 Key Projects – Innovation versus Expense	13
Chapter 3: Methodology	15
3.1 Methodological Paradigm	15
3.1.1 Samples and Data	15
3.1.2 Triangulation	16
3.1.3 Population and Collection Issues	17
3.2 Ethical Issues	17
3.3 Aims and Objectives	18
Chapter 4: Awareness & Understanding	20
Chapter 5: “We’re all Champions now...”	28
5.1 Structure, Succession and Stimulation.	28
5.1.1 Restructure and Recruitment	28
5.1.2 Motivation and Champion Roles	31
5.1.3 Inspiring ‘youth and expertise’?	33
5.2 A Stimulating Culture?	36
Chapter 6: Core Themes and Priorities	37
6.1 E-Citizens or Digital Divide?	39
6.2 The Forgotten Missions	41
Chapter 7: Fragile Flagships and Foundations?	45
7.1 Framework’s Flagships	45
7.2 Realistic Inspiration or Unrealistic Expectation?	46
Chapter 8: A Question of Semantics?	50
8.1 Policy Character (A) – Style	50
8.2 Coverage & Influence	52
8.3 Policy Character (B) – Impact	53
Chapter 9: Key Impact - Strengths and Weaknesses	55
Chapter 10: A Shared Vision?	58
Conclusions and Recommendations	63
References	66
a) Literature Review:	66
b) Research and Methodology:	70
Appendices	72
Appendix 1: Questionnaire	73
Appendix 2: Interview Questions	77

Chapter 1: Introduction

The future mission and values of UK public libraries have come under increasing speculation by Tim Coates (2004) and other researchers and commentators. *Framework for the Future* is the Government's policy document, published in 2003, with the purpose of unifying, prioritising and advocating the values and core rationale for the public library service. It sets out several themes and a ten-year vision for how it needs to develop to survive and prosper.

As the first three years of implementation have passed and a further two years of funding have been granted (Lammy, 2005), the second phase of implementation initiated along with recent acceleration of the marketing phase, the impact on library staff at different levels of seniority, and an analysis of their attitudes toward the document and its practical usage need exploration. The topic arose out of a suggested area by Briony Train, relating to Government policy documents, their implementation and impact on operations and services. I have chosen to specifically focus on *Framework for the Future*, as opposed to other suggested documents like *Start with the Child*, for its pertinence to the future mission and value of public libraries.

Exploration of the literature has highlighted a polarisation of opinion between those supporting *Framework for the Future* (Warren, 2004; Corrigan, 2003; McKearney, 2004; Molloy, 2003), including those responsible for its implementation in the MLA (Batt, 2005; Stevens, 2003, 2005) or Government (Lammy, 2005), and those critical or cynical about its worth (Usherwood, 2003; CILIP, 2003a, 2003b; Ruse & Hicks, 2003; Garrod, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c). Investigation of grass-roots staff opinion, whilst covering strengths and weaknesses, will necessarily be guided beyond established issues like lack of core-funding, to explore submerged issues and locally-specific ones – after all, *Framework* encourages local flexibility in implementation. Organisation-specific issues, values and missions, espoused and real culture will undoubtedly influence staff perceptions. Government to library to staff communication will also be reflected, with issues of awareness and understanding investigated. All key issues filter back to staff participation, retention, development or deployment. Marketing the service also highlights staff in the post-*Framework* environment:

Stevens (2005:18) – ‘from the consumer angle... the most important factor is the staff’

1.1 Why Sheffield Public Libraries?

Aside from geographical convenience, Sheffield's Public Library Services are ideally placed for an investigation into *Framework for the Future's* impact. Sheffield City Council itself envisages 'a renewed vision for the [public library] sector...' placing Sheffield '...at the heart of the region...', whilst identifying 'culture' as fundamental to urban 'rejuvenation' (Gosse, 2006:1). The Council's cultural vision is similarly focused for a 'ten' year strategy (albeit 2006-2016 rather than 2003-2013), whilst its 'collective' nature (Gosse, 2006:1) arguably equates with *Framework's* 'shared' one (DCMS, 2003:6, 12). Both straddle local-national government objectives, regional and joint-working agendas. Sheffield Council identifies *Framework*-type concerns, for example, making 'CULTURAL INCLUSIVITY' one of its core priorities (Gosse, 2006:9), whilst libraries could also help with 'Partnership[s]' (Gosse, 2006:12) and "knowledge economy" (Gosse, 2006:4).

This apparent synergy becomes more apparent when Sheffield Libraries Position Statement of 2004 is analysed, with its efforts to balance library policy like *Start with the Child* and *Framework for the Future*, but also local government agendas, particularly in its 'Vision' to 'close the gap between the most affluent and most deprived areas of the city.' (Sheffield City Council, 2004:1). Social inclusion and equality are major issues for the service, whilst it is renowned for its provision of children and young people's services, with 'Early Years work prioritised' (Sheffield City Council, 2004:3). Consequently, my questions will attempt to differentiate by the core *Framework* themes to see whether community and reading/learning themes garner more attention than digital provision themes.

Returning to the justification of focusing on Sheffield, by 2004 it had followed *Framework* to replace the Library Plan with a "Position Statement", a step Usherwood (2003:308) feels actually reduces 'visibility' in local politics. At least Gosse's (2006) work on local-government cultural-visioning reveals that public libraries had not immediately dropped off the radar, although they still seem subordinate in attention to sport and art. More important than this advocacy issue is the fact that Sheffield libraries seem to have assimilated the *Framework* document structure and aligned their Position Statement mirroring its structure directly, theme by theme (Sheffield City Council, 2004):

'This Library Position Statement reflects the national agenda of 'Framework for the Future' within local contexts and priorities.' (Sheffield City Council, 2004:*foreword*).

This was not simply a surface effort to signal allegiance to new policy, but complemented development of a new Strategic Management Team (SMT), and ‘a whole-service restructure that has aligned service strategy and service delivery to the principles and aspirations of Framework for the Future’ (Sheffield City Council, 2004:2). Service level ‘champions’ and ‘key posts’ were re-clarified, ‘mirroring Framework for the Future’ and its priorities like ‘reader development’ (Sheffield City Council, 2004:3). The second phase of *Framework* implementation, 2006-08, has not left this re-structuring ‘outdated’ because it follows the core vision which is ‘still relevant’ (Holman, 2006:33).

The impact of such a fundamental realignment of staff structure will be important to determine, justifying a methodology rooted in stratification by seniority, enabling attitudes to be compared internally, particularly as regards the *Framework* vision, and for testing the level of acceptance of both *Framework* policy and the new organisational culture espoused in Council and library documents: Has *Framework for the Future*’s impact on ‘how we [public librarians] think... and plan’ really become as ubiquitous as Stevens and Wilkie (2004:56) suggest? It will be interesting to see whether the ‘programme of ‘visioning’ and Policy briefing workshops for all staff’ (Sheffield City Council, 2004:15) are cited by staff when examples of *Framework*-related training and initiatives are requested, because these are the sort of participative strategies that are used to gain staff support for culture change (Dougherty, 1997).

Sheffield Public Library service’s new, espoused ‘solution seeking culture...’ aims for ‘...achievements through creativity and through a robust change culture.’ (Sheffield City Council, 2004:20). This accommodates the *Framework* situation; efficiency changes and partnerships emphasised because of a lack of extra central funds (DCMS, 2003; Usherwood, 2003). The Council’s ‘three year plan’ to improve book stock, lifelong learning and ICT access (2005-7) also ‘fully reflects’ *Framework for the Future* (Sheffield City Council, 2004:1). The influence of controversial critics is also evident though, because the ‘experiment’ with flexible ‘staff deployment’ and ‘peripatetic relief staff’ (Sheffield City Council, 2004:24), is indicative of the demands of Coates (2004:14, 19-20), re-emphasising frontline roles, customer-focus, flexible staffing and restructured management.

There are other changes related to specific issues for my investigation too. The impact of *Framework for the Future* on recruitment and retention is suggested through more efforts and apprenticeships to ‘improve image... to attract young people’ (Sheffield City Council, 2004:24).

Also, the role of regional MLA councils will hopefully be revealed by staff. The Yorkshire Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (YMLAC), was mentioned rarely in the Position Statement; most notably, YMLAC staff would receive ‘cultural awareness training’ (alongside all Sheffield public library staff), suggesting a need even among the former to better understand their local and regional communities (Sheffield City Council, 2004:12). This would be ironic as YMLAC’s work is focused on culture for change (Mauger & Underwood, 2004). In addition, the degree to which ‘overload’ threatened due to the explosion of initiatives, partnerships and projects ‘straining the service’s capacity...’ is important to judge (Sheffield City Council, 2004:3). Hence one question will elicit a response to views that despite support, change may be slow given the huge amount of initiatives already taking place prior to *Framework* implementation¹.

Overall, Sheffield Library Service provides an example where real efforts have been taken from an early stage to adapt to the new policy environment. Consequently, it provides an ideal opportunity for testing not only the success and satisfaction regarding implementation, but also wider cultural and attitudinal issues.

¹ See Appendix 1, (page 76) Question 8, (View 2).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 The National Policy Context

As public institutions, public libraries vary in their ‘political purpose’ given differing local, regional and national government agendas. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) determines their policy, yet national politicians with direct library responsibilities have often proven ‘elusive’ (Usherwood & Pearce, 2003:83), whilst variations in Local Authority and County councils have heightened the ‘fragmentation’ between the 149 library authorities (DCMS, 2003:7; Usherwood, 2003). *Framework for the Future* (DCMS, 2003) suggests local innovation should continue, with successful projects adopted nationally. However, civil servants have undermined this approach highlighting “‘tension[s] between the desire for locally driven service and trying to improve things across the board...” (Usherwood & Pearce, 2003:85).

Increased emphasis on the regional agenda (Hobbs, 2003), the perceived success of *Renaissance in the Regions* and MLA (Museums, Libraries and Archives – formerly Resource) *Framework* implementation strategy, all perpetuate shared priorities and joint working to try to create synergy. Resource was intended to provide strong central leadership, yet drew professional criticisms from inception (Critchley, 2000). Its latest incarnation, MLA, has faced similar doubts as does its policy, with funding and sector-based conflicts of interest persisting (CILIP, 2003a; Usherwood, 2003). Resource’s ‘opportunities’ (Critchley, 2000:59-60), most notably advocacy and central direction, are still being expounded in professional literature, whilst professional librarians still debate whether they are effectively provided yet. With CILIP’s latest President Martin Molloy (2006) reiterating these issues, whilst hinting at further impending local government reorganisation (Hyams, 2006), plus further redevelopment of the MLA and its nine Regional Councils, with October 2006’s projected new Board structure, to foster greater “‘connection between local regions and cultural policy” (CILIP, 2006a:3), the issue of strong visions, leadership and advocacy gain heightened currency. Even MLA Chief Executive Chris Batt ‘admits that, in the past, ‘MLA has not always been as good as it should be.’ (CILIP, 2006a:3). Criticisms weighed against the MLA and *Framework for the Future* which it was charged with implementing, are linked.

Framework for the Future and related funding and political fragmentation issues were debated and contested fervently 2003-4, but less frequently since, and whilst the focus has shifted more toward its operational implementation, little conclusion has been reached on those issues overshadowed by core practicalities, notably staff attitudes toward *Framework*'s visions, their coherence and applicability. Investigation is even more timely, given Batt's (2005:21) concession that *Framework*'s first three years were slow and now it is finally off the 'back foot'. Early 2006 and the wave of marketing (Stevens, 2003 & 2005) has brought renewed attention and effort, whilst many other *Framework* Action Plan (MLA, 2004) projects have also been completed. There is also the fact that with *Framework* passing its infancy, John Dolan (2006a:14), the MLA's new Head of Library Policy, is focusing instead on 'what might be the post-*Framework* direction.'

Dolan's '5 Strand Action Pack' builds on *Framework* in terms of Accessibility, Resources, Community, Marketing and Workforce (Dolan, 2006b). However, Dolan's (2006b) emphasis on individual grass-roots efforts, in terms of profile-raising, provided a somewhat leap-before-you-look ethos, with his referencing of Richard Branson's phrase 'Screw it, let's do it' loosely reflecting Batt's (CILIP, 2006c:13) call to library staff '...to get on the radar, become salespeople, with strong advocacy, a shared message.' The onus is increasingly on public library staff to re-invent, re-image and bring policy visions to life day-to-day, with culture-change (CILIP, 2006b) and community-engagement (Lammy, 2005). In fact, public library cultural roles and 'offer', plus their internal organisational cultures, are increasingly blurred, with the latter informing on the former (Mauger & Underwood, 2004:11). The acceptance and enthusiastic compliance with national policy by staff is thus increasingly vital.

More recently, a report by Define (Define: Research and Insight, 2006) has investigated non-use/declining use in the 14-35 age bracket, applying *Framework* concepts and themes to the modernisation debate. *Framework*, the Define team note, has been 'specifically tasked with addressing this issue' (Define: Research and Insight, 2006:9). It serves as additional positive-feedback, particularly re-emphasising *Framework*'s Modern Missions. For example, the 'Distinctiveness' of service (DCMS, 2003:7), is reflected in Define's (Define: Research and Insight, 2006:56) recommendation of 'Variety and Separation', redolent of a more compartmentalised service internally. Also, linking to the marketing strand, emphasised in the MLA's (2004) first Action Plan, is the need to target what Define classify as "Disconnected" users, partly through modernised and 'refreshed' buildings with greater 'value'-added services (Define: Research and Insight, 2006:45, 54, 67). Making changes here and then 'marketing'

them is highlighted (Define: Research and Insight, 2006:16). Re-imagining of the order Stevens (2005) and others suggest is clearly important to Define, because they re-emphasise ‘negative perceptions... deeply entrenched’ among 14-35 year olds:

‘It appears that without any such ‘modernisation’ libraries services hold no interest for this age group.’ (Define: Research and Insight, 2006:5).

It remains of key interest now, with the second phase of *Framework* implementation beginning, whether these issues have an impact and how *Framework*’s vision is put into place to address negative perceptions, increase value and how library staff react to the raft of suggestions, recommendations and prioritisations thrust upon them. The MLA has certainly shown interest in 2006’s Define Report; ‘If we want to plan the future... indeed if we have a future, we cannot ignore this report’ (MLA, 2006b). Interestingly the MLA’s second Action Plan (MLA Council, 2006b) has five times fewer recommendations than the first (MLA, 2004), focuses more single-mindedly on Reader Development issues, whilst upholding the original plan and *Framework* objectives. Whether more focus and success is drawn from this is unclear yet, although the MLA optimistically report success on most aspects of the first plan (MLA Council, 2006a; MLA 2006a).

2.2 Framework for the Future

Framework for the Future is a Government policy document developed by DCMS, to provide a ‘long-term strategic vision for the public library service...’ (DCMS, 2003:5). Various sources and consultants, including Resource, CILIP and the Demos think tank, were used in its preparation (DCMS, 2003). Resource’s implementation of the policy would happen in three-year stages. Phase two (2003-06) follows phase one’s 150 ‘action points’ with a further consolidating 30 (Holman, 2006:33), drawing on additional funding.

Several core problems to solve are identified in the document, which focus part of the analysis. They reflect issues raised by many commentators, like Coates. For example, ‘Fragmentation’ of public library services locally and regionally, uneven development, plus recruitment and retention failings (DCMS, 2003:6-7). These form core areas for this study, as do the central themes and modern mission in which the vision is rooted:

Themes: ‘Books, Learning and Reading’; ‘Digital Citizenship’; ‘Community and Civic Values’ (DCMS, 2003:8-9).

Modern Mission: ‘Evolution’; ‘Public Value’; ‘Distinctiveness’; ‘Local Interpretations of National Programmes’ (DCMS, 2003:23).

Other sections have more implicit foci; a later section lists eleven service enhancements that ‘could’ provide the ‘2013’ vision (DCMS, 2003:51) - at the culmination of the ten-year plan - although phrasing and framing of the vision itself varies throughout the document and remains ambiguous, and this section is markedly detached, without standing out or receiving much specific attention in the literature. Over-arching however, is the notion of the ‘shared ideal’ or purpose; notions of community, culture and citizenship, alongside regional integration and governmental synergy permeate the document (DCMS, 2003:6). The practicability of the vision is a related issue. Certainly there is potential conflict between the mission objectives for ‘Distinctiveness’ of service (non-duplication) and the assimilation and repetition of successful initiatives (DCMS, 2003:23).

A further issue is the heavy reliance on flagship examples or case studies, which (over)represent the most advanced and/or successful public libraries, for example Norfolk and Norwich Millennium Library and the Idea Store at Tower Hamlets (DCMS, 2003:18, 21). Common stratagems can be elicited, such as increased reliance on strategic partnerships as an alternate source of funding as well as springboards for ‘imaginative’ (DCMS, 2003:5) initiatives. Marketing of the service to help reverse decline also features prominently, as does the need for greater central representation for communication. Advocacy, particularly government-facing, is another implicit goal of the document, with ‘recognition’ and joint-working to prioritise services highlighted (DCMS, 2003:44).

Public library staff themselves are targeted throughout the document, with suggestions that the ‘vision’ will ‘animate’ them and engage ‘customers’, whilst ‘image and branding’, much emphasised during implementation (alongside marketing) garners some attention (DCMS, 2003:22). The central focus on staff has been repeated often by MLA representatives in professional literature, particularly Stevens (2003; 2005), and the key importance of their ‘outlook, skills and attitudes’ is affirmed in *Framework* (DCMS, 2003:15). Stevens and Wilkie (2004:56) summarised the core elements for implementation as: ‘marketing... leadership development... sharing best practice (including peer review)... advocacy.’

2.2.1 A Weak Framework?

Professional comments have been polarised between strong criticisms, moderate and strong endorsements. Sheffield's Head of Service in 2003 felt *Framework for the Future* was "bland... all motherhood and apple pie..." (Ruse & Hicks, 2003:89), lacking direct strategies for implementing change. Others identified 'lack of ambition' (Molloy, 2003:24) in its scope, with the 'overwhelming need for investment' not answered. Certainly lack of additional core funding drew most uniform criticism, although it is attitudes to the vision and scope that have helped in the development of a semantic scale for questionnaire analysis. For example, Hicks (Ruse & Hicks, 2003:89) argued there was a lack of 'vision', which was in itself 'diluted' and offered 'no "Wow!" factor... no passion... no new big ideas.' As will be seen, this represents only one extreme.

Other issues have informed the investigation. The concerns of McKearney (2004:34) that staff may only 'hazily' understand the document, influences awareness questions. More pervasively, regional variation and fragmentation affect expectations for change; *Framework for the Future* 'may not generate very much new activity when so much is already happening' in certain areas (Warren, 2004:14). Certainly, the gulf between high and low performing services and branches has a large impact, as implied in criticisms of over-emphasis on unrepresentative new-build and large lottery-funded, innovative libraries (Molloy, 2003). One upshot is that most advanced and successful libraries may find *Framework for the Future* 'a little tame', whereas less funded and less successful services may find meeting its provisions more of a 'challenge' (Ruse & Hicks, 2003:88).

In a more incendiary way, *Framework's* optimism and selectivity have led some, notably Shiraz Durrani, to view *Framework for the Future* as 'a dangerous document that lulls us into complacency that major surgery is not required.' (CILIP, 2003a:18). More than one commentator has identified a wealth of 'rhetoric' within the document (Usherwood, 2003:307), with the advocacy strand viewed by Coates (2006) and others as a diversion from action.

Whilst more extreme comments retain a somewhat knee-jerk quality in hindsight, some have retained their potency, most notably the lack of additional core-funding, the departmental split between policy-making and funding (DCMS and Office of the Deputy Prime Minister), and the lack of alternative to the 'bidding culture' for additional funds, which reinforces regional and

local variations in service quality (CILIP, 2003a:3; CILIP, 2003b). Resentments concerning lack of funding run deep and could cloud the issue of how effective the new vision is.

2.2.2 A Strong Framework?

More positive accounts reflect attitudinal dichotomy, particularly regarding scope and intent. Accusations of dull, diluted and unfocused visions are parried by those viewing *Framework* as a tool to ‘unite and focus’; ‘a flexible friend’ rather than a rubber windmill (Ruse & Hicks, 2003:88). The tension or unity debate, seen in macrocosm in regional variation and national implementation, almost equals the funding one in pervasiveness. Also, whilst change and implementation had been seen by some as slow (CILIP, 2003a), it was welcomed by others as ‘transformation[al]’ in the long-term (McKearney, 2004:34). Differences of opinion over strengths or weaknesses were often only a matter of emphasis:

These issues have also informed construction of questions about the vision and attitudinal scaling. For example, regarding pragmatism or idealism, Molloy (2003:24) argued that from a ‘pragmatic’ angle, *Framework* represents ‘...a tool we can use in articulating our own vision for the future...’, and idealistically, ‘A catalyst to improve our own performance’. Phrasing becomes a central issue in discussing and debating attitudes, visions and values. Ruse, unlike Usherwood, argued *Framework* goes beyond ‘...fine words and aspirations, wish-lists and rhetoric...’ (Ruse & Hicks, 2003:91). The character, content and style of the document offer inspiration and motivation to some, whereas the textual subtleties arouse more suspicion from others. Overall, identifying trends in staff opinions may reflect change or continuity, unity or disunity, but also their level of awareness and acceptance of new policy.

2.3 The Staff Factor

Public library staff awareness, understanding and attitude toward *Framework*, as well as their espoused role in its implementation, are particularly important. Several key questions emerge initially: Has a new shared vision brought clarification and action, or complication and stagnation? Is the new vision agreed upon? Is its emphasis right? Investigating which core themes or missions are most prioritised by staff in general and comparing with actual implementation may reveal discrepancies.

In terms of key issues like recruitment, retention, training and development, are staff more motivated, inspired, creative and free to innovate, participate and perform due to *Framework*? Some commentators felt “‘F4F [*Framework for the Future*]... will not inspire young people to come into the profession...” as Catherine Howard of Derbyshire libraries argued (Ruse & Hicks, 2003:89), whereas others like Molloy felt it could be used in ‘communicating a sense of excitement, challenge and opportunity to existing staff and new entrants...’ (Molloy, 2003:24). Whilst he felt this rested in ‘closely and critically’ reading the document, others (like Tony Duncan) noted that it is “‘how you translate it to staff.’” that is important (Ruse & Hicks, 2003:89). Extent of awareness and understanding will therefore be examined, compared by seniority, whilst feelings toward the document, its impact on motivation and shared visioning will be tested (see appendices). McKearney (2004:35) certainly felt the optimism and community-focus of *Framework* would help get ‘young people queuing up to work for libraries because they’re vibrant, contemporary, socially powerful places...’

McKearney’s priority is for the Reading theme, re-prioritised by *Framework for the Future*, thus it will be interesting to see which themes garner most attention and with what impact on staff at Sheffield. Her hopes also rested on a ‘radical’, focused interpretation of the document, relying on staff, particularly leaders, being ‘hungry for change’ (McKearney, 2004:35). Perceptions of the document (through semantic scales) and enthusiasm or negativity derived from interviews will help reveal the situation here.

In terms of MLA representatives and their aims for *Framework’s* implementation, staff, their skills and attitudes feature heavily. Improving the image and attitudes to and of public library staff forms the second aspect of the marketing phase of implementation, according to Batt (2005:22). Stevens (2005:18) also emphasised staff regarding image and marketing. It would be fascinating to explore the new national image campaign’s influence on staff, particularly through its visions. For ‘Libraries are changing’ (Stevens, 2005:17) read Librarians are changing. Such issues are hard to penetrate, embedded as they are in cultural knowledge within the organisation. Regarding new forms of working, notably regional and national implementation, strategic partnerships and regional MLA council work, MLA representatives like Warren (2004:14), also emphasised the need to persuade ‘library staff to embrace... new concepts and opportunities...’. Testing how far staff perceive *Framework* visions to be radical, exciting, change-driving and integrative, will reflect on its success.

All these issues interweave with the improvement of ‘leadership’ and ‘management skills’, a core objective of the first phase of *Framework* implementation (MLA, 2004:10). The coverage of the resultant Leading Modern Libraries programme, which notably targeted one ‘future leader’ from each authority (Batt, 2005:22), reflects *Framework*’s aims for staff, through ‘Vision, mission and strategy’ training, for example in ‘Creating an adaptive culture’ (Forrest, 2004:5). MLA representatives regularly repeat the need for staff to advocate and market not only the service, but themselves; ‘become salespeople with... a shared message.’ (CILIP, 2006c:13).

The report by Define in 2006 also links into the staff issue, citing how 14-35 year olds react more positively to, and thus demand ‘more friendly and welcoming’ staff, but also favour staff who have ‘Youth and expertise in different fields...’, because as the report suggests, ‘Youthful staff would help in lending this ‘expertise’ credibility.’ (Define: Research and Insight, 2006:61). One implication is that younger staff can connect with 14-35 year-olds disaffected with public libraries, and by further implication help with the image of a ‘refreshed’ modern service (Define: Research and Insight, 2006:5). Sheffield Public Libraries have made efforts at recruiting younger staff, as suggested in their Position Statement (Sheffield City Council, 2004:24). All these efforts seem redolent of the MLA’s marketing campaign, rooted in a greater customer-focus.

However, it is not necessarily in tune with an otherwise ageing service (facing a potential succession crisis), which in many areas lacks the resources to update comprehensively in the ways suggesting by the DCMS, MLA or Define. The wish-list library building for example, is seen in the Love Libraries campaign (2006), with three re-vamped library buildings to serve as flagship redevelopments (somewhat akin to the examples set out in *Framework* (DCMS, 2003) like Idea Stores). Clearly, the £90,000 made available to each for their twelve week transformations is equally unique in origin (Ezard, 2006). The Commons select committee has itself noted that over half public library buildings are sub-standard and need ‘up to two-thirds of a billion pounds... to wipe out the backlog of building repairs and refurbishments.’ (Ezard, 2006).

Overall, the attitudes of staff to the *Framework* document and its vision are so intrinsic to its success – least of all in the eyes of the MLA – that a thorough exploration of these will reflect on the continuing success of implementation and change, as well as public library organisational cultures; morale, motivation, inspiration and creativity.

2.4 Key Projects – Innovation versus Expense

Despite *Framework's* (DCMS, 2003) emphasis on developing the People's Network, Digital Citizenship draws no direct *Framework* (Table i) funding, whilst Action Plan package 1 (Table ii) emphasising visions, leadership, marketing and advocacy, had increasing funding into 2006 (MLA, 2004). Consequently, the issue of raising expectations without improving services could emerge exacerbating the digital-divide. The importance to library and government agendas of free ICT access and the development of People's Network services both increase, though the sustainability of the latter remains problematic.

Table (i) 'Work Package 3': 'Digital Citizenship' (MLA, 2004:23):

Budget:	Framework	Other
2003/04	£0	£500,000 (NOF/Big) over two years including project management costs
2004/05	£0	
2005/06	£0	

Table (ii) 'Work Package 1': 'Building capacity to deliver transformation' (MLA, 2004:6):

Budget:	Framework	Other
2003/04	£475,000	
2004/05	£1,602,500	
2005/06	£1,809,000	

When reviewing the end of year monitoring report for 2005/6, this issue is reinforced yet again. A table and emoticon-like faces reflect the level of success of certain packages (MLA Council, 2006a:2):

- ☺ = Fully achieved, with significant impact made
- ☹ = Largely achieved
- ⊖ = Not fully achieved, OR impact disappointing despite tasks being achieved'

Whilst most action points from Action plan 1 (MLA, 2004) have been fully or largely achieved, including (MLA Council, 2006a:18) '6.1 Create a new web-based access point into national People's Network services' and the great successes for points 6.1.1 through 6.1.4, and the huge range of PN services developed – point 6.2.1 (MLA Council, 2006a:19-20) - it falls flat on the key issue of sustainability. Point 6.1.5 sets out the need to 'Examine the sustainability issues related to the new People's Network service', yet concludes that 'Sustainability options

[are] still to be finalised’, garnering a ‘⊕’ (MLA Council, 2006a:19). Interviewee G, a Senior Public Librarian at Sheffield, noted that for the People’s Network:

“We’ve had no external funding, we’ve had to fund it ourselves but we’ve... had the budget, the maintenance costs on it, what we don’t have... is a way of replacing it, and that is one of the outstanding issues of PN, there’s no second wave of funding for when the thing gets a bit ancient.”

Certain innovations regarding staff, their motivation and skills, have been great successes by comparison, notably the National Leadership Programme through which ‘148 out of 149 authorities participated’, ‘21 courses [were] run’ and ‘429 completed [the] programme, including 119 Heads of Service’ (MLA Council, 2006a:5). However, efforts for the workforce in general were only ‘Largely achieved’ (MLA Council, 2006a:2). Point 2.2.1 aimed to ‘Implement a nationally co-ordinated workforce development programme that improves staff skills in delivering high quality services’, but most programmes are still ‘ongoing’ (MLA Council, 2006a:6). A development project (involving MLA Yorkshire) has included 150 staff and ‘provided [a] model for regional support’ (MLA Council, 2006a:6-7). Therefore, further change can be expected in the region in the not-too-distant future.

Available to staff now, via the MLA website, are various updates on developments, covering areas like marketing, the stock procurement issue and leadership programmes, but also links to downloadable resources, for example advocacy packs, providing grass-roots activity a platform to launch from. Phase two of the MLA implementation plan is shorter and more focused than its predecessor and thus preferred by those staff, particularly senior, that mentioned it. It also benefits from being able to cite successes succinctly, and refine its priorities in light of what has been fully, partially or non-achieved, without over-writing early successes:

‘Programmes completed in the first stage of *Framework*, up to 2006, will be embedded and sustained through library services and their partners. The current action plan [2006-08] concentrates on new development, building on success to date.’ (MLA Council, 2006b:5-6).

Chapter 3: Methodology

Mixed methods were utilised for an exploratory, interpretive investigation, incorporating some deductive approaches to support more subjective inquiry methods and the inherently subjective nature of staff perceptions, impressions and attitudes. Consequently, conclusions will retain an element of transferability to similar groups, (probably regionally), whilst it is possible to generalise only about a small part of the study. The majority of the information utilised will conform to the inductive, interpretive paradigm. Participant opinions, values and views will need a holistic, social-intuitive approach, exploring unlinked models and factors at an early stage. The literature review and exploration of library service values, mission statements and comparison with *Framework for the Future*, as well as how these types of espoused visions and top-level views correlate with those of staff in general and between staff of different seniority, inform the conclusion. The researcher has tried to avoid his preconceptions during analysis whilst forming a coherent thematic interpretation of the results.

3.1 Methodological Paradigm

The main emphasis is on qualitative methods, given the subjective nature of attitudes which form the core of the data to be collected. Some quantitative elements will be incorporated to reinforce comparability, notably through Likert and semantic scales. Qualitative research also has a recognised role in ‘*enlightening* policy makers’ (Slater, 1990:111), the ultimate ambition for this study. The aim was to explore the issues and develop “emergent” themes, essentially “grounded” in the collected data rather than a specific hypothesis (Finch, 1990:131). This is vital as attitudes are deeply personal, and qualitative research assumes that deep understanding is possible ‘only through the eyes of actual participants in specific situations’ (Gorman & Clayton, 2005:3). The primary tool was interviewing, widely recognised as valuable for ‘studying such emotional bases of behaviour as attitudes, beliefs and feelings’ (Mellon, 1996:47). The secondary, questionnaire tool is complementary and comparative, broadening the type of data, whilst reinforcing the emotional/attitudinal angle.

3.1.1 Samples and Data

The interview sample was ‘purposive’ in nature (Gorman & Clayton, 2005:128). Ten staff (two to three) members from each level in the hierarchy were interviewed. Identification of several potential interviewees was followed with random selection for contacting and setting up

interviews. For the questionnaires, ‘convenience’ sampling was followed, given the need for as many respondents as possible (Gorman & Clayton, 2005:129). Whilst neither sampling system allows for a high level of statistical accuracy - with only ten interviews which are not entirely randomly selected, plus the issue of self-selection of questionnaire respondents – attitudinal information is so intrinsically personal and unquantifiable that this is less important. Qualitative data is rich and enumeration of attitudinal information will at best provide small-scale comparability, the opportunity for testing to be easily repeated, plus reinforces its transferability (Oppenheim, 2001). Attitude studies are not suited for generalisation, unlike purely deductive, quantitative results. This does not undermine the utility of the methodology, because qualitative research has different purposes and strengths (Gorman & Clayton, 2005; Burton, 1990).

3.1.2 Triangulation

Mixed methods help to avoid the gaps and specific weaknesses of single methods, be they qualitative or quantitative. Multiple strategies are used here to achieve this. Firstly, interviews and questionnaires provide different angles on the same problem – interviews are more personal, detailed and enable causation to be explored, whereas questionnaires ‘are better for breadth than depth’ (Mann, 1990:55), enabling comparability by comprising more closed, tick-box responses (Peacock, 1990). Exploratory, open-ended questions suit interviews better. Secondly, using attitude scales to provide quantitative information to contrast with purely textual information, supporting patterns and trends, with ‘median’, ‘rank’ and ‘percentiles’ interpretation supported (Busha & Harter, 1980:196). Thirdly, ‘stratification’ (Gorman & Clayton, 2005:128) is used to add greater comparability and depth, with respondents asked to select a level of seniority applicable to them from a list. Interpreting results from the different levels adds yet more complexity and reliability.

The scaling of attitudes and collection of ordinal data (through Likert scales) enables comparison of such attitudes by their ‘intensity’ (Oppenheim, 2001:176). A five-point continuum – Strongly Agree; Agree; Neutral; Disagree; Strongly Disagree – helps identify and compare attitudes to particular statements derived from the literature review, regarding *Framework for the Future*. The use of seven-point semantic scales enables specific, overarching judgements to be made about the policy-document itself, based on binary opposite terms (Oppenheim, 2001). Such closed questions require less articulation and time by respondents thus will make questionnaires more likely to be completed. A small set of open-ended questions supported and elucidated these areas. The balance is reversed in the interviews, where open-

ended questions pre-dominate, for richer information, which can be reinforced on macrocosm through questionnaire responses, which avoid undue interviewer 'bias' (Powell & Connaway, 2004:149).

3.1.3 Population and Collection Issues

Across June and July, 15 Librarians completed the questionnaire (1 Senior Librarian (S1), six Middle Managers (M1-6), three Frontline Managers (FM1-3) and five Frontline Library Assistants (LA1-5). A sixteenth questionnaire respondent (a Library Assistant) made comments only regarding their inability to answer the questions and lack of awareness of *Framework*, and did not complete the tick-box questions so is only included in sections where a comment is provided (as LA6). Additionally, 10 half-hour interviews were conducted, and for these there were different respondents, three Senior (Senior Librarian Interviewees 1-3), two Middle Managers (Middle Manager Interviewees 1 and 2), three Frontline Managers (Frontline Manager Interviewees 1-3) and two Frontline Library Assistants (Library Assistant Interviewees 1-2). Interview and Questionnaire respondents were drawn from a range of branches and departments, for example, Central Library, plus branches at Upperthorpe, Highfield, Burngreave, and Hillsborough, as well as Mobile library services. Martin Dutch was my first point of contact in the service, providing a long list of contact details to randomly select from for interviews and helping with a snowball-effect dissemination of questionnaires through management staff at different levels.

Timescale:

- 1) Exploration - questionnaire distribution, interviews (and transcription), espoused values/mission research.
- 2) Analysis - Data Collection, analysis and preliminary write-up.
- 3) Completion - Member checks, final write-up and experience review. Additionally - continual feedback and progress reviews/updates with supervisor.

3.2 Ethical Issues

Ethical approval was essential given the core focus on human participants, their personal opinions related to work-based issues. Consequently, permission for interviews (informed consent) and questionnaires was acquired. Whilst top level staff interviews were recorded and transcribed, it was important to check with them about the representation of their view-points in the write-up (member-check), to ensure they were not misrepresented by accident. All staff

participation was confidential; qualitative and quantitative questionnaire results did require personal identification, avoiding the possibility of negative repercussions, whilst ensuring more honest answers. Participants were informed about the nature of the study, involvement was voluntary and participants had time to change their minds. No-one opted to withdraw participation. Anonymity, confidentiality and data-protection were supported; an Information sheet and consent form were developed and provided, with copies made available to the participant.

3.3 Aims and Objectives

Several sets of exploratory themes informed on the preparation of the search tools (see Appendices), the results from which were analysed and compartmentalised into chapters which, although slightly different, attempted to answer these initial questions:

1) Explore and assess awareness of *Framework for the Future*:

Do staff understand *Framework*, or have only a ‘hazy’ impression? (McKearney, 2004:34). Is *Framework*’s impact on ‘how we [public librarians] think... and plan’ really as ubiquitous as Stevens and Wilkie (2004:56) suggest? Which of the core aspects and/or themes are most important to them personally (e.g. reader development or digital citizenship)? Have they all been addressed equally? Is there agreement on these core services? For example, have any key user groups/services been over or under-emphasised. An indication of what level of seniority participants have within the service is important to identifying patterns. What methods do staff use to find out about *Framework*?

2) Explore staff perceptions of *Framework for the Future*:

Issues covered include motivation, performance and service, visions and values. Post-*Framework* issues include training, peer review, partnerships, marketing campaigns and other programmes and action, as well as the perceived impact on recruitment, retention and morale, plus opportunities to demonstrate initiative and creativity.

2b) Strengths and weaknesses of Framework for the Future?

What has been the major impact, linking in to service-specific changes? Also, explore perceptions of case study and flagship examples. How effective was the overall *Framework* implementation?

2c) Analyse policy in theory and practice:

Do tensions arise between *Framework* mission objectives? – Local/National; Political/Social; Internal service/External (outreach); innovation and diversification against distinctiveness and non-duplication themes; Marketing locally/advocacy nationally; Literacy/E-Literacy; radical versus evolutionary. How does Sheffield prioritise the core themes and is this agreed upon?

3) Comparing views – professional bodies and organisational hierarchy:

Compare and contrast *Framework* with library mission statements (espoused cultural artefacts) and staff views/visions, to see its influence and penetration of professional culture at grass roots. Also, compare with *Framework*'s marketing strand and advocacy image, has it penetrated to grass-roots. Look at Regionally-specific MLA programmes like those of Yorkshire Museums Libraries and Archives Council (YMLAC). Explore this through literature review and analysis of awareness methods.

4) Shared Sense of Purpose, Vision and Values:

Use Semantic Scales and open-ended questions to explore attitudes toward and outcomes of the policy. What other factors have contributed beyond *Framework* e.g. other policy documents, professional standards, partners and organisations? If there are improvements significantly due to *Framework*, have they been implemented directly from that document, due to MLA's action plans, local government pressure, or due to internal initiatives of librarians/managers/leaders? Has a shared sense of purpose taken root involving community and government? If so, have these shared values, visions and priorities been effectively embedded at all levels? Overall, has *Framework* brought clarification and action, or complication and stagnation?

Chapter 4: Awareness & Understanding

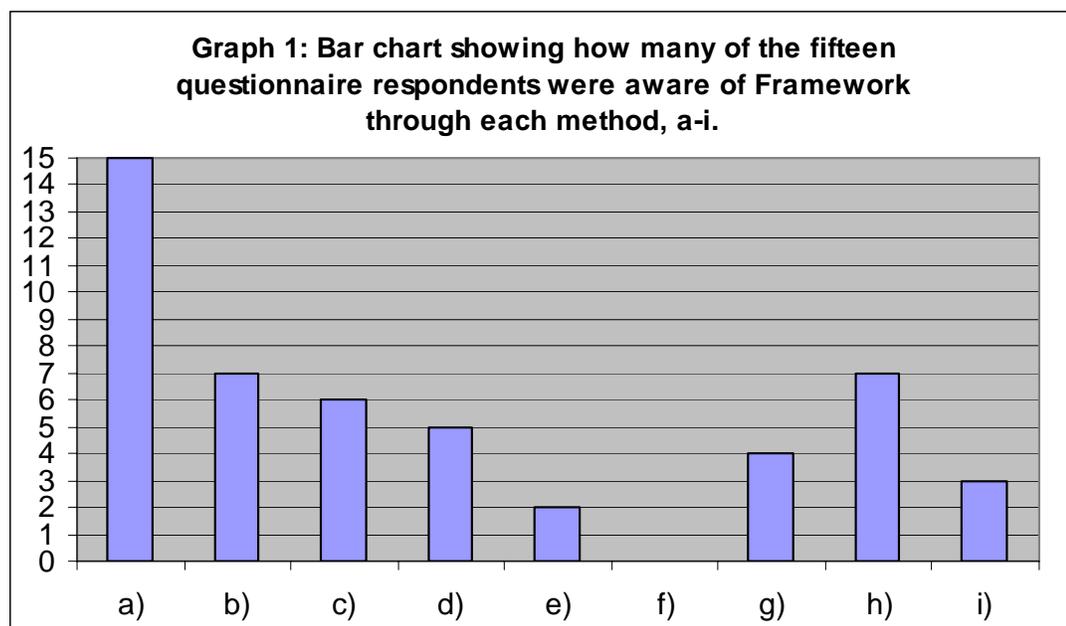
Several key questions arise when considering *Framework* in the public library organisation. It is important to assess the strength of awareness and understanding of the document, and the level of sufficiency these have for the roles staff have at different levels of the service. Comparing responses at all levels of seniority may be expected to reveal large differences, particularly regarding the extent to which frontline staff are expected and encouraged to have current and strategic awareness compared to those with more operational and strategic responsibilities. Stevens and Wilkie (2004:56) felt *Framework*'s impact on 'how we [public librarians] think... and plan' is huge, whilst McKearney (2004:34) debated whether staff would have more than a 'hazy' impression of it.

Sheffield public librarians were asked in questionnaires 'Are you aware of the policy document *Framework for the Future*?' All respondents stated yes, although more senior respondents noted that some lower-level staff were unable to complete or return the questionnaire due to a lack of specific knowledge and its difficulty. Five library assistants did complete the questionnaire however, although another returned it only with comments as to why they could not answer each section. The methods used to gain awareness of *Framework* policy are more enlightening as to the greater question of the extent to which staff are encouraged to do so throughout the service. The multiple choice question 'How have you gained awareness of *Framework for the Future*?' offered nine options (a-i):

- a) Read all or part of the document itself
- b) Read all or part of related documents (e.g. 'A Quiet Revolution'; Library Position Statements)
- c) Read coverage in professional literature e.g. CILIP (Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals) Update?
- d) Formal workplace training about *Framework for the Future*
- e) Through involvement in Librarianship-related professional groups or communities (e.g. Career Development Group)
- f) Through involvement with MLA (Museums, Libraries & Archives), Regional MLA Council or *Framework* related projects (e.g. Leadership Programme)
- g) Information from external training courses/events
- h) Informal discussion with work colleagues
- i) Other (please specify)

In terms of emphasis, workplace training (d) and discussion with colleagues (h) would be most indicative of an organisational culture which encourages awareness and understanding, as would, to a moderate degree, (a) and (b), reading all or part of *Framework* or related documents. Individual initiative and external activities are more indicative of, though not exclusive to, reading professional literature (c), involvement in professional groups, external courses (g) or with MLA bodies (f). The latter two also suggest a larger degree of partnership and/or regional joint-working, whilst work with YMLAC (Yorkshire Museums Libraries and Archives Council) would suggest strong regional commitment to *Framework* implementation.

In terms of the context of the data collected, 15 questionnaires were completed by one Senior-Librarian, six Middle-Managers, three Frontline-Managers and five Frontline Library Assistants. Whilst this provides a basic overview, the small number of respondents and more purposive sampling mean results are not generalisable, particularly for Senior-Librarian opinion, although they offer a small-scale snapshot, with some interesting trends.



Graph 1 reveals that the most frequent method was (a), because all 15 respondents (who completed the full questionnaire) had read all or part of *Framework* itself. Every other method was utilised by below 50% of respondents. Second most prevalent were methods (b) and (h), reading all or part of related documents (like Position Statements), and informally discussing *Framework* with work colleagues. This bodes well for internal awareness strategies, although the fact only seven of fifteen respondents had talked with colleagues about it, suggests informal

communication needs to improve. This is an area where developing communities of practice and other knowledge management related concepts could help, but might also reflect a need for extra time to communicate effectively.

Methods (c) and (d) were third and fourth most popular; professional publications, and formal workplace training. Six and five of fifteen respondents used these respectively, which again reinforces a moderate degree of individual initiative (c), whilst suggesting that top-down emphasis on *Framework* needs to increase as not everyone has directly been instructed upon the service's utilisation of *Framework* (d), although there is some overlap with (b) because Sheffield's Position Statement heavily emphasised *Framework* themes². In fifth and sixth places were external courses (g) then (i) 'Other' (including "interview feedback" for one Library Assistant, a Frontline-Manager's "recent" completion of "Librarianship Qualification" and a Middle-Manager using the "MLA website").

Only two people gained awareness 'Through involvement in Librarianship-related professional groups or communities' and none 'Through involvement with MLA... Regional MLA Council or *Framework* related projects (e.g. Leadership Programme)', suggesting that either professional groups and MLA are undervalued, or that staff put little extra time into these or they do not cover *Framework* issues. The fact that none of the ten interviewees made reference to Yorkshire MLA Council or particular professional bodies like the Career Development Group in these ways reinforces their lack of uptake and influence on staff in Sheffield.

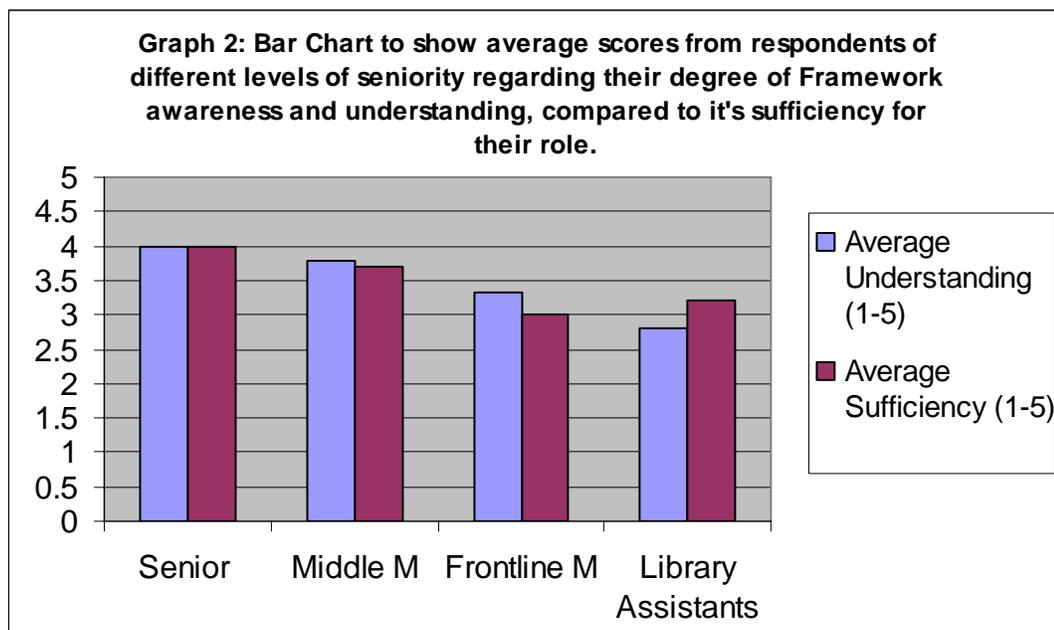
Library Assistants ranged between one and three methods each, Frontline Managers between one and six, Middle Managers between one and five, whilst the Senior-respondent used 7 methods. Whilst at the top-level most awareness is expected and utilised, and whilst the amount of methods are minimal at the frontline, perhaps most surprising is the huge inconsistency amongst the middle two management levels.

The level of awareness is not always proportional to its importance though, as is seen in how sufficient it is perceived to be. For example, some levels of seniority may require more awareness to perform effectively than others. Questionnaire respondents were asked to mark on a scale of 1 to 5 (where one represents a very low degree, three a moderate degree, and five a very high degree) for two self-perception questions: firstly, 'In terms of your awareness and

² See Chapter 1.1 discussion.

understanding of the Vision set out *in Framework for the Future*, please indicate how comprehensive you feel your understanding of the Vision is.’ And secondly, ‘To what degree do you feel your awareness and understanding of *the Framework for the Future Vision* is sufficient in terms of your job position and involvement in policy objectives in the workplace?’ The scores were averaged to allow basic comparison between the different levels of seniority (each with a different number of representatives):

Going down the hierarchy, staff perception of their awareness and understanding declined from a fairly high degree (average of 4 for Senior ‘S’ and 3.8 for Middle Managers ‘M’) through a moderate (3.3) degree (Frontline Managers ‘FM’) to a moderate/borderline fairly low degree 2.8 (Library Assistants – ‘LA’) as indicated by Graph 2 below. Whilst the sufficiency of this awareness matched the level of understanding for the senior respondent, it slightly lagged behind the awareness score for middle and frontline managers, although among Library Assistants, with the lowest awareness and understanding, their perception of the sufficiency of this for their role was higher (averaging 3.2 compared to the 2.8) – see Graph 2 below. Consequently, this suggests that middle and frontline managers feel they need to become slightly more aware, or perhaps do not receive all the policy-related information to do their jobs one-hundred percent effectively, whereas Frontline Assistants perhaps feel they have more than enough understanding to do their work and do not need comprehensive understanding of policy. This is reinforced by interview responses.



In terms of comments from Senior-Interviewees 1 to 3, reflecting on how far efforts to raise awareness through the organisation (top-down) were made, there are three main issues. Firstly, centralised transmission of summarised current policy (regarding *Framework*) did take place, although only during the restructure over two years ago, in the form of “a half day session that talked a lot about Framework” and its “main issues” as Senior Interviewee 1 remarked. However, in response to interview question 9 (To what degree has the overall *Framework* vision been adopted in your library service?), Senior-Interviewees 2 and 3 noted the ubiquity of *Framework* ideas operationally; the former stating “It’s quoted often... It’s intrinsic to the way we work now...”, whilst the latter commented on conceptual continuity in *Framework* themes, implying familiarity should be easy, because “...it hasn’t really changed; it’s just been put into new language.”

Framework may be oft-quoted and appear derivative for Senior Librarians, but this awareness and familiarity may not filter effectively down the service. In response to question ten (In your opinion, has *Framework for the Future* helped your library service achieve ‘a shared sense of purpose’ extending to its community and government?) Senior-Interviewee 2 remarked that:

“...you never know how far down the organisation it’s gone... how much people pay lip-service to the vision and whether you’ve really got hearts and minds on board... I assume that it’s changed the service, but if you talk to frontline staff they may say it doesn’t feel any different...”

Senior-Interviewee 1 went further, questioning the perceived necessity of knowing the origin of the ideas that influenced services and thus (implicitly) the relevance of *Framework* awareness on the frontline:

“With a report like this, what’s more important – for it to be so coherent that people understand all the time ‘Framework! Framework! Framework!’ and that’s where we’re driving, or that we have embedded those other values that Framework reflects? I don’t know which is better to be honest...”

Senior-Interviewee 3 went further, stating:

“I have no belief that a frontline member of staff will be able to quote *Framework* back at me, and I wouldn’t have any expectation... because they don’t need to...”

Frequently, all staff above Library-Assistant level made disclaimer-like statements about awareness and understanding of *Framework* by Library Assistants, and whilst some of their own comments suggest this to be true, it reflects a large under-estimation in most respects. For example, Library-Assistant Interviewee 1 had detailed knowledge about the restructuring and emphasised “lots” of “new” *Framework* “targets”, along with “our council’s take on that”, which are “passed down” from “top managers to the middle managers... normal branch managers to people like me. It’s a cascade...”, whilst arguing that “if you don’t mention it [*Framework*] in your application form, then you’re not getting anywhere.” So the service’s expectation of current policy awareness at assistant-level is arguably increasing.

However, the same interviewee remarked later that one of *Framework*’s “weakness[es] is that it’s such a big document that not all the people have read it through.” Library-Assistant Interviewee 2 concurred that:

“...a lot of people haven’t read it for a start, I mean it’s a really thick document... they’ve heard about it, but they think ‘what’s in it?’ ... why would you need to know it... we’re not on the managers level... we’re just doing the dogsbody work...”

These comments reflect the quantitative data which shows that despite the lowest self-perceived awareness and understanding of *Framework* in the service, Library Assistants actually rate the sufficiency of this understanding for their job and policy involvement higher, (using the same scale – see Graph 2 above). This could be explained further by Library-Assistant Interviewee 2’s impressions of the adoption of *Framework*’s vision in Sheffield Libraries (see Appendix 2, question 9):

“...we’re doing things without knowing it’s part of that document really... It’s got to come from above really, to filter down... managers have promoted these reading groups and got staff to be part of that champion role... so we’re doing it without knowing...”

One extra questionnaire was returned with only comments about why they (a Library Assistant) could not complete it (LA6). This reflected several awareness issues. Firstly, much of the terms used in *Framework* appeared like “jargon + W/O meaning”, and overall the document was “Only glanced at” because it was perceived to be “Too indigestible”.

Whilst many Library Assistants probably lack detailed *Framework* knowledge, there is little managerial expectation or pressure for them to acquire it. However, Library-Assistant Interviewee 1, who had worked in the service for about a year was positive about greater “awareness” and training, as well as “the change in staff...” through employing more “outgoing people”, whilst new *Framework*-related champion roles helped Library-Assistants “feel more included”, with greater “responsibility...” Awareness and understanding at that level may be improving but remains patchy, lacking specific minimum requirements and belief in the need for them.

The perception of a cascade of policy knowledge, top-down, is seen among Middle and Front-line management interviewees too. Regarding *Framework*-specific awareness, part of the problem is linking activities back to the document, or rather the failure to do so, and the debate as to whether it needs to be, what with top-level staff chiefly responsible for strategy and policy. Middle-Manager Interviewee 1 noted how “it’s the ideas that are embedded rather than the document”, whilst viewing their work as “a continuous thread” from *Framework* and its initiatives, whilst Middle-Management Interviewee 2 agrees that *Framework* is “something that’s there in the background,” and has more impact the higher in the hierarchy you are. The awareness and organisational communication controversy reaches a head in the comments of the three Frontline-Management Interviewees. The third interviewed stated:

“I think a lot of library assistants haven’t got much clue about it really. I think they might have latched on to the focuses of it, because that’s all embedded in our structuring, but how much they link that back... I’m not sure.”

The second Frontline Manager interviewed matched this opinion:

“...not all staff at the library assistant level are that knowledgeable about it [*Framework*]... but they’re doing a different job and they’re doing it well, and they’re reacting to it [*Framework*] whether they know they are or not. ...in the whole scheme of things they’re too busy trying to run a counter, which is down to staff and budget...”

Most importantly, Frontline Managers also felt out of the policy communication loop, lacking time and incentive to raise awareness. Frontline-Management Interviewee 3 stated:

“I know that there’s a next stage [MLA Action Plan phase II] and that I picked up because I’m a member of CILIP... [but] the thing with Sheffield is you don’t have to be qualified, you don’t have to be a member of CILIP and there’s no requirement on you... to do any professional background reading... so what you pick up is down to you... I feel in some ways very inadequate, because I’m not abreast of it all, but... there’s this information overload...”

Frontline-Management Interviewee 1 agreed:

“Now I could be totally wrong... but... I feel I’m not getting the feedback from people above me... I’m not sure how much it’s linking up... I feel it’s all a bit sort of scattered, but that’s... because you get so engrossed... in your own little area and every now and then you have to lift your head and think ‘can we share this with other people?’”

Overall, there is a vocal concern at Senior and Middle Management level about frontline awareness and understanding, but this is not matched by a definitive method for, or pressure to, increase this. There is even an admittance of the difficulty of communicating top-down and getting grass-roots support organisationally. Pressures of resources (time; budget; staffing), the over-abundance of policy material, all obstruct fully-sufficient awareness. Whilst awareness and its sufficiency range from the acceptable moderate to fairly high level, it does not seem to be addressed frequently. Staff infrequently discuss policy or receive direct communications about it. Part of this is due to the endemic opinion that it is not important for the frontline to know what policy and vision their activities follow and why - the linking-back issue. There is also the possibility that the ‘overload’ of policies and initiatives prevents this being communicated effectively, which makes it as much a problem of communication from external professional bodies as internally within the organisation.

Chapter 5: “We’re all Champions now...”³

5.1 Structure, Succession and Stimulation.

Three main themes emerged from interviews across the hierarchical strata of Sheffield public library service relating to recruitment, retention, motivation and morale issues resulting from *Framework for the Future* and its implementation. These themes are structure, relating to the major restructuring of posts and service priorities to fit *Framework*'s themes, evidenced in the Position Statement of 2004 as discussed in Chapter 1.1; development of a new Strategic Management Team (SMT), and ‘a whole-service restructure that has aligned service strategy and service delivery to the principles and aspirations of Framework for the Future’ (Sheffield City Council, 2004:2).

The second theme is succession, relating to the need for successful recruitment at all levels, particularly managerial, considering the perceived impending crisis with many top staff (across public library services nationwide) reaching retirement age soon. How the organisation inculcates new staff into its culture and the role *Framework* plays in this is important. This links neatly into the third issue, stimulation, which describes the motivational or de-motivational aspects of *Framework* and how staff work at all levels, linking back to the (re)structure and potentially informing on the succession issue, particularly regarding retention.

5.1.1 Restructure and Recruitment

All of the interviewees at all levels directly commented on the impact of the restructure. For example, in their responses, Senior-librarians all referred to the major restructure of Sheffield Public Libraries two years ago; linking of new posts and Championship roles to core *Framework* themes, as well as *Framework*-related interview questions for posts “at middle managers and below” (Senior Interviewee 3). Middle-Management Interviewee 2's views reinforce this:

³ Comment by Middle-Management Interviewee 2.

“...the whole restructuring... sort of relate to that [*Framework*] vision... so it’s certainly impacted on staff in that sense that roles have changed and parts of the *Framework* have been incorporated into staffing roles...”

The creation of champion roles has proved the most controversial aspect of this, and the discussion of structural issues fell particularly within answers to questions three and four:

‘3) Has there been an impact on recruitment and retention resulting from *Framework* policies and implementation in your service?’

‘4) Has there been an impact on motivation and morale in your library service as a result of *Framework for the Future*?’

The impact of *Framework* on recruitment and retention is debated at all levels. Senior-Interviewee 3 said “I doubt if there has been...” any, but suggested that working to *Framework* agendas “makes us more relevant to what they [potential applicants] want to do.” By contrast, Senior-Interviewee 2 was more explicit about how new posts “did lead to recruitment in the service...”, evidence of *Framework*’s impact “indirectly”. Senior-Interviewee 1 tended to agree with 2, arguing that training, restructuring and influx of new staff occurred because “we bought into *Framework*” during a time of “greater clarity about what libraries were about”. However, Senior-Interviewee 1 conceded that “two years on... for all sorts of reasons we could be challenged about whether we’ve actually... delivered what we talked [about]...”, and was critical of the overall success of certain experiments like with Champion roles.

The Middle-Management interviewees like Senior Interviewee 1 doubted *Framework* had had a direct impact on recruitment and retention, but offered different reasons. Middle-Management Interviewee 2 pinpointed obstructing “factors” such as “...our minimum staffing levels... that were agreed ten to fifteen years ago which don’t reflect the levels of service that we’re offering or trying to offer today.” Middle Management Interviewee 2 also discounted a direct impact, occupying a middle-ground between direct and indirect impacts, arguing that “...some of the [*Framework*] themes... about getting a diverse staff... [are] important to me whilst recruiting.” This views the impact from the other end of the telescope, reflecting on the impact on recruitment criteria rather than whether more and better staff were recruited.

Frontline-managers offered yet another angle on the issue. Frontline-Manager Interviewee 2 noted that “We have more turn-over of staff, because perhaps people are coming in... attracted to it, but not as a long-term career...” This fits more with the more positive Senior-Interviewee views, but divergence with Middle-management views reflects how staff increases were possible in some branches, but limited in others. However, as with both middle and senior interviewees, frontline managers also felt *Framework*'s impact was more indirect:

Frontline-Manager Interviewee 2:

“I don't think it's Framework...I think the way we're recruiting has changed... because it's on the internet it's available more widely and we are getting a higher calibre of people often with degrees just for a library assistant post...[which] perhaps gives them an edge to those who are not so computer literate...”

Frontline-Manager Interviewee 1:

“...we had a restructuring a few years ago, which should have been linked to Framework for the Future, but I'm not convinced it was particularly..., so no... As a consequence of that we actually lost a member of staff, in this section...”

Frontline Library Assistants had the least detailed knowledge about recruitment and retention. Whilst Library-Assistant Interviewee 2 was “Not...aware” of any recruitment and retention impact from *Framework*, there was a definite awareness of “a sort of restructure... that left openings for other staff...”, whilst Library Assistant Interviewee 1 suggested that the job they got “...was part of a reshuffle in the Sheffield libraries, and I think that was due to our take on Framework for the Future, and sort of previous problems”, linked to retirements and heavy reliance on “temporary contracts”.

Recruitment processes throughout the service seem to vary; there have been problems and limitations, whilst *Framework* has made most direct impact in terms of interview criteria (employee diversity and *Framework* questions in job interviews). Whilst all staff interviewed knew of the restructure, and emphasised its impact, for example in terms of reorganisation of posts and openings for promotion, few linked it directly to its origin in *Framework*'s themes.

5.1.2 Motivation and Champion Roles

Returning to question four surrounding motivation and morale, the restructure was again most important in the answers from all staff. However, disagreements arise between positive and negative developments, chiefly in the different Champion roles, some of which were more successful than others, partly due to individual staff, but mostly it seems, due to how well the *Framework* concept the particular team/role was linked to and how well it could be interpreted to drive easily-defined activities:

Senior-Interviewee 3 argued the motivational impact was “twofold”. Firstly, by providing “a very focused agenda” which “improve[s] how people see the organisation” and secondly by linking “Nearly all the agendas we’ve got” to *Framework*, it helps with “transforming the service and bringing it up to date...” Contrastingly, Senior-Interviewee 1 made a more microcosmic appraisal, arguing that changes made were motivational and raised morale in the short-term, but:

“I’m not sure it’s still motivational now for everyone, but it will be for some people... though I don’t think it’s *Framework* itself; it’s some of the major reinforcements of particular work areas that framework contains.”

Senior Interviewees 1 and 2 suggested the Champion roles, developed around key themes like Reader Development and Social Inclusion had had a mixed impact on morale. Senior-Interviewee 2 noted success of champion roles came down to the specific area and the degree of clarity *Framework* gave it, arguing that “Reader Development... has generated a lot of interest and... some highly motivated people have taken that one up and run with it...” However, “I think people are struggling harder with the concepts of Lifelong Learning and Citizenship which are less focused actually.” Senior-Interviewee 1 agreed that “we have question marks ourselves as to whether two years on it’s really worked, and so we’re reviewing our champion roles structure.” These conclusions are reinforced at different service levels too, particularly by Frontline Managers:

Frontline-Management Interviewee 2:

“Framework led to the ... restructure, so we had posts that were connected with priorities... Some of those were more attractive than others. And it also gave a lot of staff who hadn't had opportunities a lot of opportunities. For those that did well and got the post they wanted, I think there's a huge amount of motivation, and I think particularly the people I'm involved with working in Reader Development have done loads, moved mountains and are really active, proactive, motivated team... really very practical with reading groups, with staff and customers.”

Frontline-Management Interviewee 2 felt that overall champion roles made staff “feel more valued”, although other factors raise morale too, such as improvements in the book-fund, building “environment” and increased “staff training”. Library-Assistant Interviewee 2 corroborates this, highlighting how post-restructure “champion roles” and “team[s]” raised morale by giving “more focus on issues rather than just plodding along doing the day to day stuff... so we actually felt we'd got an objective...”

The only discordant note in this pattern comes from Middle-Management levels. Middle-Management Interviewee 2 was the only staff member interviewed to argue *Framework* was “not affecting morale” at all. Whereas Middle-Management Interviewee 1 felt that *Framework* concepts were overtly motivational early on, but over time had lost visibility because:

“...the whole concept... gets embedded, and people don't really recognise it as *Framework for the Future* it is just part of the ethos...”

This suggests that any motivation and morale-boost caused by *Framework* is unlikely to be directly linked back to it, which perhaps explains the reaction of Middle-Management Interviewee 1. However, when looking at positive Frontline responses to *Framework*-theme related improvements and re-focusing through champion roles, *Framework* seems to have had a largely motivational impact. The very fact such experiments occurred reflects on a more positive, change-oriented culture.

Overall, the stimulating and motivational Reader Development roles should be maintained, though more clarity and redevelopment is needed in other champion roles to encourage enthusiasm and motivation long-term. Again, there is disagreement mostly owing to failure to consistently link developments back to *Framework* directly, although many are clearly happy with the degree of ‘focus’ they have already. The need to reassess experiments and motivation links with Senior-Interviewee 3’s concession that “*Framework per se* won’t motivate anybody, it’s what you do with it... how we utilise it.” If awareness was raised more internally, then those situations where frontline workers are uncertain about their focus would reduce even further, and they could link their work to the bigger picture more easily.

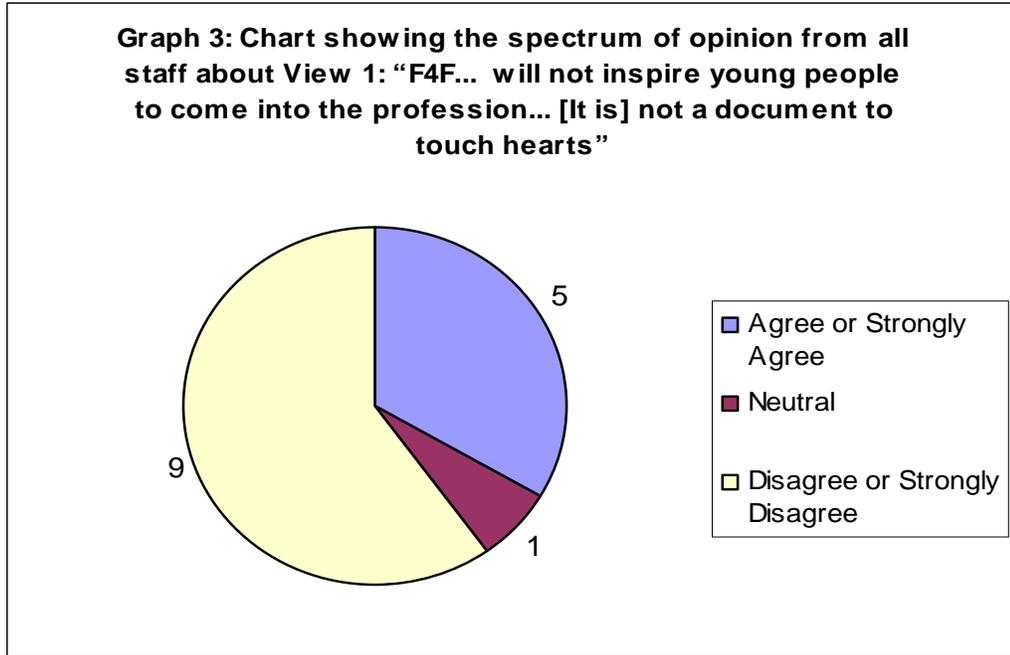
5.1.3 Inspiring ‘youth and expertise’?⁴

Framework marketing campaigns and the Define report in 2006 both emphasis the need to change the image of public library staff, not only to improve uptake of services, by employing ‘Youthful staff [who] would help in lending this ‘expertise’ credibility’ (Define: Research and Insight, 2006:61) to improve uptake of services by young people who feel disconnected from libraries, but also to appeal to young people to view librarianship as a good career path, and in the long-term refresh the service and help tackle the perceived succession crisis to come. Sheffield Public Libraries have made efforts at recruiting younger staff, as suggested in their Position Statement (Sheffield City Council, 2004:24), but when asked in a questionnaire about the whether *Framework* helped with these efforts overall, the answer was not resoundingly positive.

The fifteen questionnaire respondents from different service levels were asked to mark on a scale their response to ‘View 1: “F4F [*Framework for the Future*]... will not inspire young people to come into the profession... [It is] not a document to touch hearts”’ and were invited to make comments. The options were 1 (Strongly Agree), 2 (Agree), 3 (Neutral), 4 (Disagree), or 5 (Strongly Disagree). Graph 3 reveals that around two thirds disagreed, whereas one third agreed, suggesting that a larger proportion supported the idea that *Framework* would prove inspirational to young people and potentially win them over to the profession:

⁴ Define: Research and Insight (2006:61)

Graph 3: Chart showing the spectrum of opinion from all staff about View 1: “F4F... will not inspire young people to come into the profession... [It is] not a document to touch hearts”



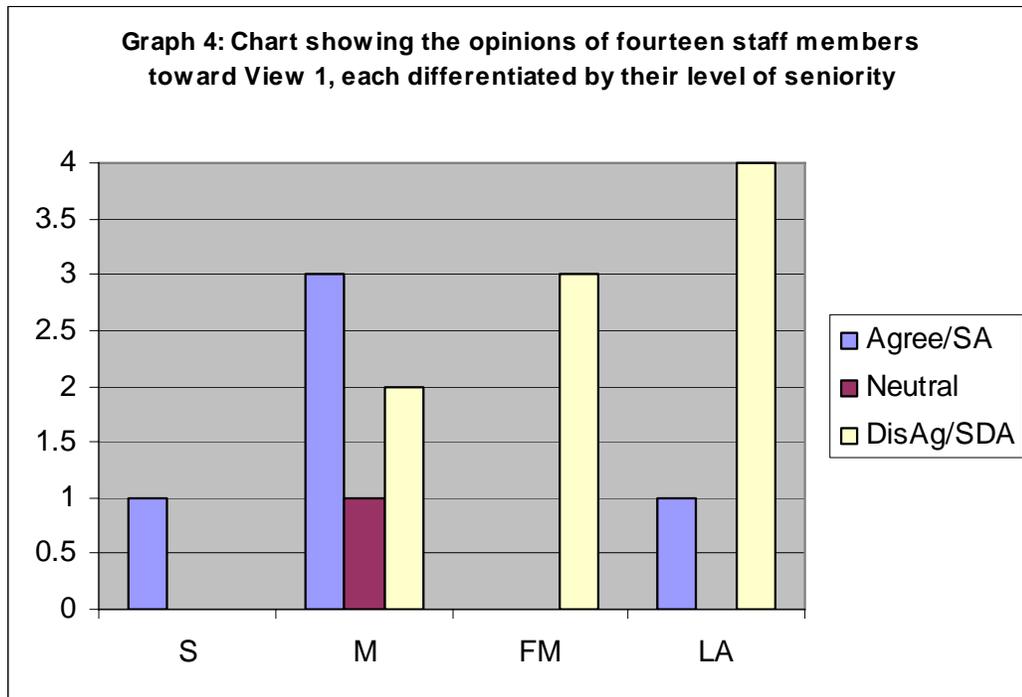
Senior Questionnaire Respondent ‘S1’ argued, “I don’t think it’s meant to be a document to ‘touch hearts’, whereas comments from the frontline were more positive. Library Assistant Questionnaire Respondents one and three were positive about the vision and youthful elements:

LA1: “I feel that if everything in the document was implemented libraries would be exciting places to work in especially for young people.”

LA3: “F4F definitely gives me hope that libraries will evolve and be a part of our future. We just need measures to keep the momentum.”

Ironically, Frontline staff (managers and assistants) disagreed most with the view stated, proving most optimistic. Four Library Assistants disagreed, whilst only one agreed, and all three Frontline Managers disagreed or strongly disagreed. Furthermore, the Middle and Senior Managers agreed most with the statement, the Senior questionnaire respondent (S1) agreed as did three Middle-Managers, whilst one remained neutral and two disagreed. This pattern (see Graph 4 below) may reflect an influx of younger staff and increased optimism, perhaps perceived as having a greater impact by Frontline staff (who work with some younger members) but with less impact and perception from the top. It may instead reflect a greater experience of, and cynicism toward, hearts-and-minds policy efforts from more experienced librarians,

compared to the less experienced lower in the service. For Graph 4, ‘S’ represents Senior Managers, ‘M’ Middle Managers, ‘FM’ Frontline Managers and ‘LA’ Library Assistants:



Clearly the comparative results for Graph 4 would be more reliable if there had been more respondents, particularly as there was only one senior questionnaire respondent. However, the Senior/Middle versus Frontline attitudinal split is fairly clear.

In conclusion, despite efforts at motivating and raising morale, improving recruitment and retention throughout the service and developing a positive culture, there remains a difference between top-level expectations and ground-level reality, particularly regarding *Framework*'s ability to inspire young people to become librarians. Much more needs to be done to make this a reality. To keep things in perspective though, the opinion of FM3 (Frontline Manager Questionnaire Respondent 3) should be considered:

FM3: “Perhaps it [*Framework*] is a bit of a dry read – however, the vision behind it is what should be promoted to young people.”

5.2 A Stimulating Culture?

Whilst Sheffield Public Library's 2004 Position Statement suggests that they have a new, espoused 'solution seeking culture...' that aims for '...achievements through creativity and through a robust change culture' (Sheffield City Council, 2004:20), and whilst experiments in working practices and communications have been made with reasonable success, such as the matrix-structure based champion roles and teams, there persists a top-down/bottom-up communication problem inherent in the traditional hierarchical structure the matrix (multidirectional/team-based) model has been partly grafted over. This was first highlighted in Chapter 4, regarding awareness issues, communication and the linking of overall strategic goals to actions taking place lower down in the organisation. It can also be seen in how the service reacts to external examples, which will be seen later in the issue of *Framework's* case studies and flagship examples. Senior-Interviewee 3 revealed the continuing rift between positive risk-taking and experimentation efforts and the desire to "achieve some element of transformational change". Senior-Interviewee 3 argued "risk" is inevitable so "realistic" efforts are key, but critically that:

"what you don't want is a blame culture... you want people to encourage people to try the concepts in Framework, and if ... they think they'll get told off if it doesn't work, that's the wrong type of culture to get that spirit of change going."

When probed about whether 'blame culture' was a problem in Sheffield, Senior-Interviewee 3 stated that due to "horrendous budget cuts, closures and a lot of staff leaving... there will always be that residual fear for the future..." but was positive about *Framework's* "focused" implementation. Champion role success suggests that this blame culture can be surpassed, but will affect initiatives. There is also the possibility that where champion roles did not reach full potential, there was a background element of fear of failure and lack of realistic focus. Another study would be needed to test this, but there are certainly issues of concern.

Chapter 6: Core Themes and Priorities

When interviewees were asked ‘What are your feelings about how *Framework*’s three core themes are implemented and prioritised in your service?’ their answers reflected variation between different branches and departments, but also suggested patterns service-wide:

At the top-level, Senior-Interviewee 2 felt “I’m not sure that any one is prioritised over the other...” an assertion made by many other higher-level managers. However, Books, Reading and Learning had certainly achieved the greatest revival of fortunes through *Framework*; “...we’d sort of downplayed reading I think and we’d lost part of the core value of libraries, and what *Framework* did was focus it back onto that key role.”

Senior-Interviewee 1 referred to prioritisation in an earlier question, noting that “I think there are weaknesses in those three main bits that you get from *Framework*...” such as the under-emphasis on “Social Inclusion”, but agreed that “...it put a lot more emphasis on Books.”

The role of Digital Citizenship, filtered through largely through perceptions of People’s Network, proved a major contender for priority-one. Senior-Interviewee 3 for example, felt the “digital” side was “very powerful”, although its emphasis and prevalence at different branches varied, whilst Senior-Interviewee 1 had concerns that IT was over-emphasised:

“...I think personally that there are some blind alleys that people are going up around some of the IT stuff. I think people get very excited about IT and forget it’s a [delivery] tool...”

The Middle-Management interviewees were most open about variation by service point. Middle-Management Interviewee 2 noted that:

“Certainly the People’s Network seems to have been given a lot of priority... In terms of this library, PN’s [People’s Network] one of our biggest successes...”

This was partly due to a large number of minority users at that branch, who communicated home via email. This linked to the second point of emphasis for Middle-Management Interviewee 2, the range of Social Inclusion work in the area with the Chinese community and work with reading prizes and initiatives like “Off the Shelf” in Sheffield. By contrast, Middle-Management

Interviewee 1's section emphasised "reading and lifelong learning", but argued that Gosse's (2006) recent "culture strategy" for Sheffield will be more locally important for their community work, with *Framework* in support providing "the bigger picture" nationally.

At Frontline Management level, the emphasis on Digital Citizenship via ICT was most pronounced. Frontline-Management Interviewee 2 stated that:

"I think Digital Citizenship is the priority... definitely the one we've been able to implement and customers know about... very well used by all the members of our community..."

Frontline-Manager Interviewee 1 agreed, going further to say that:

"I'd say the Reading we probably haven't been as involved with, and even with the Learning. It's probably more the IT... and IT is the thing that's changing probably more than anything, more than *Framework for the Future* and anything else..."

However, when asked if IT was most prioritised, Frontline-Management Interviewee 1 responded: "our strategy team is very keen to move things on that way..." but argued that the full "range" of resources should be emphasised, partly because some of the web-content is still "rubbish".

Library-Assistant Interviewee 2 agreed with the Digital emphasis, largely due to its increased visibility, compared to book and community-based efforts already familiar to librarians. In terms of People's Network –

"that's really taken off more than I think we ever thought it would do... we have queues and queues of people who really come in just for the PCs... sometimes it can be a bit irritating if you think 'ooh, they've come in to look at their email', and that's it."

Overall though, the feeling was still that Reader Development came first, then Digital Citizenship and thirdly Community and Civic Values. In any case, they all link together. As Library-Assistant Interviewee 1 remarked, Community and Social Inclusion efforts benefited from increased "ICT usage", partnerships and "reading groups".

The emphasis on Reading and PC based themes first, and Community next is repeated throughout responses, even the questionnaire ones. Middle-Management Questionnaire Respondent 3 (M3) stated that:

“I believe we prioritise 1 + 2 [Books, Reading and Learning; Digital Citizenship] well. We try for 3 [Community and Civic Values] but have a long way to go.”

Frontline-Management Questionnaire Respondent 3 agreed that “I feel we could prioritise ‘community + civic’ values more than we do, especially in areas with strong community participation”. This was different again in some services, notably mobile libraries, where Library-Assistant Questionnaire Respondent 1 (LA1) noted a lack of PCs.

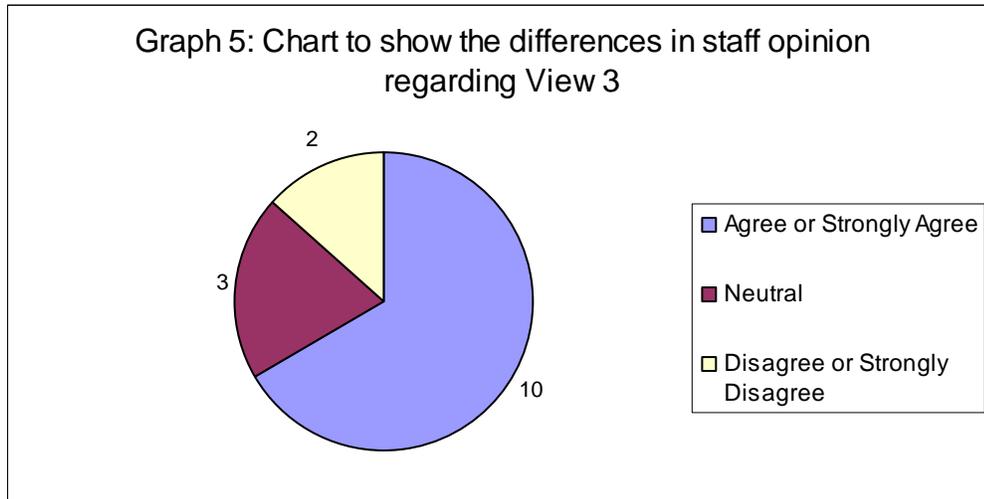
To surmise, prevalence of People’s Network PCs varied by branch and section. Where it was most visible and utilised by patrons, it achieved highest impact and emphasis, linking back to inclusion goals and Lifelong Learning. However, the overall emphasis on Books, Learning and Reading had achieved renewed focus and most strategic emphasis from the more senior managers. Community and Civic values were emphasised least often, and were in most need of renewed focus.

6.1 E-Citizens or Digital Divide?

The split in emphasis of the People’s Network is further evidenced in that of the opinion over its success regarding the development of Digital Citizenship and online content creation in particular. Questionnaire respondents were asked to give their view on a 1-5 scale, commenting on the view below:

‘View 3: Framework for the Future has provided opportunities to enhance online content, communities and access, thus reducing the ‘digital divide’ by enabling more people to become e-Citizens.’

The results indicated a 5:1 split between those responding with agreement or strong agreement to those disagreeing or doing so strongly (see Graph 5 below). Three of the fifteen respondents gave a neutral response.



Certainly, respondents in some branches felt the presence and usage of computers was higher than in others, often linked to increased appeal to local minority groups or students. Certain branches and departments however had reservations about provision and success, or focused on other resources instead like in the Mobile service. Two Frontline-Management and two Library-Assistant questionnaire respondents added their comments to this:

FM1: “Our Public computer[s] are well used.”

FM3: “People still struggle with digital information. For those with the skills it has ~~enhanced~~ provided new opportunities. More work needs to be done to give people the skills to access it.”

LA1: “At the moment I feel most people using computers in libraries are already confident users but this may change.”

LA4: “I agree + disagree – it does provide opportunities for people to develop their e-skills but I haven’t seen much in the way of classes to enable the computer literate to participate.”

These suggest that information literacy affects uptake. This may, as LA1 implied, lead to a skills divide, excluding those with lower ICT skills. LA4 noted that more skills sessions would be needed, whilst FM3 noted how many still struggle with these. Nevertheless, there is generally high uptake (FM1), but clearly most people felt the Digital Divide persists whilst online content

is still at a low-level, whilst online communities have not developed to the full, nor can it be said that *Framework* and People's Network have fulfilled the e-Government agenda and created e-Citizens.

Whilst efforts in certain sections at Sheffield and from certain managers take a strong lead on ICT, and whilst most staff agreed about its utility and importance, as delivery tool or core service there remain certain anxieties. At the very least, more needs to be done to sustain and market People's Network, deliver e-skills sessions (contingent on staff skills and time pressures) and enhance content, some of which is still poor. However, as discussed in the literature review, much of the problems are linked to financial limitations and sustainability, with a lack of continuing core funding through *Framework* for the People's Network. Nonetheless, Sheffield has invested its own effort, budget and commitment into sustaining and developing People's Network, so should not be criticised.

6.2 The Forgotten Missions

When expanding the thematic focus, the lack of emphasis on *Framework's* Modern Mission section was unearthed. Questionnaire respondents were asked 'In its 'Modern Mission', *Framework for the Future* aims for both 'distinctiveness' of services, and duplication of successful initiatives on a 'National' scale. In your opinion, have these been successfully balanced, or have tensions arisen between these or any other mission objectives? (Modern Mission: 'Evolution'; 'Public Value'; 'Distinctiveness'; 'Local Interpretations of National Programmes'). Neither questionnaire respondents M5 and LA4 (a Middle-Manager and Library-Assistant respectively) were able to comment on them in detail:

LA4: "...I'm not aware of National initiatives."

M5: "I never picked up on the Modern Mission when first reading the document."

Furthermore, when respondents did react to the statement, they largely agreed on the existence of "tensions" between themes, and the problem caused for resource management when forced to take on National initiatives. One Senior (S1) and one Middle Manager (M1) gave the following questionnaire answers:

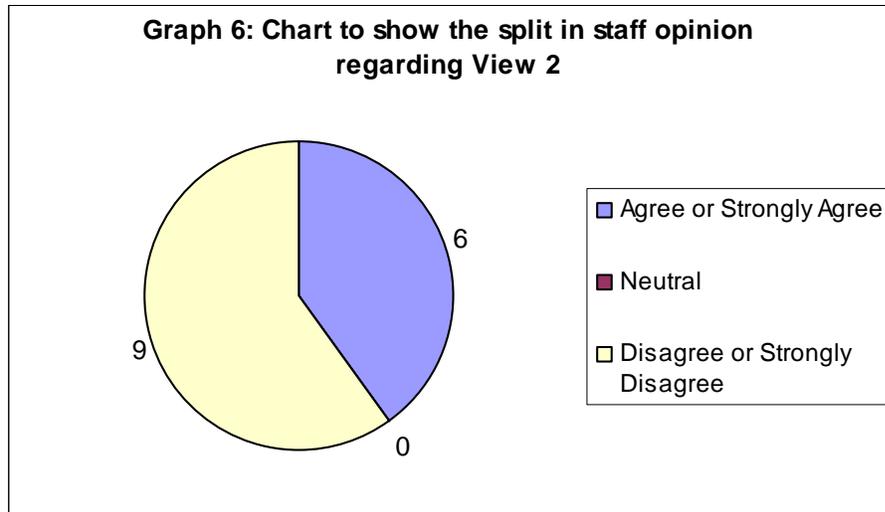
S1: “Sometimes a conflict with ‘National Offers’ feeling you have to take up – when you have to delay real initiatives or divert funding in order to do so. E.g. OUP [Oxford University Press] package.”

M1: “...there may be a tendency to devote too much time to local interpretation of national programmes.”

In conclusion, this suggests that not only have the Modern Missions achieved less emphasis next to the three core themes, but they are seen as far more problematic on a local level, whereas relatively little criticism was levelled at the three themes which were generally accepted as representative and effective.

Prioritisation of core themes and visions may still be debatable within Sheffield Library Service. Whilst Senior Librarians would not be drawn on whether any theme was prioritised over the other, difficulties were noted regarding the breadth and scale of initiatives to be followed. The increase in national activities and the conflict between certain of *Framework's* Modern Missions implies that judgement calls would have to be made, and certain activities may suffer consequently. Whether this is seen on a local level remains to be seen, although there was a marked split in opinion over View 2 in the questionnaire. Questionnaire respondents were asked to mark on a five-point scale their opinion (between strong agreement and strong disagreement) about the following:

‘View 2: ‘While the vision of F4F [*Framework for the Future*] to promote reading and learning will be wholeheartedly supported ... it may not generate very much new activity when so much is already happening.’”



A 3:2 split in opinion existed, with nine respondents disagreeing to varying degree with the statement, suggesting that new activities were still able to continue, implying unobstructed generation. This may be true regarding reading and learning objectives, as many interviewees emphasised an “explosion” of reading groups, which Frontline-Manager three noted had “taken off with a vengeance” post-*Framework*. However, given the relative confusion over initiatives and actions for the less-focused Champion areas (covering Lifelong Learning and Social Inclusion, for example) it is possible this positive view on new activity would be lessened. After all, Senior-Management Interviewee 2 argued that “Reader Development Champion roles are streets ahead...” Additionally, as two Frontline-Managers who completed the questionnaire noted, confusion can occur and maybe if this question had been linked to different themes, a different picture would have emerged:

FM1: “My service is one of the busiest branches. Very difficult to support any additional activities.”

FM3: “I feel that our library authority has tightened up its vision + strategies. However – there is a lot happening + it is sometimes difficult to ‘remember’ where new strategies come from.”

Further to this, the fact that six respondents felt there would be obstruction to new activity and given the lack of neutral responses, the split seems to suggest a fairly large problem. It may be hoped that the second phase of *Framework* implementation brings even greater focus, pulling away from the slight confusion and explosion of activity, which, whilst probably not too

problematic for Reader Development where staff are more enthusiastic and group methods are easier to define, will certainly make following through with the less clear areas of *Framework* more difficult. Also, the issue of initiatives and their costs as covered in the literature review (Innovation versus Expense), raises doubts about sustaining activity in all major areas of *Framework*, particularly as few staff have a full grasp of its contents. Greater awareness, more core funding, and more solid description of non-book and reading themes are needed to help begin resolving this issue.

Chapter 7: Fragile Flagships and Foundations?

7.1 Framework's Flagships

Framework for the Future's frequent reference to flagship and case examples has proved controversial to staff. There has been a dichotomy between those seen as realistic or unrealistic, large or small-scale, which ultimately pitches inspiration and high expectations against the risk of failure to meet these (potentially creating blame and inertia).

In terms of new and reinvigorated buildings and services, four stand out as dominant. Firstly, Bournemouth central library (DCMS, 2003:14) with its 'bold' building and 'express' service section, secondly, Peckham Library (DCMS, 2003:39) which receives a full page exterior photo, reflecting its dynamic-futuristic architecture, thirdly, Norfolk and Norwich Millennium Library, an 'open plan' new build, with an 'express service' and emphasis on staff who are in 'self-directed and self-managing teams' (DCMS, 2003:18). Finally, The London Borough of Tower Hamlets Idea Store, with its 'purpose-built', 'modern reinterpretation' (DCMS, 2003:21) of the Library format, although many other 'libraries are renewing themselves around a new image, service and sense of purpose' (DCMS, 2003:22), like Hampshire's Discovery Centres. When interviewing Sheffield staff, I mentioned Norfolk directly, although it was very well known, as were Peckham and Tower Hamlets, particularly among senior staff.

There are many others that were not remembered as vividly, probably due to slightly smaller-scale change and more subtle (less than full page) coverage. For example, March Library Cambridgeshire, (DCMS, 2003:29) with its 'redesigned', Lifelong-Learning and education focus. Most realistic in terms of Sheffield's needs, given the constant reiteration of realistic budget issues, is Blackburn with Darwen's Central Library (DCMS, 2003:38) which purportedly shows:

'...how services can be radically improved within an existing building and budgets... through a £1 million refurbishment financed through its role in delivering the local authority's public service agreement.'

There is also Dyke House Community Library and Resource Centre (DCMS, 2003:14) which is also more realistic and community-focused. None of these latter examples had photographic examples or as much space devoted to them though. Similarly, there are many good examples of innovations, projects and partnerships which permeate *Framework*, notably:

- 1) Learn Direct (DCMS, 2003:15).
- 2) Bookstart (DCMS, 2003:25).
- 3) The Big Book Share – in Nottingham – with prison libraries (DCMS, 2003:26).
- 4) Chatterbooks (DCMS, 2003:27).
- 5) The Novel Route (DCMS, 2003:28) – ‘library/business partnerships’.
- 6) Homework Sessions; Sure Start; Connexions (DCMS, 2003:30).
- 7) Bedfordshire Libraries’ Homework Centres (DCMS, 2003:31).
- 8) Boox on the Move – Leeds/Barnado’s partnership (DCMS, 2003:32).
- 9) Various Inter-/Intra-net, People’s Network and other ICT developments (DCMS, 2003:34-7; 50).
- 10) County Big Book Scheme – Cumbria partnership (DCMS, 2003:50).

Overall, in terms of the case examples that have merited most coverage in the literature, debates and the interviews conducted for this study, there is frequent emphasis on novel funding initiatives for re-style/re-furbish, café/record shop style interiors, spaciousness, customer and staff-led changes, express services, ICT access, partnerships, business and employment links and services. Those that stand-out are the exceptional ones supported with photographic coverage.

7.2 Realistic Inspiration or Unrealistic Expectation?

Both interview and questionnaire respondents were asked the following question. ‘*Framework for the Future* deploys case studies and flagship examples throughout to support its vision (e.g. Norfolk and Norwich Millennium Library). In your opinion, how far do they provide realistic inspiration or create unrealistic expectations for staff and patrons?’ Opinion fell into three areas. Some agreed with the inspirational aspects, whereas others were more critical or felt the models did not help by being irrelevant or too large-scale. The third group offered a middle-ground, based in the need to be realistic, applying those aspects that are relevant and not necessarily needing to imitate models directly. Rather than reflecting different opinions between levels of seniority, opinion was very much individual and varied at all levels.

There were questionnaire respondents at all levels of seniority who felt flagship examples were largely unrealistic. The Senior questionnaire respondent ('S1') felt that "The e.g. Given is not achievable so raises expectations & falls flat. Without consistent funding & commitment from a local & National level staff get very demoralised." One Middle-Management questionnaire respondent (M2) stated that "It makes us feel like 'poor relations'!" The main reasons, for negative responses were located in funding and the lack of ability to replicate the more visible, larger-scale flagships, even at Library Assistant level; LA3 (Library-Assistant questionnaire respondent 3) commented that "staff and patrons are concerned about the costs of such projects and how they will prevent new projects developing." However, the inability to replicate the unique circumstances surrounding re-developments were also noted; as Frontline-Manager Interviewee 3 reflected, "...you'd hardly aspire to your building burning down and losing all your sort of historical resources even if it gives you a brand new building..." which is what happened in Norwich.

Interviewee criticisms went even deeper, for example, the lack of recognition for pre-existing versions of successful examples could make case-examples less popular. Middle-Management Interviewee 1 noted that examples regarding "community information" were useful, but although "some of that reinforced what we were doing", suggesting "we were on the right tracks", in reality it "actually slightly irritated us because we were already doing it and it wasn't acknowledged..." For Senior-Interviewee 2, over-familiarity of examples and lack of "cross-regional" representation were irritating:

"...I think staff get turned off because it's always Norwich, it's always Peckham, it's always the Ideas Store...I don't think they are inspirational because they're too well known; people are very familiar with them. There's a lot more best-practice they could have used."

Senior-Interviewee 3 offered a middle-ground, conceding "Both" inspiration and unrealistic expectations. Whilst some examples now seem "passé", or are unrealistic in scale, the "smaller ones" show that it is possible to "achieve some element of transformational change." However, this would involve risk-taking, and the residual "blame culture" in Sheffield could make this process more difficult to engage in. This could link in to the lack of discussion and familiarity with the examples too. Some questionnaire respondents felt the examples were "Difficult to assess... as these examples have not been widely discussed" as Middle-Management questionnaire respondent 1 (M1) noted. This is reinforced by the fourth Library-Assistant

questionnaire respondent's (LA4) comment that "I'm not familiar with these examples", linking back to the issue of reduced awareness and understanding of *Framework* policy lower down the service.

Overall, most responses to the flagship examples were positive though, with two Middle-Management questionnaire respondents noting how it is "Good to share examples of new/good practice..." (M4). They felt that specific examples could be "...adapted to their service point limitations and their customers" (M5). All three Frontline-Management Questionnaire respondents (FM1-3) felt *Framework*'s examples were largely inspirational or "realistic" (FM2), as did the three interviewed Frontline Managers:

Frontline-Management Interviewee 2, for example, felt that "Without having flagship libraries there's no vision is there?" However, Frontline-Management optimism was necessarily couched in pragmatism. Frontline-Manager Interviewee 1 argued successful adaptation of *Framework* examples and initiatives need to be introduced from above and incorporated in an evolutionary way:

"...if you sort of go through things like that [flagship/case examples] with staff... and you say to them 'this is Framework for the Future', they're all going to say 'Oh! We could never do it!', you know, 'negative, negative, negative!' So you sort of think, great ideas, what can we take as a small step..."

The two Library Assistant Interviewees were similarly pragmatic. Library-Assistant Interviewee 2 felt that Sheffield Central library's age and "antiquated" environment only appealed to older users, whereas most people find it "intimidating" and "shabby". However, the building's "listed" status means that "it's hard to make it like any of those libraries that are in that document [*Framework*]..."

Overall, responses to *Framework*'s visionary case-studies and flagship examples varied and were mostly rooted in the larger, more memorable examples. As a result, much criticism that occurred was rooted in the inability and impracticability of replicating these directly – particularly financially. More senior staff delved into issues of under-representation in the examples, whilst at the frontline end of the service, practical obstacles like Council commitment and listed buildings were emphasised. Moderate opinions tended to identify some continued lack of awareness at middle and frontline levels, plus the tension between raising expectation and

deriving inspiration from models, and the potential risk and disappointment that might result from not being able to match them. Most staff throughout the service appreciated the examples given, but this reflects more the balance between optimists and pessimists as individuals. Sharing good practice and adapting examples would probably have been noted more if staff recalled the smaller scale initiatives, many of which Sheffield had picked up on anyway.

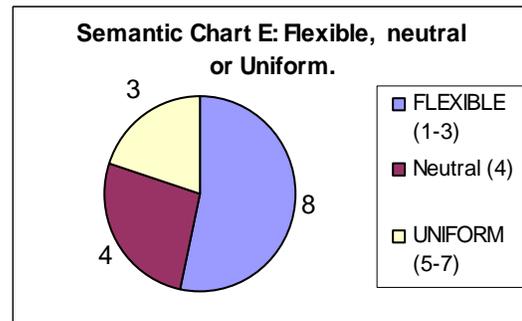
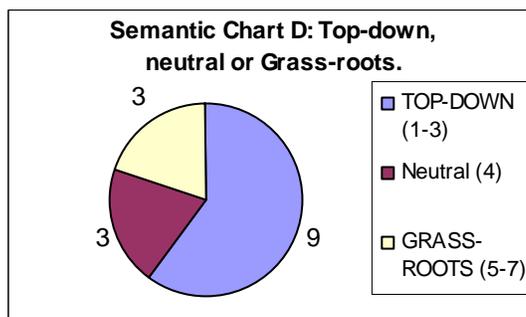
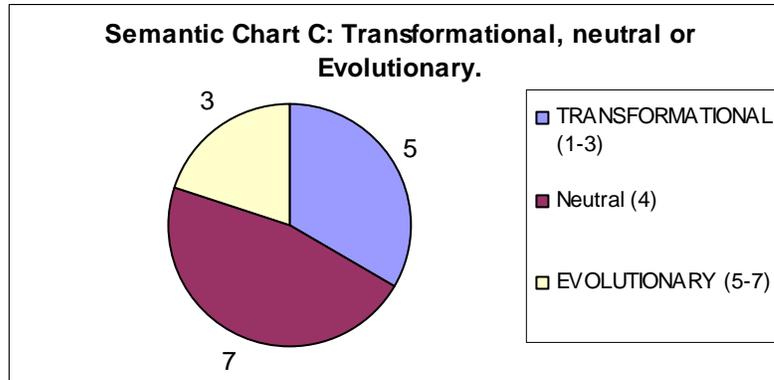
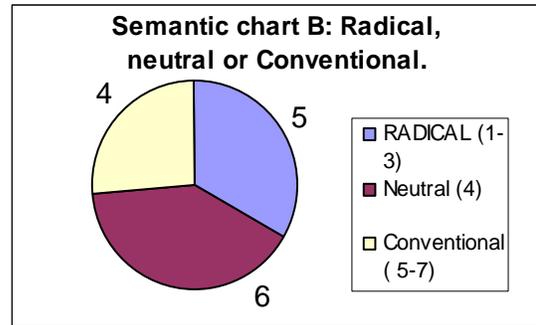
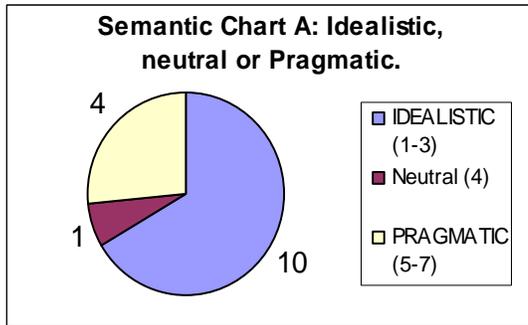
Chapter 8: A Question of Semantics?

The 15 questionnaire respondents were asked to ‘Consider *Framework* Policy as a whole’ and ‘Mark your opinion on the scale between pairs of contrasting terms. The closer to one end and term, the closer to that opinion and the further from the other your view is, whilst a score of 4 reflects balance or neutrality between the two meanings.’ Thus 1-3 reflect strong to fair agreement with the term on the left, with 5-7 fair to strong agreement with the term on the right. There were fifteen pairs of terms, designed to have dichotomous meaning. The sets of pairs came under the headings, *Policy Character (A) – Style, Coverage & Influence*, and *Policy Character (B) – Impact*.

This was designed to give an overview on issues drawn from the literature regarding these headings, which were seen through the literature review process to reflect controversies or tensions. Owing to the huge range and degree of opinion, often at all points of the scale, plus given the small sample size, particularly for senior level, the results were grouped for all levels, representing three options, favouring term one (1-3), neutrality (score 4) or favouring term two (5-7). The score given next to each pie section in the semantic charts below represents the number of respondents (out of 15) favouring that view.

8.1 Policy Character (A) – Style

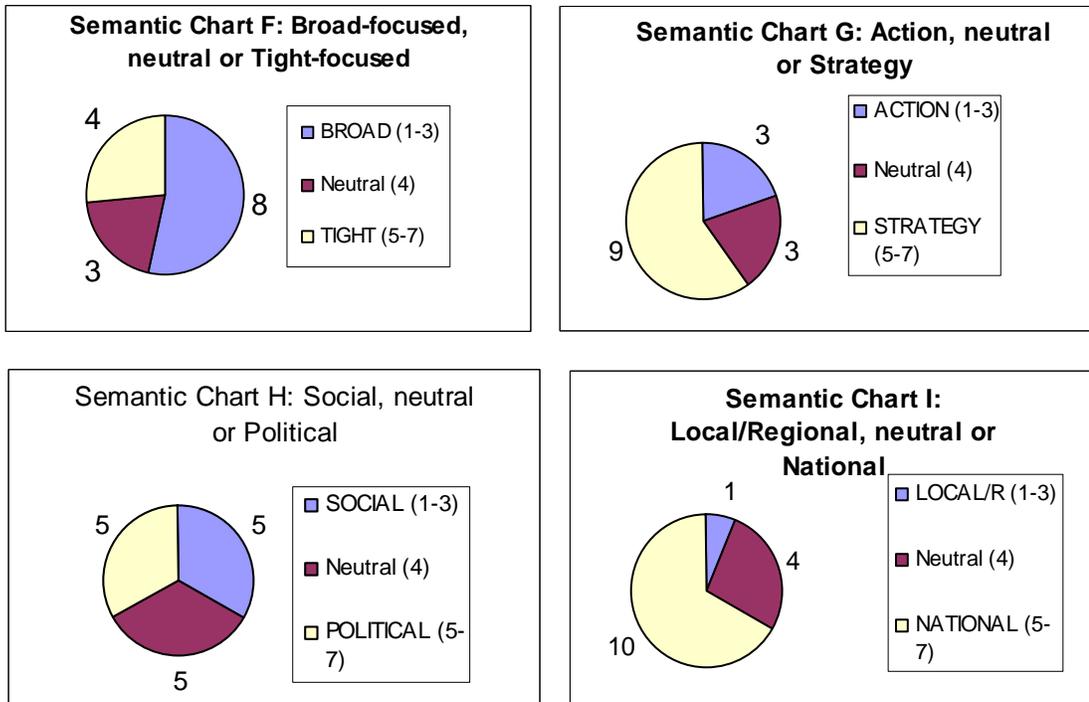
The intention here was to elicit opinions from staff about whether they viewed *Framework*’s style as ‘Idealistic’ or ‘Pragmatic’, ‘Radical’ or ‘Conventional’, evoking ‘Transformational’ or ‘Evolutionary’ change, to be brought about through ‘Top-down’ or ‘Grass-roots’ implementation, and whether it was seen as ‘Flexible’ or requiring ‘Uniform’ implementation?



Semantic pie charts A to D clearly show that the questionnaire respondents felt *Framework's* policy character was hard to define, and frequently a quarter to a third remained neutral. There was little consensus over whether it is transformational or evolutionary (Chart C), or radical or conventional (Chart B), with no more than a third of respondents making a firm claim in either direction. Over half felt it was a flexible document, though the rest were neutral or disagreed (Chart E), and a (60%) majority felt it was a document intended to give a top-down implementation (Chart D) and similarly, 10 of 15 felt it was idealistic (Chart A). The uncertainty over terms in charts B and C may reflect their complexity because no detailed dictionary-like explanation was provided for each term. Also, one Middle-Manager respondent answered neutral ('4') on every scale, but these scores are included nonetheless, to be fair to all views, despite increasing the neutrality throughout.

8.2 Coverage & Influence

In this section, opinion was sought about whether staff viewed *Framework* as providing a ‘Broad-scope’ or a ‘Tight-focus’, presenting ‘Actions’ or ‘Strategies’, reflecting mainly ‘Social’ or ‘Political’ issues, and whether it was to provide a ‘Local/Regional’ or ‘National’ vision?



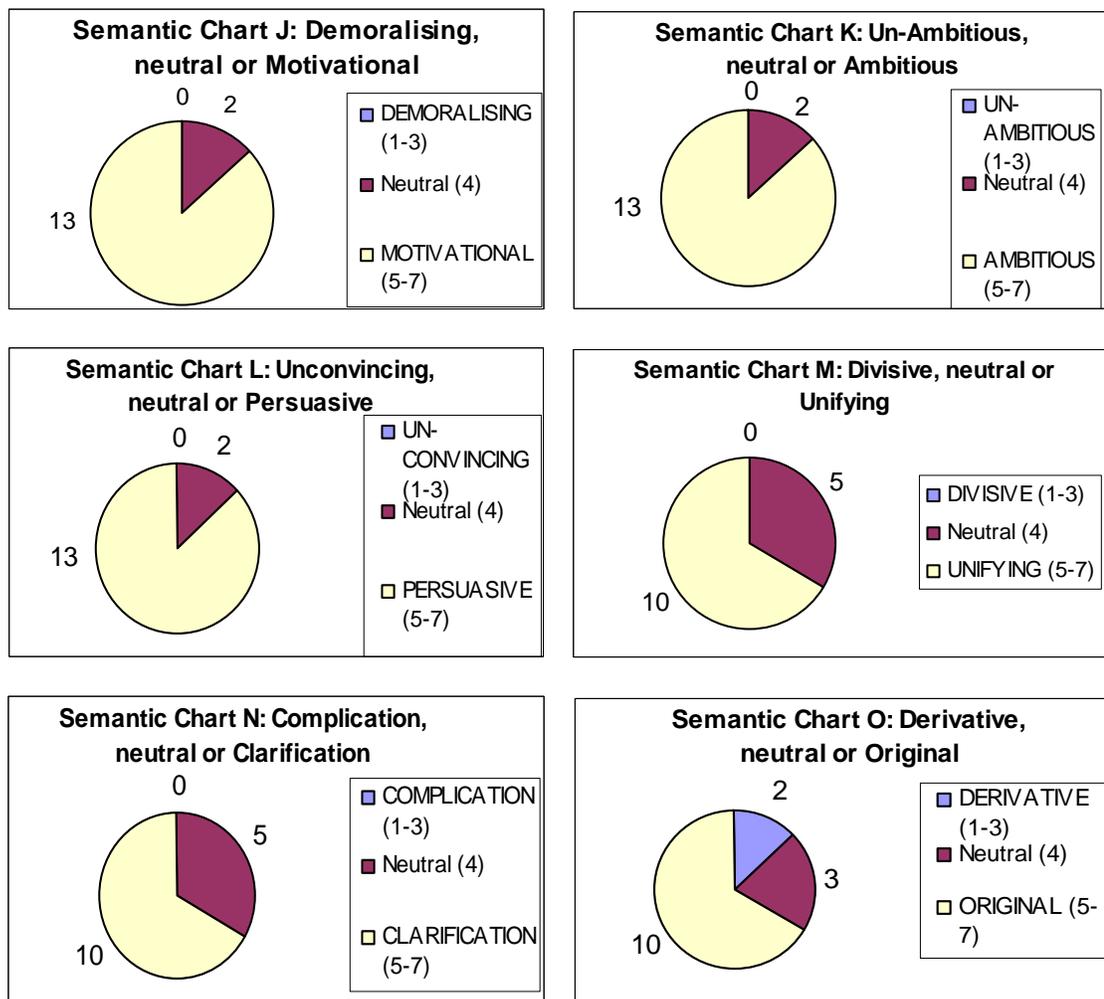
This set of results reflects opinions no less controversial, with Chart G and Chart H both incorporating attitudes ranging from each extreme on the scale (scores 1 and 7). However, whilst no agreement was reached over social or political characteristics (probably because *Framework* incorporates both – see Chart H) with neither appearing more dominant than the other, most felt that *Framework* was more strategic in content than action-based (Chart G).

Similarly strong ratios were seen in charts F and I; eight felt it was clearly broad-focused, whereas three felt it was tightly-focused (again elements of both are present in the *Framework*), whilst ten felt it was nationally-focused, whereas only 1 felt it had local and regional emphasis. The neutral views probably reflect a balance between the two opposing views, particularly in Chart H because *Framework*, a national strategy document, does

encourage local interpretations. This section reflects an awareness of the blend of characteristics, plus an appreciation of which are key, amongst Sheffield’s public librarians.

8.3 Policy Character (B) – Impact

Finally, opinion about the impact of *Framework* was sought. Was it ‘Demoralising’ or ‘Motivational’, ‘Un-ambitious’ or ‘Ambitious’, ‘Unconvincing’ or ‘Persuasive’, ‘Divisive’ or ‘Unifying’, providing ‘Complication’ or ‘Clarification’, and was it ‘Derivative’ or ‘Original’ overall?



This final set of results is clearest of all, so the impact of *Framework* is perhaps easier for staff to assess than the vision it drew on. Virtually all respondents at all levels felt *Framework* had been motivational (13 out of 15), none felt it had been demoralising, although

two respondents felt neutral. This strongly reinforces the positive conclusions from Chapter 5 regarding motivation and morale, under-scoring the successful aspects of such developments as the Champion roles, particularly regarding Books, Reading and Learning themes (Reader Development). Identical support came for (charts K and L), revealing *Framework* to be persuasive and ambitious, whilst Chart M reflects views that similarly favoured a Unifying, not Divisive *Framework* in impact. This yet again supports the positive findings in Chapter 5, the morale and motivation boosting sense of increased focus and direction, further reinforced by Chart N, which has an identical emphasis on *Framework* as providing Clarification, with none feeling it added Complication.

The document overall seems to have been largely seen as Original. That two felt it was Derivative (Chart O) suggest that some staff still remember similar themes and ideas from the past, re-phrased by *Framework*. This is seen in Senior Interviewee 2's comments about *Framework*'s three main themes: "... we used to call it Recreation, Education, Information... so it hasn't really changed, it's just been put into new language." Also, Middle-Management Interviewee 1 noted "a chicken and egg situation", regarding the difficulty linking actions back to strategies and themes.

Chapter 9: Key Impact - Strengths and Weaknesses

Two interview questions were directed to probe the strengths, weaknesses and main impact of *Framework for the Future* on staff. These revealed commonality of view between certain levels of seniority regarding certain but not all issues, as well as differences and variation in emphasis, particularly over strengths. The questions were:

‘6) From your own personal experience in your library service, what do you feel are the main strengths and weaknesses – if any – of the implementation of *Framework* policy?’

‘7) In your opinion, what has been *Framework for the Future*’s main impact on public library staff in your service?’

In terms of the main impact from Senior Librarian perspectives, Senior-Interviewee 1 emphasised new champion roles (covering many areas as diverse as IT and multicultural services) which all Sheffield’s public librarians “theoretically” engage in. These have given greater “clarity”, but some “confusion” remains, partly due to reconciling the new “matrix working” practices these roles seek to “embed”, with traditional “hierarchical” structures. All the senior librarians emphasised the fundamental significance of the restructure. Exploring *Framework*’s conceptual basis for the restructure, Senior-Interviewee 3 emphasised its “three major bullet points, digital; learning and reader/books, social inclusion [sic]...”, deeming these to be “the biggest benefit; it enables staff to see this national agenda in very easy headings.” In support of the potential communications problems noted by Senior-Interviewee 1, Senior-Interviewee 3 highlighted the effectiveness of the document for use in “briefing” staff at all levels.

In terms of Senior-Management views on strengths and weaknesses, the main strengths were broadly the same in emphasis as for impacts. Senior-Interviewee 1 emphasised the re-focusing on “Books and Reading” and increases in the Materials fund, whilst Senior-Interviewees 2 and 3 looked more at the MLA Action Plans, favouring the most recent for being more streamlined. Weaknesses were seen as mostly rooted in resources and “unrealisable” goals set by the MLA in its extensive first Action Plan. Senior-Interviewee 3 also conflicted slightly with Senior-Interviewee 1, suggesting Books and Reading were now emphasised, “downplaying the social side, the digital side...”

Middle Management Interviewees similarly emphasised the core themes and focus provided in terms of key impacts. Middle-Management Interviewee 1 noted: “it continues to be a really important driver, particularly in areas like lifelong learning and... an explosion of reading groups...” Books and Learning again seem the major area, although Middle-Management Interviewee 2 differed by emphasising the impact on recruitment instead, but linked this into champion roles as the Senior Librarians did. In terms of weaknesses, a typical trend right through the responses was phrased best by Management-Interviewee 1:

“...the one thing that always draws everybody back [as a negative] is resources, albeit staffing or finance, buildings... the restriction is [...] awesome”.

Middle-Management Interviewee 1’s section was very different to most in the Sheffield service, leading to local and community policy having a greater impact than *Framework*, but the same difficulties still certainly applied to their everyday activities as in other sections. Middle-Management Interviewee 2, in a more traditional lending section noted similar problems like finance and the inability to increase staffing despite the restructure which was nonetheless seen as having the greatest impact due to *Framework*, in the “...sense that roles have changed and parts of the *Framework* have been incorporated into staffing roles....”

At the frontline end of the service, the issues emphasised became increasingly linked to specific branches and activities, understandably given their narrower, less strategic focus. Key impact from the Frontline-Management perspective included, for example, specific building “refurbishment” (Frontline-Management Interviewee 2), but contrary to middle and senior perspectives, gave more relevance to digital resources and the “People’s Network”, given their visibility and impact at the grass roots of a service. Frontline-Management Interviewee 2 noted that “the ICT provision goes a long way to bringing new customers in...” Frontline-Management Interviewee 3 gave the most common response, linking like Senior and Middle Managers, back to the “focus” the *Framework* themes and ideas gave, improving the “clarity” of service objectives.

In terms of weaknesses, resources again reared their head; Frontline-Manager Interviewee 2 noted that despite all the new avenues for development created, “...budget issues and staffing... [are] stopping it being perfect.” Frontline-Manager Interviewee 3 came to similar conclusions from the other end of the telescope:

“I think possibly the weakness is, all the areas like social inclusion, are huge areas, so you tend to maybe focus on something maybe only one thing, because that’s all the commitment you’ve got the resources to deal with. So the weakness is that you can be concentrating on something fairly specific and maybe not thinking about other things which could be important.”

Library Assistants largely mirrored the opinions of their line-managers, rooting key impact in their direct experience and place of work. For example, Library-Assistant Interviewee 2 felt the “IT stuff... helped enormously” as did training in its use. The awareness, focus and restructured role around the core *Framework* themes were again seen as a major strength and impact, again linking all levels of the hierarchy in their views. Library-Assistant Interviewee 2 felt that the “Framework” focus on “Reader Development, Social Inclusion, [and] Lifelong Learning” provided the key impact. The major weaknesses at the frontline level though were often linked to low awareness, the size of the *Framework* document and lack of time and incentive to read it (noted by at least one Library Assistant and Frontline Manager).

Overall, whilst the most obvious parts of *Framework* and its most popular themes (Books, Reading and Learning) were emphasised by most respondents, frontline librarians often related more visible and direct changes to the building and service styles with ICT. Greater strategic awareness at the upper levels of the service matched greater debate of the policy in terms of strengths and weaknesses, whilst the impact of the People’s Network and the restructuring of the service have been relatively ubiquitous. There seems to have been no change in negative responses, which focus on financial, material and staffing limitations, plus the inability to take on every possible new initiative.

Chapter 10: A Shared Vision?

The over-arching purpose of *Framework for the Future* has been to create a ‘shared ideal’ or purpose (DCMS, 2003:6), linking community, culture and citizenship, developing regional cooperation and integration, rooted in greater synergy between local and national government:

‘*Framework for the Future*... is not a blueprint with detailed targets for how libraries should achieve these goals. The aim is to provide the library service as a whole with a shared sense of purpose.’ (DCMS, 2003:12).

This has been translated into the messages of implementation through the MLA and its representatives like Chris Batt (CILIP, 2006c:13), and their emphasis on attaching this ‘shared message’ to advocacy and marketing campaigns. Ironically, Senior-Interviewee 2 commented on the marketing phase to say that:

“...it’s had absolutely no impact on public perceptions of public librarians... I thought the marketing campaign was a disaster... it hasn’t happened... most of the publicity is crap... and it’s one of the hardest things we’ve got to do.”

Previous chapters have looked at the core themes and priorities, the character, strengths, weaknesses and impact of *Framework* from the perspective of public librarians in Sheffield. Whilst the investigation of the awareness issue has revealed certain weaknesses with the dissemination and understanding of the message, this can be linked to weaknesses of internal communication and perceived irrelevance of strategy to frontline staff. In any case, investing staff with this sense of shared purpose has received little attention in training, but this reflects the lack of detailed strategy for doing so and reflects on the lack of interaction at all levels with regional and national MLA councils. Whilst certain staff referred to the MLA’s Action Plans, they have criticised the first plan for asking too much, and whilst the second plan is preferred for being streamlined, there was even less awareness of it or when it would begin to take effect in the service.

Related to this shared message were the following questions. Has a new shared vision brought clarification and action, or complication and stagnation? Is the new vision agreed upon? Is its emphasis right? Which core themes or missions are most prioritised by staff in general?

Chapter 8 has revealed how most questionnaire respondents throughout the service felt that *Framework* policy was ambitious, persuasive, unifying and largely original. It also was seen to provide more clarification than complication as well as being very idealistic. The core themes garnered much attention in Chapter 6, with Books, Reading and Learning providing most prioritisation generally, proving most motivational in terms of new champion roles which sought to provide greater team-working and initiative within the service based around the core themes. People's Network proved highly visible and successful, although only in some of the better resourced parts of the service. In this sense, the shared message can be seen to be effective, but varying in strength and by theme. Perhaps most revealing are the areas where the vision proved more divisive, chiefly over flagship examples and case studies which sought to put meat on the skeletal structure of the document. In this sense Chapter 7 has revealed how difficult it is to provide a vision everyone finds inspiring, given how much people vary, least of all in their relative optimism.

This variation in opinion was again seen when questionnaire respondents were asked directly whether 'In your opinion, has *Framework for the Future* helped your library service achieve 'a shared sense of purpose' with its community and government?' Whilst the Senior questionnaire respondent (S1) felt that "It has provided a commonality of Aims/Purpose", at the next level down, Middle-Managers were split down the middle on the issue. Three were negative, one saying "No, I don't think so" (M3) and another doubting any impact other than a "slight rise of profile" (M6), whilst a third (M1) favoured other documents entirely:

"My impression is that the council's agenda of 'Closing the Gap' and national government's long standing commitment to Social Inclusion and Lifelong Learning initiatives are more important in driving policy than *Framework for the Future* as a document on its own. If *Framework* was to help create "a shared sense of purpose" it would have to possess the status of a White Paper."

By contrast, M2, M4 and M5 provided positive comments, agreeing with the statement, perceiving higher political profile (M2), whilst one felt that it "May even have stopped the cutbacks..." (M5).

Frontline staff again provided a different angle to Middle and Senior levels, focusing less on political influence and more on community impact. Most Frontline Managers and Library Assistants agreed a shared purpose was being achieved, although one Frontline-Manager (FM3)

and one Library-Assistant (LA4) hinted that efforts with the community were below optimum potential:

FM3: “I am not sure that our community understands our direction, or the possibilities that working with the library could bring. This needs to be demonstrated on the ground – and takes time to achieve.”

LA4: “It would be interesting... to know whether our community feel this way. Are they aware of a new vision?”

The issue of awareness within the service is clearly matched by a need to raise awareness and profile beyond it. As will be seen with interview responses, local community awareness of *Framework* is not a precursor to involvement, though it is necessary for overt sharing of purpose. The ten interviewees were asked the same question as the questionnaire respondents about whether a ‘shared sense of purpose’ had been achieved, extending to local community and government.

Senior-Librarians agreed that a shared purpose existed, but disagreed over its strength. Whilst Senior-Interviewee 3 felt there was “Certainly a shared sense of purpose internally”, most other interviewees were less optimistic. Senior-Interviewee 2, for example, noted that –

“I think it has at least given everybody a clearer sense of purpose, hopefully shared...[but] you never know how far down the organisation it’s gone...[or] whether you’ve really got hearts and minds on board...”

As for shared purpose externally, Senior-Interviewee 1 argued communities would agree with *Framework* but lack knowledge of it, whilst Government clings to it without putting in enough money:

“I think the basic thrust of it wouldn’t be... unrecognisable if you went out to the communities and said what we’re working to now is these agendas, and you didn’t mention the word ‘Framework’, I think many of the communities would buy into it, and say ‘well that’s what we want you to do’. From the government end, I think the difficulty is that the government still seems to cling to Framework. It’s not particularly updating it

in a sense... but the difficulty is some of the major things they want to happen... need more resourcing...”

Middle-Management interviewees 1 and 2 were both resoundingly positive by contrast, both saying “Yes” to a shared purpose, whilst the former highlighted its utility because –

“It’s given a reference document that people can go back to and say ‘this is what we need to be doing, this is the vision, and how do we actually put that vision into place in Sheffield’, because the context is different from everywhere...”

However, there again emerges the issue of awareness, because whilst the vision may be agreed upon, it is not always shared effectively because of the failure to link successful activities and initiatives back to the document itself; Middle-Management Interviewee 2 felt that *Framework* was “something that’s there in the background”. Without full service awareness and linking back of successes, it will be hard to promote the vision and link up ‘purpose’ with local government and community groups. The awareness issue takes centre stage at the frontline level. Frontline-Management Interviewee 1 for example stated that “I’m not sure that we have this clear vision” and that “...some library services have embraced it, and used it more positively than I feel we do here”. As for a shared purpose, it was seen to exist “...more so in the community libraries...” whereas:

“...in the information services we’re still struggling a bit... I’m not sure that we’ve really possibly grasped the nettle properly yet.”

Even so, Frontline-Management Interviewee 2 continued casting doubt on the community side of a shared purpose, but was more positive about local government:

“I don’t think the community will understand anything about Framework. I do think the community is benefiting from changes in the library service. And I think maybe the library service itself has a shared vision with the government now...”

When the two Library Assistant Interviewees were asked about a shared sense of purpose, they were put off a little by the question, but both produced responses which related to the variety of initiatives taking place and the increased emphasis on partnership working. These

were effective responses to the question when bearing in mind the fact that, as Library-Assistant Interviewee 2 had previously stated:

“...we’re doing things without knowing it’s part of that document [*Framework for the Future*] really... we’re doing it without knowing... why would you need to know it... we’re not on the managers level...”

Overall, the shared nature and core foci of the themes, objectives and case examples contained in *Framework for the Future*, have been recognised at most of the levels of seniority. The aim for this shared vision to reach all these levels has been only partially fulfilled. There have been efforts top-down to win support for the vision, but lack of awareness and problems with vertical communication prevent full cascade. There is disagreement within and between all levels, when taking into account questionnaire and interview responses to the question. Middle and Senior Managers seem more preoccupied with the political, publicity and public profile aspects, whereas Frontline librarians have more attention on their community and have less awareness of *Framework* and less incentive to raise it. Both local communities and library assistants are seen to be pro-*Framework* without necessarily being fully aware of it. Communication and the linking back of core objectives needs re-emphasis or the shared sense of purpose, at least with local communities, will remain fragile. Equally, greater pressure must be exerted on government to support the vision with more than just words. Frontline-Management Interviewee 1’s comments on internal and external communication really crystallise these factors:

“...some of our senior management go to meetings throughout Sheffield with education people, housing and councillors, and I’m not sure how much [...]? They probably *are* selling us, but I’m not sure how much, because they don’t actually come back to us and say where are we with this... I know we all write these plans and things, but... I just feel there’s a bit of a gap there.”

Conclusions and Recommendations

In conclusion there does not appear to be a coherent shared vision to the extent *Framework for the Future* sets out, although as only three of the ten years have passed, there is still room to achieve success. Part of the problem is rooted in flawed internal communications from the top to the bottom of the service. Whilst the restructure has created matrix, team-based structures with the hope of more horizontal communications, the linking back of success stories, actions and initiatives to specific *Framework*-objectives is insufficient. There has also been a compartmentalisation effect, with some staff more motivated and directed than others, particularly in the Reader Development/Books, Reading and Learning areas, but less so in the more vague *Framework*-related champion areas covering Lifelong Learning for example. Similarly, People's Network and Digital Citizenship has gained particular attention in only the better resourced sections of the service and is sustained through internal funds, lacking much needed core funding, although staff were most positive about its developments in the questionnaire responses. By comparison interviewed staff showed concerns about over-emphasis on the IT side, but also about the lack of quality in some of their content. The Digital Divide also seems to persist due to the lack of time and expertise of staff for helping patrons with lower ICT skills.

Whether too much focus on Book-related activities to the detriment of other areas is occurring is not accepted by staff. However, when National Initiatives were commented on regarding the Modern Missions, it seems there are tensions and parallel commitments which can divert resources away from local initiatives. The awareness of the Modern Missions was far lower than the core themes, where the community side seemed to gain the least attention, although this would appear to conflict with the ostensibly heavy community focus generally attributed to the services tested, and also with the range of positive messages about activities and uptake of new services (particularly online) by minority groups. Overall policy awareness and sufficient understanding decline slightly down the service hierarchy, but the latter rises for Library-Assistants because many do not feel they really need to know about it. This attitude clearly needs to change, whilst top-level librarians need to take more time to persuade staff of the vision's benefits.

In terms of recruitment and retention, staff related this back to the restructure directly and *Framework* more indirectly. The motivational impact of *Framework* was rooted in the same way, and tied largely to the Books and Reading elements where staff could envisage group

activities more clearly. A more youthful staff, reflecting marketing and re-branding campaigns was seen as possible by staff, because the document could touch hearts and minds, although older more experienced staff were more doubtful. In general, awareness of *Framework* and understanding of the political side of the strategy was strongest from above and weaker lower down. However, certain issues were debated within and between levels with much disagreement:

Staff opinion was split over the efficacy of the flagships and case study examples, but also regarding whether *Framework* was a political or social, evolutionary or transformational, radical or conventional document. Most staff only remembered the largest, most visible flagships and whilst some felt these supported the vision, others felt they were unrealistic or unrepresentative. Lack of awareness of the full range of examples featured heavily. Communicating and linking back to *Framework* themes proved a weakness again here, but also reflected on the impact of the blame culture and desire not to experiment with initiatives which may fail. This in itself could be linked to the desire not to waste resources which were very tight – financial, material and staff. These represent continuing, core weaknesses, whilst the core strengths relate to issues of greatest impact – the three core themes and restructuring of posts around them.

Nevertheless, despite these efforts, a shared vision and joint-working with both government and community is only partially evident. The seeds have been sown though, as seen in semantic scale appraisals which rated *Framework* policy-style as idealistic, top-down and flexible, with coverage and influence in a broad, national and strategic sense. Perhaps most pleasing of all, it was seen to be motivational, original, ambitious and persuasive, bringing clarification, heightened focus and profile. The key areas for improvement are Communication (top-down and horizontal through improved champion-role focus for the non-Reader Development posts, greater communication of *Framework* ideas and how they relate to staff at all levels and the derivation of more positive messages from case examples, achievable or otherwise. Additional awareness methods from informal discussion to CILIP membership could be promoted. In addition, closer work with the MLA is needed, applying pressure for core funding into the People's Network. Finally, there must be greater scope for creativity, where risk is seen as a positive enabler rather than a restriction, whilst Community and Civic Values must be raised to equal status with other core themes and be translated into effective and motivational work areas. Overall, there needs to be a transition from 'hazy' awareness to informed and motivated working.

Research into attitudes toward *Framework for the Future* could be extended into equally interesting areas. A detailed investigation of grass-roots implementation of specific objectives derived from MLA Action Plans would be very enlightening, as would a measurement of how far staff feel they fit the new image and branding of library services. This particular study could be added to by parallel studies of attitudes toward other suggested visions for the future, such as by CABA (2004:4) with its 'people, programmes, partners and places' emphasis, or Coates's suggestions. Simple repetition at different services would test the transferability of the results I found, although it would be better to have an extended research period, so as to enable larger samples, with more statistically accurate sampling techniques. Combining the statistical elements of the questionnaire into a refined interview would combat the problem of too few Senior questionnaire respondents. Additionally, certain questions would need improvement for effectiveness. A contrast between several sites, particularly a flagship and non-flagship service, would provide an insight into the variation in *Framework's* utility, where it is most useful and why. A deeper exploration of specific staff involvement in *Framework* projects would also add to this, particularly regarding the leadership programme, and whether, as McKearney (2004:35) argued, 'tough-minded leadership' is really essential to 'tackle' public library problems. Taking a change-management approach more directly would reveal the managerial consequences of implementing new visions.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Questionnaire

Appendix 2: Interview Questions

Appendix 1: Questionnaire

SECTION 1

1) What level of seniority is your current post? Mark the section that most closely resembles your position.

- a) Frontline (Library & Information Assistant) []
- b) Frontline (Manager) []
- c) Management (Middle) []
- d) Management (Senior) []
- e) Other, please specify [] _____

1B) Do you have a Librarianship qualification (e.g. Degree/Diploma)?

- Yes []
- No []

2) Are you aware of the policy document *Framework for the Future*?

- Yes []
- No []

If No, go to Section 2 (Q5).

2B) How have you gained awareness of *Framework for the Future*? Mark as many boxes as are relevant.

- a) Read all or part of the document itself []
- b) Read all or part of related documents (e.g. 'A Quiet Revolution'; Library Position Statements) []
- c) Read coverage in professional literature e.g. CILIP (Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals) Update? []
- d) Formal workplace training about Framework for the Future []
- e) Through involvement in Librarianship-related professional groups or communities (e.g. Career Development Group) []
- f) Through involvement with MLA (Museums, Libraries & Archives), Regional MLA Council or Framework related projects (e.g. Leadership Programme). []
- g) Information from external training courses/events []
- h) Informal discussion with work colleagues []
- i) Other, please specify _____ []

3) In terms of your awareness and understanding of the Vision set out in *Framework for the Future*, please indicate how comprehensive you feel your understanding of the Vision is.

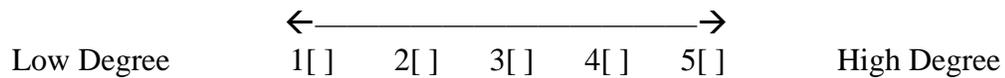
Mark a number on the scale below (where 1 represents a very low degree, 3 a moderate degree, and 5 a very high degree).

←—————→

Low Degree 1 [] 2 [] 3 [] 4 [] 5 [] High Degree

4) To what degree do you feel your awareness and understanding of *the Framework for the Future Vision* is sufficient in terms of your job position and involvement in policy objectives in the workplace?

Circle a number on the scale below (where 1 represents a very low degree, 3 a moderate degree, and 5 a very high degree).



SECTION 2

You are not expected to consult the *Framework* document and vision itself in completing this questionnaire, but should you wish to, it can be accessed online at:

http://www.culture.gov.uk/global/publications/archive_2003/framework_future.htm

5) What is your attitude toward how your service prioritises the three core themes?

Themes: ‘Books, Learning and Reading’; ‘Digital Citizenship’; ‘Community and Civic Values’

6) In its ‘Modern Mission’, *Framework for the Future* aims for both ‘distinctiveness’ of services, and duplication of successful initiatives on a ‘National’ scale. In your opinion, have these been successfully balanced, or have tensions arisen between these or any other mission objectives?

Modern Mission: ‘Evolution’; ‘Public Value’; ‘Distinctiveness’; ‘Local Interpretations of National Programmes’

7) Semantic Scale – Consider *Framework* Policy as a whole:

Mark your opinion on the scale between pairs of contrasting terms. The closer to one end and term, the closer to that opinion and the further from the other your view is, whilst a score of 4 reflects balance or neutrality between the two meanings.

<i>Policy Character (A) – Style:</i>								
←-----→								
Idealistic	1[]	2[]	3[]	4[]	5[]	6[]	7[]	Pragmatic
Radical	1[]	2[]	3[]	4[]	5[]	6[]	7[]	Conventional
Transformational	1[]	2[]	3[]	4[]	5[]	6[]	7[]	Evolutionary
Top-down	1[]	2[]	3[]	4[]	5[]	6[]	7[]	Grass-roots
Flexible	1[]	2[]	3[]	4[]	5[]	6[]	7[]	Uniform

<i>Coverage & Influence:</i>								
←-----→								
Broad-scope	1[]	2[]	3[]	4[]	5[]	6[]	7[]	Tight-focus
Actions	1[]	2[]	3[]	4[]	5[]	6[]	7[]	Strategies
Social	1[]	2[]	3[]	4[]	5[]	6[]	7[]	Political
Local/Regional	1[]	2[]	3[]	4[]	5[]	6[]	7[]	National

<i>Policy Character (B) – Impact:</i>								
←-----→								
Demoralising	1[]	2[]	3[]	4[]	5[]	6[]	7[]	Motivational
Un-ambitious	1[]	2[]	3[]	4[]	5[]	6[]	7[]	Ambitious
Unconvincing	1[]	2[]	3[]	4[]	5[]	6[]	7[]	Persuasive
Divisive	1[]	2[]	3[]	4[]	5[]	6[]	7[]	Unifying
Complication	1[]	2[]	3[]	4[]	5[]	6[]	7[]	Clarification
Derivative	1[]	2[]	3[]	4[]	5[]	6[]	7[]	Original

SECTION 3

8) The following three views are from senior librarians as represented in professional literature. Please mark a box on each scale which closest represents your attitude. You may add comments below if you wish.

View 1: “F4F [*Framework for the Future*]... will not inspire young people to come into the profession... [It is] not a document to touch hearts.”

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
<hr/>				
<hr/>				
<hr/>				

View 2: ‘While the vision of F4F [*Framework for the Future*] to promote reading and learning will be wholeheartedly supported ... it may not generate very much new activity when so much is already happening.’

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>				
<hr/>				
<hr/>				
<hr/>				

View 3: *Framework for the Future* has provided opportunities to enhance online content, communities and access, thus reducing the ‘digital divide’ by enabling more people to become e-Citizens.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>				
<hr/>				
<hr/>				
<hr/>				

9) *Framework for the Future* deploys case studies and flagship examples throughout to support its vision (e.g. Norfolk and Norwich Millennium Library). In your opinion, how far do they provide realistic inspiration or create unrealistic expectations for staff and patrons?

10) If you have been involved in any *Framework for the Future*-related initiatives or projects (e.g. Leading Modern Libraries; Partnerships, Peer Review; Marketing) please identify and comment on your attitudes to one below:

SECTION 4

11) In your opinion, has *Framework for the Future* helped your library service achieve ‘a shared sense of purpose’ with its community and government?

Thank you very much for taking the time and effort to complete this survey. Please add any further comments you want to make overleaf.

Appendix 2: Interview Questions

A) Background:

- 1) What level of seniority is your current post?
a) Frontline (Assistant) [] b) Frontline (manager) []
c) Management (middle) [] d) Management (senior) [] e) Other _____.
- 2) Do you have a Librarianship qualification (e.g. Degree/Diploma)? Yes [] No []

B) F4F Motivation & Succession

- 3) Has there been an impact on recruitment and retention resulting from Framework policies and implementation in your service? -> *Please Explain.*
- 4) Has there been an impact on motivation and morale in your library service as a result of *Framework for the Future*? -> *If YES, please explain the nature of this impact.*
- 5) *Framework for the Future* deploys case studies and flagship examples throughout to support its vision (e.g. Norfolk and Norwich Millennium Library).
In your opinion, how far do they provide realistic inspiration or create unrealistic expectations for staff and patrons?
- 6) From your own personal experience in your library service, what do you feel are the main strengths and weaknesses – if any – of the implementation of *Framework* policy?

C) F4F Shared Purpose?

- 7) In your opinion, what has been *Framework for the Future*'s main impact on public library staff in your service?
- 8) What are your feelings about how Framework's three core themes are implemented and prioritised in your service?
- 9) To what degree has the overall Framework vision been adopted in your library service?
- 10) In your opinion, has *Framework for the Future* helped your library service achieve 'a shared sense of purpose' extending to its community and government?
-> *If YES, do you think all members of staff are aware of and support this shared purpose?*

D) Additional Comments

Are there any additional comments you would like to make about Framework for the Future, in particular its impact on library staff and implementation?
[SPARE Q -> *Have you been involved in any Framework-related initiatives or projects which you would like to comment on, in terms of outcome and your attitudes?]*