Investigate how public libraries can support new writers and examine the benefits of this support

A study submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Librarianship

at

THE UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD

by

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September 2007

Abstract

This study investigates what the public library service currently does to support new writers and examines the benefits of any support. A review of the literature revealed that there was little direct information relating to this area, although research was found to suggest that new writers found it difficult to receive promotion for their work. From here the study was broken down into finding answers to six separate objectives:

- What public libraries are currently doing to support new writers.
- How suitably placed the public library service is to support new writers and whether this is appropriate for a public service.
- What work to support new writers the public library service carries out in partnership with other parties and how successful this is.
- What benefits there are for the public library service and other parties when related to the promotion of new writers.
- The sustainability of the support given to new writers.
- What else can be done to the public library service to support new writers and what barriers block this.

The research takes an inductive and qualitative approach. This was achieved by conducting interviews with library workers at all levels, writers, publishers and other persons working to promote new writers.

The research found that the public library service was generally committed to the promotion of new writers and promoted them whenever the opportunity arose. A lot of this promotional work was carried out in partnerships and this was considered to be a success. All involved in the support of new writers in the public library service benefited in some way, and such support was generally considered sustainable. The main barriers to support were funding and marketing.

Recommendations include: improvements in funding, promotion, training and marketing in the public library service. Ideas for further research

include an investigation into the best ways to specifically promote new writers and how this differs from normal promotion.

Contents

1 Introduction

1.1 Background to the promotion of new writers

It is generally considered to be difficult for new writers to establish themselves in an increasingly competitive marketplace for books. Around 206 000 new and revised titles were published in the UK in 2005, compared with 161 000 in 2004 (The Publisher's Association, 2007). Of these titles, many are written by established authors, best selling authors or those with considerable fame in other areas. Such factors give titles authored by these writers a considerable advantage when pitted against a work from an unknown and untested author, and this is reflected by the fact that of the top ten selling fiction books in hardback and paperback in the week ending 16 June 2007 only one book out of the combined twenty was by a new writer (The Sunday Times, 2007a, 2007b). To further illustrate this disadvantage it should be noticed that this single bestseller, Jed Rubenfeld's *The Interpretation of a Murder*, has been the beneficiary of a considerable amount of promotion. New writers then, tend not to be best sellers, and as a result it rarely makes financial sense for booksellers, a business like any other that requires to sell a lot of its products in order to make a profit, to spend a lot of effort in promoting new writers when time and money could be spent maximising the sales of books with a guaranteed audience. Even when new writers are promoted they are often sold on the basis of what has been described as "piggyback publishing (the 'new JK Rowling' syndrome)" (Kellaway, 2007). This suggests that any new writers who cannot be immediately linked as a copycat of an established author will struggle to be promoted. It is therefore likely that exciting and original new writers, who could use a first novel as "a proving ground" on the way to better things, will not be afforded such an opportunity (Kellaway, 2007).

Promotion for new writers from the traditional route of book sellers can therefore be said to be declining in its breadth as financial constraints are an increasing issue and more first novels are being published than before. However, this leaves an obvious, yet important question: if first novels can be

the first stepping stone towards greatness and high sales, is a generation of potentially great writers being stifled at birth because their proving ground does not receive adequate promotion? If promotion leads to sales and sales to opportunities to write further novels it would seem that this could be likely. However, as stated above, publishing and book selling are businesses and it is both unfair and quixotic to expect that massive funds will be used to promote new writers when, as shown by the recent announcement of closures to several branches of Waterstone's, livelihoods are on the line (Teather, 2007).

This study therefore seeks to examine this gap and assess the suitability of the public library service to fill it, either through single initiatives or in partnership with the other interested parties such as publishers, book sellers and the writers themselves. It will also investigate the benefits of this support in relation to all parties and ask even if the pubic library service can fill this gap, should it? The topic is related to the area of reader development and the promotion of reading, although it is unique enough so that original material can be mined.

1.2 Aims

The aim of this topic is to investigate how public libraries can support new writers and to examine the benefits of this support for all concerned.

1.3 Objectives

The aims will be achieved by exploring the general topic through examination of a range of more specific questions. This will allow the topic to be investigated in detail, while retaining a focus on the overall question. These parts can be stated thus:

- What public libraries are currently doing to support new writers.

- How suitably placed the public library service is to support new writers and whether this is appropriate for a public service.
- What work to support new writers the public library service carries out in partnership with other parties and how successful this is.
- What benefits there are for the public library service and other parties when related to the promotion of new writers.
- How sustainable any support is.
- What else can be done to the public library service to support new writers and what barriers block this.

These subjects will lead to a conclusion that will address the aims but will also assess how successful the public library service is in the area of the promotion of new writers.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Public libraries and new writers

There is little in the way of specific literature directly relating to public libraries and their promotion of new writers. However, there is evidence that certain public library services are specifically targeting new writers as a subject for promotion. Essex libraries is a library service with a particular record of this. Heavy promotion of new writers begins two months before the annual Essex Book Festival, organised and ran by Essex libraries, and takes different forms. Interested reading groups discuss, review and act as advocates for new writers who are scheduled to appear at the festival. This advocacy includes reader reviews on a website and monthly appearances on BBC Radio Essex, bringing unknown new writers to a sizeable audience (Essex Libraries, 2007a). During the festival, promotion of new writers is achieved through displays in branch libraries and author events. Reading groups are encouraged to attend these author events and in some cases even chair them (Essex Libraries, 2007b).

The promotion of new writers before the Essex Book Festival proved to be a huge success during the festival proper. Impressive statistics for the festival include six new author events being completely sold out and one with only six available places left; acknowledged by publishers to be "fantastic audience figures". (Essex Libraries, 2007c). Authors were featured in a festival programme that had a circulation of 50 000. Feedback was universally positive: "It's great to know there's a festival where we can send new writers and they can get decent audiences that they would not get elsewhere" (Essex Libraries, 2007c). This suggests that the public library service can promote new writers with a success not matched by commercial organisers. However, while this is certainly a positive quote for the Essex public library service, it is worrying for the service in general because it suggests that of all the library services in the UK, in the view of the publisher quoted in the literature above only Essex is making a valuable contribution when it comes to promoting new writers.

However, the literature suggests that the situation is not quite so dire when considering the promotion of new writers by the public library service. New writers are frequently promoted by public libraries as part of larger promotions. For example, Marcus Zusak's *The Book Thief* is featured on the Sheffield libraries website as a new and recommended book (Sheffield City Council, 2007). *Poppy Shakespeare* by Clare Allan is a recommended read in Manchester libraries (Manchester City Council, 2007). New writers will generally be promoted in public libraries when they are part of any book awards that include categories for first novels. However, this research has been unable to find any specific public library policy concerning the promotion of new writers or a comprehensive study of the topic.

2.2 New writers and promotion

Outside of the public library service there is a variety of ways for new writers to be promoted, although it is becoming an increasingly difficult process. There is an established trail for new writers to follow in order to be promoted: Kellaway (2007) notes that, "Novelists depend on word of mouth, Radio 4, book clubs and prizes". Radio 4 has a book of the week, from which extracts are read daily (Radio 4, 2007). It is claimed that there were 524, 767 unique weekly listeners to Radio 4 in May 2007, a massive potential readership for any new writer (BBC, 2007). There are a number of book prizes specifically for first novels, where even being on a shortlist guarantees a good level of media attention for the new writer. Previous winners of the Costa (formerly Whitbread) First Book Award include Hanif Kureishi, Zadie Smith and William Boyd, all of whom have established themselves as successful writers (Whitbread Book Awards, 2006). Other high profile first book awards are run by WH Smith and the Guardian. Both guarantee the new writer much needed exposure. Of course, only a handful of new writers published can even be nominated for such prizes and so such promotion is scarce. For the majority of new writers, other methods of promotion are required. The success of book groups in the promotion of new writers has already been acknowledged in Essex (Essex Libraries, 2007b). There are,

therefore, ways for new writers to be promoted. However, this is becoming ever more difficult.

Kellaway (2007) sums up the problems new writers face as they seek to be promoted as that of there simply being too much risk attached to promotion for publishers when they are guaranteed sales by promoting established writers. Waterstones charges fees as high as £45 000 to ensure that books are displayed in sales-maximising positions (Hoyle & Clarke, 2007). When faced with such costs publishers are unlikely to gamble on unknown writers. This state of affairs is confirmed by many new writers on a Guardian Books blog (The Guardian, 2007):

> "My own experience to date is of how difficult it is for a first time, unknown writer to make an impression on the 'market'."

> "Getting it reviewed has been a challenge: several literary blogs gave it glowing reviews but all the standard review services … have declined to review it."

> "Those, like myself, who have been given very small advances, may be allocated publicity budgets which are so small as to be invisible. There appears to be no publicity campaign or even a strategy that I am aware of, and while many pre-publication copies of the books have gone out to the big trade buyers and to potential reviewers, and while reasonable stocks of the books have gone into the shops, I have not seen a single advert or any other piece of promotional literature designed to get the people into the shops to buy the books."

If they are to be successful, new writers must struggle for every bit of promotion possible, including that from the public library service.

2.3 The public library and partnerships

Promotional work carried out by the public library service is now increasingly being carried out in partnership with other agencies. This is certainly the case regarding the Essex Book Festival, where Essex libraries worked in partnership with the publisher Random House to put on four events featuring new authors at the festival (Essex Libraries, 2007d). In practice, this partnership involved Random House providing copies of their books for Essex libraries to present to their affiliated reading groups before they were available to buy. As noted above, this work culminated in sold out events at the book festival and gave new writers some precious publicity. This partnership allowed libraries to gain an insight into the way publishers work and vice versa. Both sides agreed that the scheme had been a success: reading group feedback provided Random House with useful quotes with which to carry out their publicity campaigns and the library service benefited from the provision of books that it would not otherwise be able to afford (Essex Libraries, 2007d). New writers benefited enormously. Furthermore, the good relations established made it likely that such methods of promotion will continue, to the lasting benefit of all parties involved. Ultimately, "It enhanced the image of the library as the place to be to catch up on up-to-date writing and of the publishing house as an organisation dedicated to promoting the best writing." (Essex Libraries, 2007d).

The idea that partnerships between the public library service and other parties can be beneficial to all, especially the writers involved, is given further credence in *Partnerships in Promotion* (Thebridge et al, 2001); although it is acknowledged that the success of these partnerships relies heavily on breaking down preconceived views. For example, library staff presumed that publishers and book sellers were awash with money to fund projects, which is not necessarily the case. It was also found to be very important that all involved made the utmost effort to realise that although working to a common goal, each partner has different expectations: "about recognising that other people have agendas that need to be met" (Thebridge et al, 2001). However,

if these issues are overcome then an equal partnership is likely to benefit all involved in the work of book promotion.

An organisation working to create successful partnerships in the area of book promotion is The Reading Agency. The mission statement of The Reading Agency is to "inspire a reading nation by working in new ways with readers, writers, libraries and their partners" (The Reading Agency, 2007). Inspiring a reading nation involves a lot of work promoting both reading and writers and The Reading Agency has been involved in scores of schemes designed to promote books, from Richard and Judy's book club to the BBC Big Read (The Reading Agency, 2005a). Recognising that "libraries are the UK's most significant provider of the reading experience," The Reading Agency realises that partnerships are invaluable in the promotion of books, and therefore the promotion of new writers (The Reading Agency, 2005b). Indeed, many of the stated ways for new writers to receive media attention are projects in collaboration with The Reading Agency.

Another organisation working in partnership with libraries in order to facilitate the promotion of books and reading is Opening the Book. Like The Reading Agency, Opening the Book's aim is to "release new energy into literature and library work", with a reader centred approach (Opening the Book, 2003a). This approach involves the promotion of books to readers who may enjoy a certain book, but who would not necessarily choose to read it, for any number of reasons. This is important when it comes to the promotion of new writers, who cannot rely on the strength or popularity of their previous material to encourage borrowers. Furthermore, Opening the Book is involved in the training of library staff in the methods of book promotion, which is then used effectively in a library environment: the success of this 'Branching Out' programme is attested to by the fact that it is currently used by library authorities across England (Opening the Book, 2003b). Opening the Book has also developed what is known as 'The Stock Quality Health Check'. It is designed to ensure that libraries have a balanced collection and so are relevant and attractive to all sections of the community. It involves checking stock against a sample list to gauge the overall balance of stock (Opening

the Book, 2003c). Goulding (2006) reports that this has been a success because it allows libraries to see where they are under and over provisioned. Of course, by its very definition a balanced collection has to include the work of new writers. Here then, working in partnership with the library service, Opening the Book helps to encourage books by new writers into the library and then, with 'Branching Out', attempts to give library staff the expertise to promote them. This suggests that partnership work is very important in the promotion of new writers.

2.4 The public library and reader development

It would seem to be a self-evident notion that the nature of the public library service is defined by books. This is not the undeniable truth it has been: the library service is keen to show that it performs a range of other functions for the community, from providing free access to the internet to combating social exclusion (People's Network, 2005). Nevertheless, a majority of library staff and cultural commentators do agree that the primary work of the library lies in the provision and promotion of books (Coates, 2004; Goulding, 2006; Jacobson, 2005). The Government also agrees: *Framework for the Future* states that one of the three main functions of the public library service is "the promotion of reading and informal learning" (DCMS, 2003). Promotion, so essential for new writers, is therefore a cornerstone of the public library service and promotion is currently informed by Reader Development.

Although there is no definitive statement to sum up the concept of Reader Development, it is possible to present an overall background to, and summation of, the main ideas. Primarily, Reader Development is focused on the creation of positive reading experiences rather than adhering to targets and figures (Elkin et al, 2003; Goulding, 2006; Leadbeater, 2003). A central aspect of this aim lies in encouraging readers to take a chance on a book they may not normally consider but would nevertheless lead to a positive reading experience. Opening the Book explains this approach:

"Reader development sells the reading experience and what it can do for you, rather than selling individual books or writers. It builds the audience for literature by moving readers beyond brand loyalty to individual writers, helping them develop the confidence to try something new."

(Opening the Book, 2003d)

Work concentrates on matching a reader to a book that will suit them perfectly, regardless of brand or author status. This a hugely positive development for new writers because it goes some way to negating one of the most powerful barriers put against them in their journey towards success: their status as unknowns. The attempt through effective Reader Development to level the playing field regardless of who an author may be suggests that the public library may be an excellent place to promote new writers.

Promotion falls into two broad categories: passive and active (Elkin et al, 2003). A passive approach acknowledges that many readers are content to keep their reading experiences private and would not feel comfortable at being waylaid by a member of library staff, no matter how well meaning (Kendrick, 2001). Having said that, this does not mean that promoting new writers to such people is impossible. Passive promotion includes displays of books, which can be as simple as a new arrivals shelf, or can revolve around much more specific themes, such as films or foreign writers (Elkin et al, 2003). Such an approach has the advantage that it can be seen by every borrower in the library There is evidence that such an approach is effective in encouraging users to take a risk and borrow more adventurous books (Train, 2003).

An active approach to Reader Development unsurprisingly involves much more hands-on methods on the part of library staff in order to encourage borrowers to make new choices with their reading. The most

basic, and least subtle, active approach is for the member of library staff to directly intervene with the borrower and recommend a book (Elkin et al, 2003). It is however, important for the member of staff to do this in a professional way: the process is not the same as recommending a favourite to a friend. Recommendations must be based upon knowledge of the reader and their preferences (Saricks and Brown, 1997). Another aspect of active promotion is the librarian's involvement with reading groups. This is a way for library staff to promote to a group of different borrowers simultaneously, and has the effect of widening choices significantly, since readers necessarily lose some of their control of reading material when part of a group. This active approach has been successful in terms of Reader Development and the promotion of new writers, as seen in the case of reading groups in the Essex area (Essex Libraries, 2007b). It can be stated then that the practice of Reader Development gives the public library service an excellent platform from which it can effectively promote new writers.

2.5 Issues effecting the public library service

Having established the credentials of the public library service as an organisation equipped to effectively promote new writers, it is pertinent to look at factors which may effect the realisation of such promotion. The Government has set out an aim to create a popular library service and has invested heavily in libraries (Lammy, 2004; Cipfa, 2004). However, there is a voice of opinion suggesting that the public library service is failing due to a variety of issues.

The first, and main, factor when considering promotion in the public library service is that of money. Goulding (2006) reports that, although investment in the public library service is at an all time high, the previous decades of massive under-funding had crippled the service to such an extent that funding is still too low to create a widely effective service. The essential problem is that while libraries have expanded their services, there has been no new money to fund these services, which effectively means cuts in traditional areas of library work (Goulding, 2006). In addition to this, it has

been suggested that inefficiencies within the service itself are eating up money unnecessarily (Coates, 2004; Goulding, 2006). That any extra money tends to come about as a result of an uncertain bidding process means that projects cannot be planned over a long-term period, so any promotion work is likely to be piecemeal (Goulding, 2006).

However, of possible greater concern than the lack of money is the effect this has on staff. It seems that some have been defeated by the funding issue and now automatically presume that anything the library service attempts is doomed to fail due to lack of resources, when they should, "focus on revitalising their services, making them indispensable to local and national priorities thereby attracting more adequate funding" (Goulding, 2006). It has been pointed out that a successful promotion does not need to benefit from an expensive array of promotional materials: a selection of interesting books, displayed attractively in a good location can be very effective and requires nothing more than initiative on behalf of library staff (Thebridge et al, 2001). This suggests that although lack of funding does have a detrimental effect on the promotion of new writers, this is not an insurmountable barrier.

A further issue regarding the public library's ability to promote new writers is that of the library service moving away from what is seen as its traditional function of providing books. Coates (2004) is particularly vociferous in this regard, suggesting that unless the public library service radically alters its direction then it will have died out by 2020. He cites falling book issues as a real headache for the service and suggests that unless the library service focuses heavily on providing books it will continue on a downward slide. As Goulding (2006) notes, Coates' report is essentially a "polemic" without the benefits of any comprehensive and detailed case studies. It also fails to recognise the huge amount of work currently being done in the field of Reader Development. However, it has been acknowledged that Coates does make some valid points. Only fifty nine percent of borrowers find the book they have come to the library to borrow and issue figures are steadily declining (DCMS, 2003; Goulding, 2006).

However, as noted by Lammy (2004), rising prosperity has led to an increase in the number of people who can afford to buy books at the same time as prices have tumbled thanks to the abolition of the Net Book Agreement in 1997, suggesting that the public library service is at least in part a victim of circumstance. These figures have positive and negative aspects for new writers. Declining issue figures suggest that the public library provides a diminishing marketplace for their work. However, if forty percent of users are not finding what they came to the library for then there is significant opportunity for library staff to promote the work of new writers to this group.

A final major issue in the public library service that may affect the promotion of new writers is that of marketing. There have been many changes that have occurred, both in the world and the public library service over the last fifty years. However, to a large extent a stereotypical view of libraries as dour and uninspiring places, used only by the elderly, remains and this can be very off putting to potential borrowers (The Reading Agency, 2004). It has been acknowledged that in a world where the public library is in competition with other media, such as film, music and the internet for the increasingly limited leisure time of the public it is no longer adequate to provide a service and presume that people will come to use it (CILIP, 2002; Goulding 2006). It has been suggested that the public library service takes tips from the commercial world to create a powerful brand image that will encourage borrowers of all types to use the service (Coates, 2004; Hood & Henderson, 2005; Lee, 2006), and although not universally liked this has been achieved with a large degree of success in Tower Hamlets with the creation of their 'Idea Stores' brand (Tower Hamlets, 2007; Goulding, 2006). However, it is acknowledged within the service that, without the benefit of significant funding to completely revamp buildings, libraries are not very strong at marketing themselves (Goulding, 2006). This is a problem when it comes to the promotion of new writers. If libraries are unable to market themselves as a place for all members of the community then it is likely that a large potential readership for new writers are not even making it inside the building. It is, after all, impossible to promote books to those who walk past the library.

3 Methodology

This study takes an inductive approach. This is because it is attempting to answer a question and is not testing a hypothesis. A quantitative study was ruled out due to the difficulties inherent in acquiring enough randomised evidence in order to get a generalisable sample in the limited time frame. Quantitative study also relies on facts and unchanging evidence, and while it is possible to find out a number of hard facts concerning the promotion of new writers, it is the views and opinions of those involved with the process of promoting new writers which is likely to yield the most information. As Gorman and Clayton (2005) explain, qualitative research is concerned with the context of any research, is verbal, and analyses any data rationally rather than statistically. Quantitative study, with such a reliance on facts, is often rigid and cannot process non-standard results. A purely quantitative study would "simply rule out the study of many interesting phenomena relating to what people actually do" (Silverman, 2003). However, as either qualitative or quantitative methods of investigation are both used regularly for research purposes it is evident that both methods have uses and disadvantages, and rather than being opposed and hostile to each other can be used in a complementary manner. Ultimately, "the choice between different research methods should depend upon what you are trying to find out" (Silverman, 2003).

This study is mainly qualitative. It relies on the perceptions, views and opinions of those involved with the promotion of new writers in an attempt to find answers to the objectives of the research. It aims to research the whole process of promoting new writers in the public library service in order to gain a complete understanding of the topic (Gorman & Clayton, 2005). However, over the course of the research factual data will inevitably be collected, regarding such topics as specific details of certain promotions and levels of funding, meaning that the investigation will benefit from some quantitative methods. Combining these methods of research will result in the collection of more useful data.

Triangulation is an important aspect of the methodology of this research. As described by Robson (2002), this "valuable and widely used strategy … involves the use of multiple sources to enhance the rigour of the research … Triangulation can help to counter all of the threats to validity". As noted above, the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods of investigation will provide a more complete and rounded view of the topic. In the same way, in order to gain the most complete view of the topic research is not limited to one library authority but looks at three different authorities to triangulate data from around the country. Similarly, data is collected from all persons involved with the promotion of new writers in the public library service. This include library staff at all levels, as well as library partners involved with promotion, such as publishers and the writers themselves. These three levels of triangulation will ensure that the study is as comprehensive as possible given time limitations.

3.1 Ethics

In order to fulfil the ethics requirements of Sheffield University, several steps were taken to ensure that there were no issues regarding ethics during the course of the study.

Everyone involved in the study was either handed or emailed a participant information sheet (see Appendix A). This sheet set out the nature of the study and gave all relevant information that the participant would require. Such information included: what exactly would be expected of the participant; emphasis that participation was on a purely voluntary level and that withdrawal was allowed at any time; an assertion that all information collected will be anonymous; giving a contact for any query or complaint. These information sheets were left for the participants to keep and consult at any time.

Once participants had read the information sheet and agreed to contribute to the study they were asked to sign a consent form (see appendix B). The form ensured that participants had read and understood the information sheet, and had agreed to be interviewed.

4 Method

The beginning of the research involved discovering the identities of useful contacts involved in the promotion of new writers. These people were from libraries, publishers and other outside agencies. Furthermore, personnel from three libraries were identified to share their opinions on the promotion of new writers by the public library service. These personnel were not formally linked to the specific promotion of new writers, thus allowing for a service wide appreciation of the topic and eliminating any bias that may occur should interviewees only come from the research field. All potential interviewees were first approached via an email stating the topic and an invitation to help with the research.

One-to-one interviews were held on the understanding that all data collected would be anonymous. This was done so that participants would feel comfortable giving their true views on matters without feeling under pressure due to the presence of colleagues or managers who may hold different opinions. Interviews were conducted face to face, over the phone and via email. This caused some difficulties with normalising the findings.

4.1 Advantages and disadvantages of interviews

The main advantage of interviews is their flexibility. It is possible in an interview to follow potentially interesting threads to previous answers in order to expand knowledge, something that is not viable with a questionnaire or survey. It is possible to modify questioning techniques in order to clarify points. Interviews allow participants to give specific and extensive answers to questions, something that is not possible when choosing a box to tick (Robson, 2002).

The main disadvantage found when carrying out interviews was the medium employed. Due to time constraints it was not physically possible to interview all participants on a face-to-face basis. Some interviews were conducted via telephone and others via email. This meant that the research

was not conducted as part of a standard process. An issue with an email interview was also that it lacks the flexibility and spontaneity of an conversation. However, thanks to the goodwill and patience of participants being interviews like this, it was possible to ask many follow up questions which were answered promptly.

4.2 Interview technique

As much care as possible was taken to keep the interviews as balanced and unbiased as possible. However, it has been well documented that interviews can be prone to some level of participant bias because an interview is much less formal than other methods of research (Robson, 2002; Silverman, 2003). Also, it is possible that participants will come into an interview situation determined to make certain points no matter what the question, which can lead the research to lose focus. This issue did not affect the current research however: all questions were answered and a variety of interesting points were made.

In a further attempt to ensure that as little bias as possible affected the interview process, all questions were carefully formulated prior to interview, although some follow up questions were spontaneous. The prior composition of interview questions meant that all questions were balanced and non-leading (Robson, 2002).

The basic structure of all interviews was the same for all participants. The first questions asked for basic details about how participants went about the promotion of books in general before going into further detail about the research topic. Depending on the participant, some questions had to be modified: interviews with people from outside the library service tended to focus more on partnerships in promoting new writers, and in such cases questions that had been put to library workers were not appropriate (Gorman & Clayton, 2005).

In order to keep focus on the topic interview questions were designed to be as simple as possible (Robson, 2002). When questions were in more then one part, this was because in the interviewer's opinion these two parts made an important whole. For example, when asked if their promotional work involved organisations other than the library service, the second part of the question asked participants to expand on this answer by stating any advantages or disadvantages of such work.

4.3 Sampling

4.3.1 Library services involved in the study

Although an overarching vision for the policy and development of the public library service is found in *Framework for the Future*, it is the case that the precise work carried out by any library service is determined by the individual councils (DCMS, 2003). Thus it is entirely possible that while a particular library service may devote a great deal of resources towards the support and promotion of new writers, such support will not be high on the list of priorities for a nearby service. Therefore, in order to gain as wide a view as possible of the topic the library staff interviewed will come from three different library services.

Library Service A is a largely rural service in the North-East of England. It serves two main but relatively small towns, the outer districts of a different very large town and many smaller villages. It has a population of c139 000, which is 99% white (National Statistics, 2005). There are thirteen libraries in the area.

Library Service B is a service in the North of England which serves a main city of c513 000. It consists of a main central library and twenty eight surrounding branch libraries. The city is 91% white although it has an increasing refugee and migrant community, which is reflected in the amount of literature now available in foreign languages (National Statistics, 2005).

The city is in a period of extensive regeneration and has a large student population. The library service runs a literary festival every October.

Library Service C is a service in the South East of England with good transport links to London. Overall there are seventy two libraries in the service and a population of c1 310 000 of which 97% are white (National Statistics, 2005). The area is largely a commuting one and is generally more affluent than the previous two areas. This service also runs a literary festival, the most recent of which occurred in March 2007.

4.3.2 Persons Involved in the study

Library personnel at all levels were interviewed, from those working on the ground to those developing policy. This was done to ensure a perspective from all levels of the service.

Interviews also took place with other significant parties involved in the process of the promotion of new writers. This was done so that the perspective of the topic was not only from a library perspective. These interviewees were a writer, a publisher, a book seller and those who work in partnership with libraries in order to promote reading. This had the effect of eliminating any possible bias towards any one involved group.

Overall, there were fifteen people interviewed. Five were members of ground level library staff. Three were library managers. One was a library manager responsible for a group of libraries in the region. Three were involved with library run literary festivals. One was a publisher. One was a writer. One worked in the promotion of reading as part of an outside organisation.

5 Findings

5.1 What public libraries are currently doing to support new writers

At any one time there are a variety of reader promotions taking place in a public library, and in any particular promotion as a whole it is likely that books authored by new writers will be present. All personnel involved in the research who were working in libraries at a ground level expressed a view in agreement with *Framework for the Future*: that promotion of reading was an essential aspect of their work (DCMS, 2003). All personnel were heavily involved in promotion, even if this was not specifically named as their area of responsibility at work. For example, the work of the children's champion in one library has been co-ordinating The Big Wild Read, a scheme encouraging children to use the library over their summer holidays by offering incentives such as stickers and bookmarks to young readers. Some of the books received as part of the promotion were by new writers. Similarly, the promotion of new writers of adult fiction is achieved as part of a larger promotion:

> "I think the good way we have of promoting new authors
> is with the Richard and Judy book awards. The only
> problem is we've gone from being saturated with them to
> getting just one copy and one poster to promote."

Another library worker said that a useful method of promotion was to, "find out about what award schemes are going on," and to tailor promotions accordingly. As has been seen, book award schemes often feature categories specifically for first books, so in promoting these awards the library promotes new writers. However, promotion in this way, essentially piggybacking onto promotions that already exist, means that the number of new writers benefiting from promotion remains limited to the narrow range that have been selected from other organisations. In this aspect of promotion public libraries are following rather than leading.

There was a commitment from ground level staff to promoting a wider range of new writers, although this was accompanied by a sense that they lacked the power to influence policy and direction. One respondent said that, "We can recommend that we buy in particular authors but it (stock buying) is at a higher level." Ground level staff felt a lack of control regarding stock: although they could make suggestions there was no particular sense that these suggestions were noted or acted upon. Personnel therefore had to promote new writers with the tools they had: whatever useful stock they received and the promotional materials sent from the higher levels.

However, it emerged that in order to promote new writers effectively, different methods of promotion were being undertaken. Whereas most books can be promoted around the author's name or the fact that it is part of a series, thus instantly appealing to those who have read and enjoyed the writer's previous works, those promoting new writers cannot take advantage of such easier methods. Therefore promotion must be achieved in a different way.

> "It's a lot different because you have to try to build a theme or story around it, so at the moment something about Russia or Iraq. So you can do it if there's a story behind it. You can also do it if the author's local. So if a new author from Sheffield came out you'd basically go around South Yorkshire and try to get a local audience."

This suggests that some libraries are promoting new writers, realising the challenges that come with such work and adapting accordingly. One respondent demonstrated this, noting that, "One promotion we did was borrower's recommend; trying to find new or original authors rather than the big time." This display allowed users to promote a book they had recently enjoyed by writing a brief review. Such promotions were designed to move borrowers away from the books they already had a degree of familiarity with and towards new writers. The respondent suggested that such displays

tended to be particularly effective because borrowers reacted favourably to the idea that someone in their local area, whether library user or member of staff, had enjoyed a book. Such methods of promotion are also used by book shops, and it turned out to be more influential than recommendations in the media. In all three of the library services involved with the study promotion of new local authors was widespread and seen to be an effective method of promoting these writers.

Two of the library services involved in the study ran an annual book festival. Both festivals ran events designed to promote new writers. Although these events could not offer constant promotion for new writers, author events, promoted in the local media and by reading groups, gave new writers a considerable boost in terms of exposure to the public. One respondent involved in running such a festival said

> "We encourage new writers: for instance Liz Kettle
> this year is the festival read, so she gets read by a
> number of reading groups, including an open
> reading group on the local radio."

Such high profile work at literary festivals gives a new writer a considerable amount of promotion and exposure.

Ultimately, public libraries are involved in promoting new writers, whether as part of larger promotions or specific initiatives. However, no matter what schemes are implemented by management, it was thought that promotion of new writers is best carried out through the enthusiastic work of staff at ground level.

> "I think the best way of promoting books is to talk to
> customers, find out what they want."

This was a view expressed most often by ground level library staff, but managers expressing an opinion also agreed with this perspective. By

following such methods of promotion and using these methods to put the works of new writers in the minds of borrowers, the public library service is involved in an ongoing process of promoting new writers.

5.2 How suitably placed the public library service is to support new writers and whether this is appropriate for a public service

5.2.1 Should the public library service be supporting new writers?

All participants agreed that the public library service should be promoting new writers. Most believed this because as a public service the library is in a position to promote without the pressure of having to turn over a profit, even if there is pressure to meet other targets. Such attitudes are essentially philanthropic: one worker at ground floor level who was otherwise not heavily involved in promotion said, "It's about helping them to get a first foot on the ladder … getting established". Another participant made the point that, "All the great authors were new once weren't they?" By promoting new writers there was a sense that the service was helping the great writers of the future by assisting them as they search for their audience. This was considered to be essential.

Some participants believed it was appropriate for libraries to promote new writers for reasons other than services to literature. One library manager said that promoting new writers was important, "if we are to keep up to date and fresh in our approach." That is, if libraries are to attract users of every type it is important to stock and promote novels of every type that can appeal to all. This includes the work of new writers. In this sense libraries are fulfilling the mission statement that libraries should promote reading to all of the community, as explained in *Framework for the Future*.

5.2.2 How suitably placed the library is to support new writers

The suitability of the library as an effective place to promote new writers garnered a more mixed response. The issues affecting this suitability are due to stock, the tastes of library users, and marketing. One member of library staff at ground level noted that, "On the whole we get more established authors at this particular library so it's not so easy to publicise the new authors". A limited stock budget means that although public libraries can

promote new writers without fear of losing money, the need to provide a range of books with a finite amount of resources means that libraries often do not receive a massive amount of works by new writers to promote. This is also partly due to the readers themselves. Talking about promotion in general, one respondent noted that, "It's trying to find the right books that will suit customers. Readers do ask for particular authors". Even in the library the problem facing unknown writers remains: it is natural for library users to ask for further works by writers whose novels they have previously enjoyed. Accordingly it is up to the service to supply this demand. This puts doubts on the suitability of the library service to promote new writers by suggesting that libraries need to supply the works of popular writers to their user base, and therefore have little resources for new authors. Finally, there is a strong issue concerning marketing. The thoughts on this issue from all respondents, both inside and out the library service can be summarised thus:

"It's hard for libraries to promote outside the library and they don't do it very effectively really."

This was seen to be a major barrier against the suitability of the library service as a place to promote new writers. A lack of promotion outside of the library itself means that potential users who would enjoy the work of new writers are not even getting as far as entering the building. The old-fashioned image of the library played a part in this, and it is something that libraries have not managed to remove. Any effective promotion of new writers inside the library is severely compromised if users are staying away.

However, despite these issues there was a general agreement that libraries were suitable places to promote new writers because the positive aspects of the service outweighed the negative. In this area respondents emphasised the positive differences libraries could bring to promotion due to their function as a public service.

"The libraries are in a position to have a range of books
that it's their responsibility to promote. They can't just
buy in a hundred copies of the latest Ian McEwan."

The key difference between libraries and commercial organisations lay in the idea of responsibility, stated above. It was part of the reason why it was found to be necessary to promote new writers and it also makes the library was a suitable place to do so. A responsibility to promote a range of writers means that the public library service cannot simply stock many copies of the latest best seller: it has a duty to supply and promote a range of books. This is the essential point that makes public libraries a suitable place to promote new writers, even if such promotion can only be of limited kind due to the issues stated above.

The responsibility of libraries to buy and promote a range of stock also meant that they had a degree of independence when promoting new writers, and it was felt that this should be something to be emphasised.

"Libraries are trying to show themselves as a place
where you can get true word of mouth, rather than
displays according to how much the publisher's had to
pay the shop."

This response suggests that libraries have no desire to place themselves in direct competition with bookshops when it comes to promotion, but are keen to highlight their difference as an independent organisation under no pressure from outside influences. Again it means that libraries are able to promote new writers, whereas, as hinted in the response above, a publisher is unlikely to take the gamble of paying a lot of money for a new writer to take a prominent place in a display. Such independence suggests that the library is a suitable place to promote new writers according to merit.

The further point raised that positioned libraries as a suitable place to promote new writers was less to do with the strengths of libraries and more to

do with the deficiencies of other organisations involved in the promotion of books. It was suggested that because of financial pressures publishers can fail to effectively promote new writers:

> "Publishers really they don't know how to find ways to promote new authors, because all the money a publisher has goes to promoting the big names like Ian McEwan and Harry Potter. They haven't got a lot of imagination."

Selling a high volume of books is necessarily a must for publishers if they are to stay in business. The easiest way to achieve these high sales is to take advantage of the brand names in literature, which have a built in audience, and promote heavily so that all potential buyers are alerted to the presence of a new book by such a brand. However, this then means that there are limited funds to promote the new writers who desperately need exposure because their name is not recognisable. Furthermore, publishers are limited in how well they can promote new writers by time constraints. One respondent with many contacts in the publishing industry said that, "A publisher can only focus their attention on an author for a week of two because they've got lots of other books. It's (the publishing industry) not rolling in money either". The need to promote all books released means that a publisher cannot spend months pushing a single title to the detriment of others. Therefore a new writer has only a short time to get attention drawn to their work before publicity vanishes.

The public library is in a position to counter these problems faced by new writers: they are capable of promoting beyond the initial weeks of publication and can give new writers valuable exposure to much needed readers.

5.3 What work to support new writers the public library service carries out in partnership with other parties and how successful this is

5.3.1 Public libraries in partnerships to support new writers

It quickly became apparent that all respondents were aware that an increasingly large part of the work done in libraries is achieved with the help of outside organisations. Overall, and perhaps unsurprisingly, while ground level library staff knew that partnerships with other organisations in order to promote books and reading were happening, other details were thin on the ground. Those directly involved in the partnerships, from both inside and outside the library service, gave more specific responses.

It is clear that a lot of work done in the library service which has the aim of promoting books is now in partnership with outside organisations. A popular example was that of *The Big Wild Read*, in partnership with The Reading Agency and designed to keep children reading during the six week school holiday. As a result of this promotion, new writers inevitably gained. However, there were specific promotions in partnerships between the public library service and outside organisations designed to specifically help new writers and seek a way around the barriers they face.

> "In Reading Partners one of the things we're trying to do
> is make author events which will introduce library users
> to new authors … an audience wouldn't necessarily go
> out to see Joe Bloggs the new crime writer but they
> would come out to see three new crime writers because
> they identify with the genre"

In this example the partnership is actively seeking to solve one of the acknowledged problems faced by new writers of having no built-in audience to loyally buy their books. Promoting a group of new writers reduced the risk associated with this type of promotion: an event featuring three new writers was much more palatable than a single new author. There were other

schemes where the library service worked in partnership with other organisations to promote new writers.

> "We also try to set up events where we put an established author and a new author together, to sort of support; so the audience come to see the established author but end up reading the new author as well."

This type of promotion again tackled the issue of new writers being unknown and potential readers being reluctant to take a chance with their work. In this scheme publishers worked with both libraries and another agency concerned with the promotion of reading to co-ordinate their authors and attendant publicity.

Partnership working to promote new writers was also highly prevalent in literary festivals organised by libraries. Libraries were able to organise author events, where publishers would provide books in advance for use by reading groups while libraries would then promote these authors heavily. However, partnerships in festivals ran far more widely:

> "We work in partnership with all sorts of different organisations. For example, the galleries and museums, Penguin supply support, Hodder support the reader's day, quite a few of the publishers send authors to us. We work quite closely with the universities, having events there."

In this type of work to promote new writers it is essential to work in partnerships. Events could simply not take place without different organisations contributing to particular aspects of the whole scheme.

5.3.2 The success (or otherwise) of partnerships

Overall it was felt by the majority of respondents that partnership working between libraries and other organisations in order to promote new writers was successful. Again, perhaps unsurprisingly, those most enthusiastic about partnerships were directly involved in this work, although there was a considerable degree of support from ground level library staff.

One of the main ways that partnership working was considered a success was that it allowed the library service to compensate in areas where they are not traditionally strong; or that partnerships were, "Very important … you get more information from other people". Different expertises lent new ways for libraries to look at promotion.

> "I'd say that you get a different spin on things (in
> partnerships) and maybe if you've not seen something
> from a certain perspective you gain an extra knowledge
> and you can tackle things in other ways."

There was a consensus that libraries benefited from the marketing and promotional expertise that publishers and other organisations brought from outside the public sector, where survival is dependent on effective use of such expertise.

The other main factor that contributed to the success of partnership working in promoting new writing was that of funds. Speaking about partnerships, one respondent directly involved noted that, "It's essential. It's really enriched what libraries can offer because libraries just don't have the resources". Another respondent, working in a completely different area, concurred almost word for word, noting, "It enables us to do far more and reach far more people. It helps with the shortage of resources." This was backed up by ground level library staff, one of whom said, "I think the problem when you're approaching other groups is funding problems. The book budget, there's been problems with that. It's been getting better but…"

The funding problems faced by libraries can be tackled in partnership work. As seen above, publishers can provide libraries with copies of works by new writers for promotional purposes that the libraries would otherwise have no chance of affording. This significantly contributes to the success of partnership working.

However, while being positive that partnerships were helpful to libraries, some respondents pointed out that these partnerships were not without issues. Some library workers sensed a lack of definitive commitment to partnership working across libraries in general:

> It's not something that appears to be a huge cause at
> the minute … You've got that bias towards children

By attempting to focus on a variety of causes simultaneously, from social inclusion to digital access, as set out in *Framework for the Future,* it seemed that there was not always time to focus attention properly on partnership working (DCMS, 2003). Furthermore, there was a sense that a lot of partnership (and other) work in the library service was geared towards children, sometimes at the expense of adult services, such as the promotion of new writers. As a consequence it was not as successful as it could be.

There was also a danger that library staff believed that they were the only organisation with limited resources and that partnerships inevitably meant large amounts of money rolling in from outside sources. One publisher noted that this was not necessarily the case.

> "Money's tight and people think it's a really rich business
> because of the deals they hear about. The independents
> in particular do it out of love. It's certainly not the
> money."

Such misapprehensions meant that there was sometimes an underlying seam of tension running through partnerships due to a lack of

mutual understanding. This lack of understanding then meant that partnership working was not as smooth or successful as it could be. However, it should be noted that any misunderstandings were generally sorted out and that libraries and their partners were keen to work equally hard to create something that would prove to be mutually beneficial to both parties.

5.4 What benefits there are for the public library service and other parties when related to the promotion of new writers

There were not many respondents who had previously given the matter of who benefits from the promotion of new writers a great deal of thought. It had been taken for granted that promoting new writers was simply something that was done, in the library service, that this was a good thing and that things should continue that way (see 5.2.1). Ground level library staff in particular had few opinions regarding this issue. However, library staff involved in management and organisation, and those interviewed from outside the library service, were able to find many benefits for all involved around the promotion of new writers.

5.4.1 Benefits for the public library service

When respondents considered what benefits the library service received from undertaking the difficult work of promoting new writers there was a general agreement that fulfilling the duty to promote a range of books was important. This was specifically highlighted by one respondent, who noted that, "From a library's point of view it's (promoting new writers) good because it's broadening readers, what readers read." Broadening what readers read is a key aspect of Reader Development and promoting books in general. Another respondent made a similar point, suggesting that promoting new writers was important for

> "Widening range of choice for readers. Until Richard and
> Judy book club, which often includes new writers, most
> publicity about books was for established writers."

In *Framework for the Future* the Government states that one of the key tasks for the public library service lies in the promotion of books (DCMS, 2003). From a similar, but more quantifiable perspective, was the opinion that libraries benefited from the promotion of new writers because it made good use of available stock. Or, as one respondent but it, "Having bought new

writers, it makes sense to ensure that they are bought to readers' attention." With limited funds with which to buy books, it was seen as imperative for the public library service that there was no stock that remained unborrowed for months at a time. The promotion of new writers was seen to be a useful aspect in going towards achieving this task, and so benefited the library service.

A further benefit in promoting new writers for the public library service lies in the opportunity to change the image of libraries. As noted previously, the public library service currently has an issue with regard to image and marketing. There is a popular perception that libraries are dusty places only concerned with supplying cosy novels by established authors to their borrowers. Promoting new writers affords them the opportunity to display that this is not the case and that libraries can be on the cutting edge of new literature, or as one respondent eloquently put it, "not fuddy duddy!". Changing this old fashioned image, and therefore bringing in new borrowers, would be a considerable advantage of promoting new writers.

Libraries were also found to benefit from promoting new writers in partnerships. Most of these benefits, from the arrangement of author events, to the provision of more books than the library could afford, have been documented in the preceding part of this research. However, one comment, fully explaining a benefit to the library of promoting new writers in partnerships is worth quoting in full:

> "A publisher will bring free books by new authors:
> posters, leaflets and all sorts of things that the library
> couldn't afford to do themselves. Libraries are trying to
> get away from the home made looking displays to
> something more professional, because that's what
> people seem to respond better to. Both sides are getting
> what they want out of it."

The library benefits not only from books they could not otherwise afford, but by promoting new writers in partnerships they are able to go some way towards changing their image further. There was a view that professional promotional materials give the impression that a library is up to date and modern, rather than ill thought out and slipshod. Again, promoting new writers is helping the library service to create a new image for itself.

A final benefit mentioned by one respondent was one that affected libraries as well as other parties.

> "Demonstrating to publishers the way libraries can
> connect new writers with readers/reading groups and
> create a buzz."

By demonstrating their effectiveness in promoting new writers, the public library service can hope to build a relationship with publishers. This could lead to increased partnership working between libraries and publishers and so libraries will further benefit from the expertise and resources of publishers. If libraries do effectively demonstrate their usefulness in promoting new writers then the publishers have gained another useful outlet where they can promote their new writers.

5.4.2 The benefits for other parties

The most obvious beneficiary of the promotion of new writers by the public library service was found to be the new writers themselves. As has been noted previously, most new writers face a constant struggle when promoting and getting attention for their first book. Any promotion they receive from the library, from being part of a display to being heavily featured at a festival, will therefore be beneficial.

There was agreement that publishers also benefited from the promotion of new writers in the public library service. As with the new writers themselves, any promotion of new writers was found to be beneficial for a

publisher. It has already been noted that publishers frequently lack the time and resources to promote their new writers over a long period of time because the surest way to make a profit in an uncertain business is to heavily promote established writers. However, this problem can be eased by working with libraries.

> "Publishers often give out free press copies of new authors to reading groups; say ten books to ten reading groups each and that's a good way of getting word of mouth, by giving them away basically, to start to build their career."

After undertaking the initial expense of providing the books to be promoted, publishers then benefit from the time spent by libraries in publicising new writers: time that the publishers themselves simply don't have. If such promotional work by libraries can help new writers to become established, and as established writers they go on to create best selling works, then publishers benefit greatly.

5.5 The sustainability of the support given to new writers

Overall, most respondents felt that the public library service was doing a good job, or at least as much as could reasonably expected, when it came to the promotion of new writers. There were, however, several issues that were highlighted as problems that threatened the sustainability of any current work, ranging from concerns about individual branch libraries to factors that affected libraries on a nation wide level.

The way the public library service markets itself proved to be a large concern when considering the sustainability of the promotion of new writers, and has proved to be an issue effecting the promotion of new writers throughout this research.

"Marketing is one of the things that libraries are crap at
… If you do something good in libraries then all the
clichés come out … all that 'sshh' stuff. It's promoted as
a joke. If libraries do something good it's a joke and if
they do something bad it's a disgrace."

The problem libraries have with image and outside marketing has already been highlighted when the suitability of libraries as a place to promote new writers was being considered. However, ground level members of library staff, a library manager and those involved with promoting books outside the library all agreed that this issue potentially had far wider ramifications for the service. If the library service is unable to attract new users then this, along with many other factors, will lead to the service being seen as outdated and not performing to standard. If this scenario were to occur then some respondents felt that libraries would become obsolete, budgets would be slashed and the sustainability of many services would be in question. Out of the five people to express such views, three also made the accompanying point this was an absolute worst case scenario that they did not believe would become reality. However, although unlikely, they strongly believed that such a scenario was real and would significantly

hamper the sustainability of many of the services provided by the public library service, including the promotion of new writers.

Another issue concerning the sustainability of any support for new writers from the library service was to do with the design of the libraries themselves. One ground level library worker explained why promoting new writers was difficult to sustain at a good level:

"If we had more display space and better display space it wouldn't be so difficult but there's only certain areas for display and sometimes we can't use it to the best of our advantage because it's not great display space."

Promotion relies on displays in order to present books to borrowers. The library mentioned above is a branch library that is quite old and run down. No money has been spent on the building recently because there is hope that an entirely new library will be built on a new site nearby. However, at present there is little room in the library entrance so the display space is halfway along a side wall, hidden from view by shelving. A borrower would nearly have to be directly next to the display before they would be in a position to notice it. Such library design severely affects the usefulness of any displays and the sustainability of promotion. Of course, it is not necessarily the norm that libraries are so poorly equipped to promote: many libraries have been designed with a large amount of display space that is in prominent positions throughout the library. One library studied in a different area had been built in the last ten years and had no such problems, and staff there felt happy that their promotions were effective. Sustainability of promotions in these types of libraries is unlikely to be a problem. However, for some libraries it remains an issue.

The two issues above are connected by the factor of resources, which most obviously contribute to the sustainability of the promotion of new writers. All respondents commented on funds at some level as being important to promotion. To put it bluntly, sustainability is only possible if there

is money available to buy the works of new writers and promote them. Despite some of the doomsday scenarios above, there was no respondent who believed that any cuts in funding were forthcoming in the near future. However, all were also of the opinion that current levels of funding were only just adequate to sustain the services provided by the library. One respondent highlighted this issue by voicing concerns about, "The book budget, there's been problems with that. It's been getting better but…" The tailing off of the comment, and the accompanying shrug, suggested that the respondent remained unconvinced that the budget had been sufficiently increased for there to be much improvement in services. Budgetary issues do affect the sustainability of new writers: a lack of funds ultimately means less spending on books and promotional materials. However, as noted previously, consistent lack of funding can also have a cultural effect. It is possible that library workers are so affected by the funding issue that they become reluctant to even attempt any promotions on the grounds that there will be insufficient funds to carry them out. This cultural shift is damaging to the sustainability of the promotion of new writers: if library workers believe that funds are not available then promotions are likely to become less prevalent. There was also the issue that low funding meant that there were fewer opportunities for training in promotion. Without competent, trained staff running library promotions, promotions of new writers will tail off. Simply, promotion is not sustainable if there are not staff available who possess the expertise to run them.

However, despite these issues there was a general belief that support for new writers was sustainable at present. One respondent noted an enthusiasm for such work, saying, "The libraries are quite successful in promoting new authors to existing users. They'll happily put a promotion out to do that". This enthusiasm is a positive factor when it comes to assessing sustainability: if library workers enjoy promoting then it is likely to be sustained in spite of more negative factors. The fact that no one believed that a slash in funding was imminent suggests that funding will be available to keep levels of promotion steady for the present. Furthermore, there is evidence that the public library service is actively seeking to improve levels of

promotion. One ground level library worker noted, "I think they're trying to get more new books into reading groups because if they do that it's a lot of publicity". Planning to increase promotion suggests that the promotion of new writers is sustainable and is being treated as such, despite some underlying issues.

5.6 What else can be done by the public library service to support new writers and what barriers block this

There was a consensus amongst most library staff that the public library service was currently doing as much as could reasonably be expected of it to promote new writers. This was because of two consistent barriers that were cited in every interview with library workers: "we just don't have the time or money". The public library service now has to focus on many more services than the provision of books and this has eaten into the time most workers have to plan promotion. In each library involved in the research there was a member of staff devoted to promotion and reader development but other members of staff not directly involved felt they had little time to do so. There was a sense of resignation around this issue. Most staff seemed to feel frustrated at this sense of impotence. However, it also seemed that in some cases these two barriers had become so much a part of library life that they had become mental barriers as well as physical ones, and in some cases put personnel off from suggesting any ideas or initiatives concerning the promotion of new writers. This is an area that would require significant further research however.

One respondent believed that the best thing that the library service could do to promote new writers was to create more partnerships with other organisations, but especially between libraries themselves.

> "More cooperative working between library services regionally or nationally to promote new writers. Good example is the Penguin Book of the Month which works with library services and reading groups but this doesn't focus just on new writers. It is led by the publisher and the latest example is with Black and ethnic minority writers who have had poor publicity (unusually for Penguin)."

It was suggested that if library services worked more closely together they would be able to promote more effectively. An example was that a collection of a book designed for use in a reading group need not be solely for reading groups in any particular library group: sharing such books would be a cost effective way to ensure that libraries promote new writers over a wide geographic area and over a lengthy period of time. This would be especially useful in areas not large enough to support a festival.

Another scheme libraries were keen on and that was felt to help new writers was increased cooperation between libraries and the writers themselves. One respondent was very keen to, "Get them in to hold events", feeling that a well publicised author event would be a much better way to create local enthusiasm for a new writer, when compared to displays or other methods of promotion. Another respondent, working outside the library service in promotion and a writer themself, agreed, although suggested that such methods of promotion could be problematic due to the attitudes of some writers.

"Writers need to help themselves, as they do in some quarters. When you get a book deal you think you've cracked it and you're going to be famous and it happens to one in five hundred."

Unless writers are willing to travel to small libraries which are potentially far away from their homes, such promotional ventures are unlikely to be more than a limited aspect of the work that libraries do to promote new writers.

At ground level, library workers interviewed showed an eagerness to expand their knowledge. One said, "It's trying to learn more about promotion. That's a huge area. There are different courses I can go on". If as many staff as possible were given training in the most effective ways to promote books then it is likely that promotion in the library will become more successful.

6 Conclusions

6.1 What public libraries are currently doing to support new writers

The research found that new writers are likely to receive promotion in the public library service. However, such promotion is unlikely to form part of a dedicated and coordinated push to support and promote new writers. A lot of promotion in the library tended to revolve around what was happening in the outside literary world: libraries will promote the Richard and Judy book club and book awards quite heavily, and if new writers are involved in such schemes they will enjoy a good level of exposure in the library as part of displays and as the subject of local reading groups. It can be said though, that if a new writer has been given some exposure through these channels then the public library service is merely adding to the promotion of a chosen few, at the expense of the majority of new writers who remain in obscurity.

There was an acknowledgement that the promotion of new writers was not the same as promoting established names and that different methods were required for this work. The problem of promotion was that new writers had no brand name or loyal readership, factors which usually recommend books to borrowers. As such, libraries were promoting new writers in groups as part of a genre showcase, or teaming up new writers with established ones for author events. It was also found to be the case that promotion of new writers was more effective, and more likely to be undertaken, if they were local, giving the library an angle from which to promote.

Two of the library authorities taking part in the study were involved with annual literary festivals in their region. Such festivals actively promoted new writers. Reading groups were asked to get involved by reading the works of new writers and commenting on these works in the local media, thus drumming up support for author events. These events were regarded as great successes and provided much higher levels of attention for new writers than they were generally used to. However, while such festivals provided a

welcome boost in promotion for new writers, such promotion only lasted for the length of the festival.

As well as the methods of promotion mentioned above, it was acknowledged that a lot of the work done to promote new writers in the public library has to be performed by ground level staff. The success or otherwise of the promotion of new writers in the public library is heavily in their hands.

6.2 How suitably placed the public library service is to support new writers and whether this is appropriate for a public service

It was widely agreed that the promotion of new writers was not only an appropriate undertaking for a public service but that it was something essential that was fulfilling the role of what a public service should be. This was because it was thought to be important that the library service helped to nurture the great writers of tomorrow. In addition, it was also believed that the promotion of new writers was an appropriate undertaking for the public library service because it helped the library to seem fresh and up to date in a fast moving literary world.

The responses over how suitable the public library is to support new writers was much more mixed. Overall though the positive points outweighed the negative ones. The library was found to be a useful place to promote new writers because of its differences to other organisations. Libraries are obliged to acquire and promote a range of books in a way that booksellers are not. This included works by new writers as well as popular best sellers. The public nature of the library service was found to mean that libraries had more independence when it came to promotion, whereas the rules of business dictate that publishers and bookseller need to do their utmost to make a profit. Similarly, public libraries can promote new writers over a period of time that is not possible in the commercial world, where publishers can push a book for a fortnight before moving on to the next title. Since libraries are not bound by such pressures, their promotional work can complement that done

in the commercial sector, making libraries a suitable place to support new writers.

However, there are currently some issues hindering such suitability. Budgetary issues mean that it is not often possible to acquire many copies of the work of new writers. There was also the problem that library borrowers are no different to other readers in that they tended to borrow established authors, thus putting new writers at a disadvantage. Another serious issue was that of marketing: it was noted frequently across the range of respondents that the poor marketing ability of the library service was a large problem. If the service was failing to attract borrowers then any promotions in the library were useless. Overall, however, such negative factors were outweighed by the positive ones and there was a belief that libraries were a suitable place to promote and support new writers.

6.3 What work to support new writers the public library service carries out in partnership with other parties and how successful this is

The public library service is currently involved in a range of partnerships schemes and the consensus, albeit without any quantifiable proof, was that these schemes added to the effectiveness of the promotion of new writers in the library. Such partnership work included the promotion mentioned above whereby author events paired established and new writers to deal with some of the problems faced by unknown writers. Partnership work with publishers meant that libraries were able to acquire multiple copies of a work by a new writer, sometimes even before the publication date. This then meant that promotion could be carried out through local reading groups, something which budgetary restrictions would otherwise render impossible. It was also found that the library services involved in festivals were heavily dependent on partnerships in order to put on events involving new writers.

The research found that those involved in partnership working were very enthusiastic about the work and considered it to be an essential part of the promotion of new writers. Fresh approaches and different expertises from

outside the library service were greatly appreciated and led to promotion involving a variety of talents from different areas. Partnership working further contributed to successes with the promotion of new writers because libraries gained access to more resources as a result, from books to other promotional materials such as posters.

Partnership working is not perfect however. There was some feeling that there was too strong an emphasis on work with children in libraries, to the detriment of adult readers and new writers who write for adults, and that this was reflected in partnership working. It was also declared to be important for library staff to have a clear understanding of their partners. The perception of libraries as paupers and their partners as awash in money has little basis in reality and has the potential to create issues in future work. However, in general partnership working has been very successful with regards to the promotion of new writers.

6.4 What benefits there are for the public library service and other parties when related to the promotion of new writers

It was found that there were significant benefits for all involved in the promotion of new writers in the public library service.

6.4.1 Benefits for libraries

Although it was felt that the promotion of new writers was something that the library service had a responsibility to support, it was found that such work brought many benefits with it. First was a contribution to the fulfilment of the mission laid down by *Framework for the Future* that libraries be committed to reader development, providing a range of choice and broadening reader's tastes (DCMS, 2003). It was also suggested that promoting new writers had the potential to help change the image of the public library service. The current image is dour and unexciting. Effective promotion of new writers can show libraries in a different light, proving that they are up to date and at the cutting edge of the literary world. Such a

change in image would likely have the benefit of attracting new and different users to the library. Promoting in partnerships has already been seen to give the public library service the advantage of more resources. If good relations are kept up then they are likely to further benefit from these partnerships in the future.

6.4.2 The benefits for other parties

New writers most obviously benefited from any promotion undertaken in the public library. Their situation, whereby they struggle against their anonymity for the oxygen of attention, means that any promotion and exposure in the library can make a crucial difference to their prospects. Publishers simply cannot afford to risk large sums of money in their promotion, and so any work done by the library becomes hugely beneficial.

In a similar way, publishers benefit from the promotion of new writers in libraries. This is because promotion and attention for their new writers from any source is automatically beneficial. Even if the method of promotion in the library is as simple and unflashy as a book being displayed face out, it is more beneficial than having the same book hidden in the shelves. The work done by libraries in promoting new writers helps to make up for the lack of time available to publishers in this respect. The real benefits for publishers may not become apparent until a writer's second or third book, but if even some new writers are helped by libraries and go on to an established career then publishers benefit enormously. The is no party who fails to benefit from the effective promotion of new writers in libraries.

6.5 The sustainability of the support given to new writers

Overall the research found that there was no reason to believe that the support given to new writers by the public library service could not continue. Sustainability of any enterprise is most obviously compromised due to funding issues. Although there is a general level of dissatisfaction in the public library service at the amount of funding received, no one involved in

the study was aware of any immediate plans to slash any library budgets. However, years of limited funding seemed to have had a cultural effect on some attitudes, which may have led to a lack of enthusiasm when it came to commitment to promotion.

There were two other main issues of sustainability. The first was that of marketing. The failure of libraries to market themselves effectively has become a running issue throughout this research and could potentially impact on the sustainability of any work carried out by the library. To put the situation simply, if libraries are unable to market themselves to non-users they risk obsolescence. If this happens then there will be budgetary cuts meaning less resources for the promotion of new writers. Enticing borrowers into the library in order to see promotions for themselves is absolutely vital.

Another, more minor, issue with sustainability is library design. This does not apply to all libraries: many have been designed with ease of use and displays in mind. However, the design of certain older libraries means that promotions are not always placed so that many borrowers will see them. It follows that if the promotion of new writers is rendered nearly invisible in this way then its effectiveness, and therefore sustainability, is called into question. However, although there are problems, the issues surrounding the sustainability of the promotion of new writers do not currently look like causing a significant impact. There is a commitment in the public library service to the promotion of new writers and this looks set to continue.

6.6 What else can be done by the public library service to support new writers and what barriers block this

Although the respondents in the research had ideas for improving the support the public libraries give to new writers, many of these new ideas were immediately discounted due to the barriers of time or money. For example, buying multiples copies of the works of new writers would be extremely helpful were there any funds available to do this. However, there

were some suggestions made with a feeling that they were a realistic proposition.

All respondents who had any experience of working in partnerships suggested that more work of this kind was required. This was not just limited to libraries working with outside organisation such as publishers in order to set up author events but included more cooperation between different library authorities in order to tackle the problem of limited resources.

Closer work with writers themselves was suggested as a way to improve promotion. Author events were suggested as an effective way to promote that put some spark into the process. Finding writers willing to travel to regional libraries was considered to be a problem with this idea, although it was not considered to be in surmountable.

Finally, some respondents working at all levels across the library service felt that they knew little about the subject area and would appreciate more training. Giving staff the expertise to promote in general, and promote new writers in particular would have the potential to improve the effectiveness of the promotion of new writers.

7 Recommendations and areas for further study

7.1 Recommendations

The research would have to take place over a longer period and a significantly wider area in order to definitively identify the issues surrounding the promotion of new writers by the public library service. As such any recommendations for improvement are limited by the range of this research. It is also the case that these recommendations are generally aimed to improve the library service as a whole, with the knock on effect that the promotion of new writers will benefit. However, given the findings and conclusions it seems that the steps below would have a positive impact on the promotion of new writers.

7.1.1 Funding

The recommendation that would have the most impact on the promotion of new writers (or, indeed, any public library initiative) is unfortunately also the most unrealistic. An increase in the budget allocated for reading and promotion would enable more books by new writers to be made available to borrowers. It would allow a greater quantity of professional promotional materials to be provided to libraries. It would allow for the construction of modern libraries, designed with twenty-first century challenges in mind. All would significantly improve the promotion of new writers in the library. However, any increase in funding is unlikely. Indeed, at the time of writing one of the library authorities featured in this study was looking to save money wherever possible and had enforced a freeze on further employment.

However, it may be possible to make efficiencies in the fundraising process. Many libraries now receive money from applying for external funds, yet there is evidence that this process is clumsy and unwieldly (Goulding, 2006). Streamlining and simplifying this process could lead to budgetary

savings which could then hopefully be better spent on maintaining and enhancing the core services of the library.

7.1.2 Promotion

Although the research found out that libraries were promoting new writers well, there could be improvements made. The internet presence of libraries in particular has promotional potential. At the minute library internet sites focus on the library. A shift to focus on books; reading groups, discussions, reviews and new titles would provide another outlet for libraries to promote new writers. An ideal would be to have a reading group set up in every library, although this may not always be feasible. An increase in events such as author visits would also be useful for promotion, although this depends on the success of partnerships and the availability of writers. Libraries should also seek to make more use of their independence and promote books which are not currently receiving any media attention. Seizing this initiative would significantly help the new writers who have had little promotion elsewhere.

7.1.3 Marketing

The lack of expert marketing of the public library service means that it is losing borrowers in a world where there are a myriad of ways to fill leisure activity. In order to improve the promotion of new writers it is important to have a range of new borrowers in the library. Put simply, the more borrowers there are, the more likely it is that a promotion will be a success.

In order to improve marketing of libraries serious commitment has to be paid to tackling the problem. It is worth repeating that it is no longer acceptable for libraries to provide a service and presume that people will come to use it. It would be desirable to bring in marketing executives with extensive experience of marketing in today's world. It is likely that such experience will have to come from outside the library service. From there the

library service needs to aggressively push its positive points and change the image that is keeping people away.

Such an aggressive approach is not universally popular: many library workers like the way the service is now and look at the idea of marketing and brand with distaste. However, some form of improved marketing is vital to keep the library service relevant in the twenty first century.

7.1.4 Partnership working

Although not without faults, there is significant evidence that partnership working between libraries and outside organisations has had a good effect on the promotion of new writers. Such partnership working should be encouraged nationally. Many organisations have something to offer the library service in areas of promotion, while libraries themselves offer enthusiastic and effective promotion in return There may be a problem that publishers only have finite resources to provide libraries with materials, making inter library cooperation of the utmost importance. The more all organisations work together, the more likely it is that promotion of new writers can be carried out smoothly and effectively.

7.1.5 Staff training

Reader development and the promotion of reading currently enjoys a high profile in the public library arena. There is training available for staff in effective promotion, provided by organisations such as Opening the Book. However, the research found that many members of library staff were unsure about how best to go about promotion. This was as true for some library managers as it was for ground level staff. Staff should be trained in effective methods of promotion, so that they feel confident thinking up taking the initiative when it come to promoting. If at least one member of staff per branch library has this kind of training then libraries will be able to promote effectively and retain a local individuality.

However, it has been seen that the promotion of new writers requires a different approach to promotion, and specialist training should be given to achieve this. If staff can be trained to promote local new writers, group established writers with new ones or promote several new writers together as part of a genre promotion then promotion of new writers will improve.

7.2 Areas for further study

- A study into the way the funding issue has become a cultural barrier to innovation in the public library service. This was hinted at as an issue but time restraints did not allow for a thorough examination of it.
- An investigation into the most effective ways to promote new writers and a comparison with methods of promotion for established writers.
- A study aiming to assess the best methods of quantifying data in library research. Many respondents in this topic, with plenty of experience of the issues they were discussing, gave forceful opinions but there was a lack of physical evidence to back these opinions up. Such evidence is needed.

15785 words

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Appendix A: Participant Information Sheet

Project: **Investigate How Public Libraries Can Support New Writers And Examine The Benefits Of This Support**

Researcher: **Alexis Holyoake**

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide whether to take part it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or you

would like more information.

What is the purpose of the project?

This research is being undertaken as part of an MA in Librarianship at the University of Sheffield. In-depth research has already taken place. It is now necessary, on the basis on findings from this research, to gain a view of the opinions of professional involved with the promotion of books and reading

The focus of the research

It is widely regarded that new writers have difficulty with promoting their work. Through interviews with those involved in the promotion of reading I wish to discover how public libraries are supporting new writers.

What will I have to do?

I will conduct one main interview with you. The interviews can be conducted face-to-face, via telephone or via e-mail. I may ask short follow up questions via email.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form) and you can still withdraw at any time. You do not have to give a reason

Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

Any face-to-face interviews will be recorded. However, the names of the participants will be kept anonymous. Transcripts of interviews may be included in the appendices of the dissertation.

What will happen to the results of the research project?

The results will be collated and the findings woven into the dissertation. Some direct quotations may be included but these will remain anonymous.

What are the benefits of taking part?

Although there will be no direct benefits to those taking part in the study it is hoped that the research will provide a useful contribution to the topic. An electronic version of the competed study will be provided on request.

Contact for further information

Professor Peter Willett (Supervisor of this study)

P.Willett@sheffield.ac.uk

0114 222 2633

Appendix B: Participant Consent Form

Title of Project: Investigate How Public Libraries Can Support New Writers And Examine The Benefits Of This Support

Name of Researcher: Alexis Holyoake

Participant Identification Number for this project:

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated
2. *[insert date]* for the above project and have had
   the opportunity to ask questions.

   [ ]

3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw
   at any time without giving any reason. *Insert contact number here of lead researcher/member of research team (as appropriate).*

   [ ]

4. I understand that my responses will be anonymised before analysis.
   I give permission for members of the research team to have access
   to my anonymised responses.

   [ ]

4. I agree to take part in the above research project.

   [ ]

_____   _____
_____
Name of Participant   Date   Signature
(*or legal representative*)

_____   _____
_____
Name of person taking consent   Date   Signature
(*if different from lead researcher*)
To be signed and dated in presence of the participant

Copies:

Once this has been signed by all parties the participant should receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form, the letter/pre-written script/information sheet and any other written information provided to the participants. A copy for the signed and dated consent form should be placed in the project's main record (e.g. a site file), which must be kept in a secure location.