EXHIBITIONS IN LIBRARIES: THE ROLE OF THE
INFORMATION PROFESSIONAL

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by
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Abstract

BACKGROUND

Exhibitions are an area of work in which many libraries are engaged, however it is an under researched topic. The roles of information professionals and exhibitions in libraries are both under-researched; this is identified in this study, which then seeks to address this gap and provide further insight into the topic.

AIMS

The study aims to develop an understanding of the involvement of information professionals in exhibition work in libraries; it investigates the skills and expertise required, together with the challenges and problems encountered by those working on exhibition projects in libraries.

METHODS

An online questionnaire was distributed to gather information about both exhibitions and the role of information professionals working on them. Ninety-six responses were received. Three small scale case studies were carried out as a follow up to the questionnaire, for which interviews with individuals representing different sectors were conducted focusing on university and special collections, public libraries and national libraries.

RESULTS

Exhibition work forms a significant part of library work for many information professionals. The study has found exhibition work takes place across all sectors in a wide variety of libraries; however it most commonly occurs in special collections, universities and public libraries. Key skills and expertise for exhibition work have been identified within five categories: practical skills, project management, interpersonal skills, knowledge, and creativity. The findings highlight several key challenges: lack of resources, time and funding, insufficient skills and training, lack of support from management, and the fact library collections are not always suited to being exhibited.
CONCLUSIONS

Exhibitions have potential to be part of strategies for promoting collections and library services, however exhibitions must be interesting and engaging to be successful. Information professionals responsible for exhibition projects require increased access to training, support and guidance. The study concludes that many of the skills required for exhibition work are not traditional skills of information professionals therefore more opportunities must be available to allow for development of essential skills and expertise.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, Barbara Sen, for the support and guidance provided during the course of this project.

I wish to thank all those who responded to the questionnaire for their participation also the individuals who gave up their time to participate in the case studies, without these contributions the study would not have been possible.
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1.1 Introduction

This research project investigates exhibitions in libraries from the perspective of the information professional. The study seeks to understand the role of information professionals involved in exhibition work. The investigation will focus on the impact of exhibition work for the professional through examination of the challenges encountered. This chapter sets out the research aims and objectives alongside an introduction to the topic, discussing the background and rationale to the study.

1.1. Background

1.1.1. What is an Exhibition?

“The act or fact of exhibiting collections, objects, or information to the public for the purpose of education, enlightenment and enjoyment.”

(Dean, 1996: 161)

For the purpose of this research an exhibition is defined as a public display of books, artefacts, objects, and other materials. Exhibitions can be online or physical and of any scale or duration, however this study focuses primarily on physical exhibitions. The term exhibition has been favoured over display, as exhibition is more encompassing; the term is inclusive of both large scale exhibitions as well as small displays. The research focuses on physical library exhibitions; that is to say, exhibitions curated by libraries. These may not, however, necessarily take place within the library itself; exhibitions of library collections taking place in a different location are also included.

1.1.2. Exhibitions in Libraries

Exhibition work is not considered a traditional function of libraries nor of the work of the information professional; however many libraries hold exhibitions, which take place on a variety of scales and for different purposes. Exhibiting is increasingly becoming a commonplace activity in libraries, as a strategy for promoting and highlighting collections (Schaeffer, 1991). Exhibition work is happening on a range of scales from frequently changing displays of books and other materials arranged as a table-top display in a public library to permanent glass display cases within a university library. Thus exhibition and

1
display work is a part of the remit of the information professional. High profile examples of library exhibitions which are considered as much tourist attractions as libraries include the Bodleian Library and Trinity College Dublin’s Old Library, as well as national libraries such as the British Library and the Library of Congress in the US.

1.2. Rationale

The impetus for this research stems from an understanding that exhibition work in libraries is commonplace, yet under-researched. According to Kemp and Witschi (1997) exhibitions in libraries are a valuable activity, yet rarely considered in job descriptions, budgets, professional training programmes or library school programmes. Furthermore, according to Prendergast (2003) many professionals within the library sector don’t recognise the value exhibitions can bring to libraries, and therefore do not provide the necessary support for the activity. Bowen and Roberts (1993) label exhibits as the “illegitimate child of the library.” There is a lack of comprehensive research into the value of exhibitions for libraries and the challenges this work creates for the information professional.

Increasingly exhibitions in libraries are regarded as a key publicity strategy; they are an important method of showcasing library collections and attracting new customers (Schaeffer, 1991). In the current time of uncertainty for library services, exhibitions have potential as an integral part of publicity, public relations and library promotion strategies. Library services are under increased pressure to prove their worth, therefore new ways of proving value need to be found. Exhibitions hold great potential as part of this movement; however to be successful greater understanding of exhibitions is required.

Exhibitions are a little-covered topic in the literature on library publicity and promotion. There is a need for research into the impact exhibition work has on the role of the information professional and greater understanding of the challenges this type of work presents. According to Schaeffer exhibition and display production have “become permanent parts of a librarian’s job description” (1991: 2), yet there is a distinct lack of professional guidance and research literature about library exhibitions. Furthermore, Traue (2000) criticises the existing body of literature on exhibition theory and techniques as insufficient for the library community; the literature fails to address the problems specific to exhibiting library collections, whilst individual case studies do not provide information which is applicable on a broad scale. Greater understanding of the challenges and
problems encountered by those working on exhibitions is needed to ensure that support and guidance is available.

1.3. Research Aims and Objectives

The study aims to examine the role of information professionals involved in physical exhibitions in libraries. The study aims to develop an understanding of the skills and expertise required by the information professional to create successful exhibitions of library collections and understand the challenges for information professionals involved in this work. The research draws upon quantitative and qualitative data gathered using questionnaires and case studies to develop a greater understanding of library exhibition work. It is hoped the research will provide insight into the impact of exhibition work on the role of the information professional and develop recommendations for improved practice in libraries.

The topic will be investigated with the following objectives in mind:

- **Objective 1:** To determine the extent to which exhibition work occurs in libraries.
- **Objective 2:** To investigate the scope of involvement information professionals have in exhibition work.
- **Objective 3:** To identify the skills and expertise required by information professionals undertaking exhibition work.
- **Objective 4:** To identify the main problems encountered by information professionals and understand how they impact upon exhibitions in libraries.
2. Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

A literature review has been conducted to establish an overview of current understanding on the topic. The research methodology for this study has been informed by the findings of the literature review. By scoping the breadth and depth of the topic within the existing body of literature, an idea of the key issues and themes has been established. This understanding has been used to inform the data collection methods, highlighting key areas of questioning for the questionnaire stage of the research. Furthermore, the literature review provides a theoretical framework to underpin the discussion of the findings and to draw conclusions on the research.

Both librarianship and museum literature has been examined to draw together a comprehensive overview of current exhibition practices. The literature review begins by providing an overview of the scope of previous studies, discussion of the definitions of an exhibition from both the museological and librarianship discourses follow. Next, the skills required by the exhibition creator as presented in the literature are considered, followed by the challenges and problems encountered by those involved in exhibition work. Literature which offers practical advice and guidance to library staff involved in exhibition work is also examined.

2.2. Overview of Previous Studies

A wealth of literature exists aimed at the museum professional, providing guidance and a theoretical framework for exhibition work (Belcher, 1991; Falk and Dierking, 2000; Velarde, 2001; Lord and Lord, 2002; Black, 2005); however the amount of literature intended as a guide to exhibition work in libraries is more limited in both scope and value (Schaeffer, 1991; Barteluk, 1993; Cleeve, 1995; Tedeschi and Pearlmutter, 1997; Brown and Power, 2006). Much of the literature takes the form of anecdotal accounts of experiences staging exhibitions in libraries, primarily focusing on the benefits for libraries whilst offering some ad-hoc guidance to others wishing to pursue exhibition work. It is also important to note that the literature possesses a bias towards academic libraries; there are, however, examples of exhibitions from national libraries, law libraries and public libraries.
There is also a selection of publications offering practical advice on key issues such as display methods, equipment and preservation, however much of the literature is outdated. Little research has been published examining the scale or impact of exhibitions in libraries; one example is a study by Kemp and Witschi (1997) examining the potential of exhibition work as a form of outreach in academic libraries, however this is outdated and limited in its scope.

2.3. Defining the Exhibition

“Exhibitions come in all shapes and sizes…”

(Velarde, 2001:1)

To fully develop an understanding of the role of exhibitions within libraries and the role of the information professional, it is prudent to first examine the definitions of an exhibition. According to Velarde (2001) the term “exhibition” is a semantic jungle; a word with numerous meanings in both the public and professional context. A key definition is given by Dean (1996) who defines an exhibition as the overall creation which presents objects and information to a public audience. Although exhibitions are traditionally associated with museums or art galleries, all exhibitions regardless of where they are located are underpinned by the same fundamental principles. Regardless of the type or purpose all exhibitions deal with the same elements: information, people, objects and space (Velarde, 2001). Thus an exhibition in a library or elsewhere is no different in definition to that in a museum if its aim is to present a collection to an audience.

2.3.1. Perspectives in the Literature

2.3.1.1. The Museological Perspective

As exhibitions are an activity traditionally associated with museums. The Museological discourse has been considered to offer the perspective on what constitutes an exhibition within museums. A distinction is made between displays and exhibitions whereby an exhibition is formed out of many displays; within the museum discourse, interpretation is the key factor distinguishing a display from an exhibition (Dean, 1996). Interpretation is explained by Dean as “the act or process of explaining or clarifying, translating, or presenting a personal understanding about a subject or object” (1996: 6). Essentially it is the process of transforming a collection of objects into a display with a theme, meaning or
added significance. Museums place great emphasis on “the translation, interpretation and presentation of their collections and other intangible information” as a key part of creating an experience for the visitor (Lake-Hammond and Waite, 2010: 87). On a basic level interpretation allows a collection of objects to be woven into a narrative of educational or entertainment value.

2.3.1.2. The Library Perspective

Within the librarianship discourse there is far less discussion of exhibitions on a theoretical level; however a small number of authors from the library sphere do touch upon the issue including Traue (2000). Here it is argued that whilst library collections are unlikely candidates for display in a museum or gallery due to lack visual appeal held by books, manuscripts and other paper based artefacts, library collections can be displayed effectively (Traue, 2000). Traue discusses library exhibitions using Greenblatt’s theory of resonance and wonder as a framework. Greenblatt (1991) distinguishes two types of exhibition: those that create wonder and those that create resonance. The theory of resonance and wonder is further outlined in Table 1. According to Traue (2000), objects usually found in library collections such as books and manuscripts generally lack the wonder element. Instead they are artefacts which need to be exhibited incorporating the idea of resonance, emphasising a social, historical or cultural context of significance to the viewer prompting “questions of how, of what, and of why, questions of relationships and meanings.” (Traue, 2000: 64).

Table 1: Greenblatt’s theory of resonance and wonder

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESONANCE</th>
<th>WONDER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“the power of the displayed object...to evoke in the viewer the complex, dynamic cultural forces from which it has emerged” (1991: 42)</td>
<td>“the power of the displayed object to stop the viewer...to evoke an exalted attention” (1991: 42)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The artefact is loaded with social, cultural and historical associations which resonate with the viewer.</td>
<td>• Object creates a feeling of awe and wonderment for the viewer, often evoking powerful response to the beauty or rarity of the artefact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Resonance gives meaning to an object by revealing significances like stories and events.</td>
<td>• Often objects of wonder are displayed in isolation to emphasise the physical wondrous qualities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Viewer gains an awareness of the context and history of an object through the exhibition.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.3.2. Defining the Library Exhibition

In addition to considering a broad definition of exhibitions it is constructive to consider any definitions specifically defining exhibitions within a library context. Again, as much of the literature within the library discourse adopts a more pragmatic stance, theoretical definitions for the library exhibition are limited. Schaeffer (1991) offers the most relevant and applicable definitions. Viewing exhibitions within the library context is viewed as wide-ranging Schaeffer (1991) puts forward two different definitions which reflect the variation in form and style of exhibitions within libraries. According to Schaeffer an exhibition within a library could be a simple display of books on a table or a large scale multimedia presentation. Alternatively an exhibition could be defined as “a creative arrangement of visual elements designed to convey a specific message.” (Schaeffer, 1991: 3) This latter definition is more aligned to the museum literature, where it is suggested that an exhibition presents objects with a message through the addition of interpretation (Dean, 1996).

Furthermore Prendergast (2003) demonstrates an awareness of the importance of possessing awareness of theoretical debates whilst curating exhibitions.

2.4. Library Exhibitions

2.4.1. Types of Exhibitions

Within the literature it is apparent that library exhibitions fall into two main categories: physical and online. Most of the literature is focused on the physical exhibition and display of books, artefacts and other items in the library. However more of the most recent literature is focused on online exhibitions, as this is a growing trend for libraries (Lester, 2006).

The scope of exhibition work in libraries is both extensive and varied (Dutka, Hayes and Parnell, 2002). The literature is primarily focused on in-house library designed exhibits. Whilst libraries are also working in partnership with other organisations, loaning items for exhibition and managing spaces for external groups to exhibit, this work is not extensively covered in the literature. Dutka, Hayes and Parnell (2002) discuss their experiences with partnerships and collaboration in academic libraries including creating exhibits with staff from other departments and utilising exhibition space for external travelling exhibits. Furthermore Dent (2002) provides an example of libraries loaning items from elsewhere for an exhibition project.
2.4.2. Exhibiting Collections

As already discussed library collections are not the most obvious collections for display in an exhibition due to general lack of visual appeal. The library discourse on exhibitions offers many examples of what is exhibited: most commonly books, manuscripts and pamphlets but also a wide range of less obvious items found in library collections, including photographs, illustrations, sound recordings and ephemera. Prendergast (2003) emphasises the importance of visual appeal, stating that the viewer’s engagement begins with “a visual stimulus” (2003: 396); it is therefore vital that exhibited objects are eye-catching and interesting to look at as well as possessing an intellectual interest point. Furthermore, the issue of what is exhibited extends beyond the choice of the individual items for display to the wider issue of the choice of concept or theme for an exhibition (Chadbourne, 1976; Cleeve, 1995; Prendergast, 2003).

2.4.3. Exhibition Spaces

The literature from the library discourse discusses the physical and logistical requirements for exhibiting, albeit briefly. There is limited discussion in the literature about venues for exhibitions; it can only be presumed that most library exhibitions take place within the library itself. According to Dutka, Hayes and Parnell (2002) there are numerous potential exhibition spaces to be found within the library, however the suitability of such spaces depends on factors such as accessibility, visibility and availability of resources including display furniture.

2.5. Purpose of Library Exhibitions

The literature offers numerous suggestions for the purpose of exhibitions in libraries and the benefits they can bring to an organisation (Cleeve, 1995; Byrd, 2001; Dent, 2002; Gifford, 2002; Prendergast, 2003). The literature is primarily anecdotal accounts of experience. Very little research has been conducted to investigate the benefits of exhibitions for libraries. Education, library advocacy, promotion of collections and entertainment are highlighted as the main reasons for exhibitions as illustrated by Table 2.
Table 2: Overview the purpose and benefits of library exhibits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose / Benefit</th>
<th>Critic</th>
<th>Key Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education (Of Users)</td>
<td>Chadbourne (1976)</td>
<td>“The educational aspect is preeminent.” (321)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education (Of Library Staff)</td>
<td>Chadbourne (1976)</td>
<td>“The library staff also profits by enhanced knowledge of their own collections.” (322)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prendergast (2003)</td>
<td>“Prospect of becoming better acquainted with the [rare-music] collections.” (394)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library Advocacy</td>
<td>Cleeve (1995)</td>
<td>“Create a better awareness of the library service...and strengthen the library’s corporate identity.” (32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Byrd (2001)</td>
<td>“Exhibitions can promote academic libraries to the wider public.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dent (2002)</td>
<td>“Vital part of demonstrating that libraries and their collections and services are still not only relevant but crucial.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prendergast (2003)</td>
<td>“Raise the library’s visibility.” (393)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotion Of Collections</td>
<td>Cleeve (1995)</td>
<td>“Really valuable marketing tool.”(31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dukta, Hayes and Parnell (2002)</td>
<td>“Some collections...will seldom be seen or used unless physically presented.” (20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessibility</td>
<td>Morris (1991)</td>
<td>“Make special collections more accessible to both the scholarly and non-specialist public.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Relations</td>
<td>Cleeve (1995)</td>
<td>“Provides a very useful customer contact point.” (32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chadbourne (1976)</td>
<td>“Create good public relations by offering diversion from routine use of the library’s resources.” (321)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure &amp; Entertainment</td>
<td>Schaeffer (1991)</td>
<td>“Exhibits can inform, educate, amuse or inspire.” (143)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chadbourne (1976)</td>
<td>“Give readers... the opportunity to refresh themselves with a break, to reflect, or simply to relax.” (321)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Whilst exhibitions are primarily considered to be advantageous for educational and marketing purposes, Gifford (2002) argues that as well as these functions, library exhibitions also have the potential to be entertaining. This idea is reiterated by Chadbourne (1976) and Schaeffer (1991). Chadbourne suggests exhibitions in the library can offer a place of escape for the researcher, something to do whilst taking a break. Furthermore Schaeffer identifies four key benefits for libraries as a result of exhibiting (Figure 1).
2.5.1. **Education**

According to the museum literature one of the primary functions of the museum is to educate visitors, an aim it achieves through exhibitions (Dean, 1996). Within the library discourse the question is raised as to whether libraries can also use exhibitions to stimulate further intellectual engagement with collections and educate (Gifford, 2002). Byrd (2001) argues that library collections have a similar educational function to museums and other organisations which hold “culturally or historically significant objects” (2001: 116). A library holding objects of contextual significance, whether social, cultural or historical, has the potential to play a similar educational role to a museum by exhibiting collections (Prendergast, 2003). More broadly the library is thought by many to hold a key role as an educator and knowledge disseminator, thus exhibitions help fulfil this role.

Within the library literature there are examples of exhibitions with a clear educational purpose; for instance Frías (1995) cites the importance of exhibitions as a tool for library led AIDS education programmes, with exhibitions forming part of a strategy to educate communities alongside other elements such as talks and workshops. Furthermore Allen (1999) discusses the benefits of exhibitions in enhancing the education of students; the case study focuses on making special collections more accessible to undergraduate students including examination of exhibiting university library special collections in order to enhance the education experience. When perceived as a “humanities laboratory” (Allen, 1999: 111) the special collections department offers students a more enriched and participatory experience. By creating exhibitions these enriched experiences can be more frequent, through increased opportunities for access to materials.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. <strong>AESTHETICS</strong></th>
<th>the library becomes more attractive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. <strong>ECONOMICS</strong></td>
<td>increased users can lead to more funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. <strong>EFFICIENCY</strong></td>
<td>library staff gain a better knowledge of collections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. <strong>ENTHUSIASM</strong></td>
<td>resulting in a better performing service</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 1: The four key benefits of library exhibitions (Schaeffer, 1991)*
2.5.2. Library Advocacy

The literature suggests use of exhibitions by libraries can raise the profile of collections and increase use.

“An exhibition can and should be a vital part of demonstrating that libraries and their collections and services are still not only relevant but are crucial to successful information finding”

(Dent, 2002)

Libraries must develop new promotional strategies to reach out to current and potential users (Schmidt, 2007). In a master’s level research project Smith (2005) investigates the strategies employed by special collections for marketing and promoting services. Promotion in the library context is defined by Gupta (2006) as an activity designed to drive demand for a product or service, with example activities listen as exhibitions and displays. Considering the potential threat of funding cuts for libraries, particularly in the current economic climate, it is vital that libraries promote their services. Exhibitions are considered by Schaeffer (1991)to be a key promotional tool within a library’s marketing strategy, as exhibitions are one of the most visual means of showcasing what the library can offer. Similarly Cleeve (2003) views exhibits as a valuable marketing tool but stresses that a poor exhibition can cause damage to the reputation of the library. Byrd (2001) comments that exhibitions are a strategy often adopted to highlight special collections, emphasising what your service can offer in comparison to competitors.

Schmidt (2007) argues that libraries must develop new promotional strategies to reach out to current and potential users. Libraries need to do more to publicise services and collections in order to remain relevant in the 21st century (Giuliano, 2009); exhibitions are a tool allowing libraries to remind the public of the importance of the services provided forming a crucial element of a librarian’s publicity campaign. Exhibitions play a role in advocating for the library service and developing a community of users (Dent, 2002).
2.5.3. Promotion of Collections

Exhibitions are cited in the literature as a method to promote collections and increase awareness of their existence; an exhibition has great potential as an opportunity to highlight a collection which might otherwise be relatively unknown. Exhibitions are highlighted in the literature as a strategy often adopted by special collections libraries to promote their collections. They are a popular method for showcasing the collections and highlighting the treasures held by the library (Byrd, 2001). Warnaby and Finney (2005) cite the benefit of touring exhibitions which have the potential to facilitate access to collections to a wider audience; when possible touring exhibitions facilitate the showcasing of collections to a greater proportion of the population. In most cases an exhibition of a special collection allows those who would not otherwise have access to enjoy and appreciate items held by a library.

Furthermore for many libraries exhibitions can play a key role in demonstrating uniqueness; Whittaker (2006) views this as crucial in the age of the homogenous academic library. Today many libraries hold similar collections and offer similar services. Whittaker suggests that for libraries, particularly in the higher education sector, special collections are a way of a library offering something unique and individual to the customer. Exhibiting these collections is another way of exploiting that uniqueness and increasing use of a collection and of the library service.

2.6. The Exhibition Creator

A key issue of investigation in this study is the information professional as exhibition creator. The literature provides insight into what this role involves for the information professional. Wythe (2007) discusses the convergence of library and museum work, suggesting that library staff have begun to adopt skills from the museum profession, particularly for outreach exercises such as exhibitions. In an article focused on the role of the archivist as exhibition curator Lester (2006) suggests that guidance can be sought from the museum professional; this idea is equally applicable to the library sector. However questions are raised in the literature asking whether library professionals are equipped with the appropriate skills to create exhibitions. Schaeffer highlights a key problem: “art and design techniques are rarely part of a librarian’s professional skills.” (1991: 4). Solutions must be found to overcome this barrier before libraries can create successful exhibitions.
Exhibition work is traditionally associated with the museum profession; information professionals are not normally thought of as exhibition creators. The process of creating an exhibition can be complex and specialist work, demanding a specific skill set (Dean, 1996). Museum careers including exhibition curatorship are becoming increasingly professionalised (MacDonald, 2006). In recent years there has been a development of professional training courses and growth in the significance of professional codes of practice in the museum sector (Boylan, 2010). According to Velarde (2001) an exhibition designer should be highly trained, preferably to postgraduate level, to attain the high level of expert knowledge required to create exhibitions.

### 2.6.1. The Skills of the Exhibition Creator

“Exhibits call for our best thinking, research, writing, planning, organising”

(Dutka et al, 2002: 20)

A review of the literature highlights a wide variety in the skills required for exhibition work, dependant on the scope of the involvement and the type of exhibition. However there is limited discussion within the library literature, about the skills required and about how to gain or develop them. Most of the literature examining the skills of the exhibition creator is found within the museum literature, which is not ideal on a practical level for those working in libraries. Dean (1996) provides a list of core skills required by an exhibition creator: creativity, problem solving, aesthetic sense, project management, writing skills, interpretation skills, audience awareness and teamwork (1996: 1). Along with the skills to create and install an exhibition it is also vital to have the skills to market and publicise the exhibitions (Cleeve, 1995). Whilst many of these skills are fairly generic and core to librarianship such as problem solving, project management and teamwork (Kinkus, 2007; Field, 2008; Widdows, 2010); others such as design and interpretation are specific to the role of curator and therefore must be acquired by the library professional undertaking exhibition work.
2.6.1.1. Project Management

As with any other project within the library, an exhibition requires application of a range of project management skills: goals and objectives must be set, a timeframe for the work established, resource requirements considered and a budget planned. Good planning skills are crucial according to Dutka et al (2002); information professionals involved in exhibition work need to employ project management skills to ensure the exhibition is well planned and carefully thought out to guarantee success. Similarly Cleeve (1995) discusses in detail the importance of more pragmatic management skills in addition to creative flair, to ensure a successful exhibition effective planning is required; thus the exhibition creator must possess the skills to manage time, resources, budgets and people.

2.6.1.2. Design skills

The literature emphasises the importance of design skills for those working on exhibitions. It is the designer who provides the bridge between the object and the audience (Velarde, 2001); design is more than a presentation tool but a valuable tool for disseminating information to an audience (Lake-Hammond and Waite, 2010). The role of the designer is gaining importance in the museums sector, indicating a convergence of the traditional curatorial roles. This topic is not addressed comprehensively within the library discourse; Schaeffer (1991) suggests design skills are not part of the information professionals’ skill set.

2.6.1.3. Interpretation

Interpretation is another core skill required for exhibition work; referring back to the definition of an exhibition, interpretation is required to create the transformation from a collection of objects on display to an exhibition. Interpretation allows a dialogue to be established between the object and its audience, thus it is important that the exhibition creator has the skills to present the right information about an object in an accessible way. Prendergast (2003) discusses the importance of interpretation skills further suggesting that “the curator accepts the role of liaison between the object and the audience” (395) creating frames of reference, drawing out contextual meanings, and developing a storyline for the viewer. To refer back to Dean, and Lake-Hammond and Waite (2010) interpretation is significant in providing a point of access to the collection for the visitor, enabling an enriched learning experience to take place.
2.7. The Problems and Challenges for Exhibition Creators

Several key problems for library staff involved in exhibition work can be identified, including lack of time, budgetary constraints, insufficient training and resources, and the undervaluation of exhibitions as a library activity. An overview of the key points identified in the literature is included in Appendix A.

Time is highlighted in the literature as a major problem for library staff involved in exhibition work (Chadbourne, 1976; Kemp and Witschi, 1997; Prendergast, 2003). Prendergast (2003) notes that balancing the demands of curating an exhibition with one’s day to day role can be challenging. Furthermore many librarians are lacking in the right training and guidance to create exhibitions of the standard required to be more successful; Dent (2002) comments that her lack of curating experience meant exhibition work was a steep learning curve.

Research by Kemp and Witschi (1997) indicates exhibition work in libraries is informal; they state very few libraries have policies and procedures in place relating to exhibition work. According to Kemp and Witschi (1997) exhibitions are traditionally viewed as secondary to core library work; they note that exhibition work is often not included in library job descriptions, budgets, strategic documents or library school courses. Furthermore the value of exhibitions is also considered problematic; Cleeve suggests that a proportion of the profession view display work as a “frivolous, non-cost effective” (1995:32) activity.

Dupont (2007) discusses the issue of visitor expectations, which could be a potential problem for those creating library exhibitions. Whereas visitors to museums expect exhibitions and come with a purpose linked to leisure and entertainment, visitors to the library come with the purpose of seeking specific information. A fundamental difference in the perception of the purpose of museums and libraries could potentially make library exhibitions less successful. However this notion is countered by the literature which offers examples of extremely successful exhibitions (Dent, 2002).

2.8. Practical Guidance

Guidance can be found within the literature to aid in the creation of exhibitions within libraries (Chadbourne, 1976; Caswell, 1985; Cleeve, 1995; Dent, 2002; Brown and Power, 2006). Much of this advice comes from library workers with involvement in exhibition projects in anecdotal form. Prendergast (2003) offers considerable advice on the
practicalities of exhibition work based on experiences of curating an academic library
exhibition; display design, sensitivity to the context of the visitor and marketing are
highlighted as key areas to consider. Although the article is dated Chadbourne (1976)
offers practical guidance which still holds relevance for today’s twenty-first century
librarian. Chadbourne (1976) stresses the importance of planning, stating that preparation
is the key to a successful exhibition. Traue (2000), however, criticises the current advice in
the literature deeming it insufficient.

The literature also exists advising on issues of preservation relating to exhibitions.
Preservation and collection care are a serious consideration for libraries looking to exhibit.
Guidelines are found in the literature advising on best practice for exhibitions in libraries;
The National Preservation Office (2000) offers guidance about the care and preservation
of library materials whilst on display. The guidelines include measures to prevent damage to
materials during an exhibition, advising on environmental factors, display methods and
security of materials.

2.9. Conclusion

It is apparent that the literature examining exhibitions from a library perspective is largely
anecdotal with very little rigorous research available on the topic. It is clear that published
information intended to offer practical advice and guidance on exhibitions in libraries for
library staff is both limited and dated. Furthermore the coverage given to exhibition work
within the context of the role of information professional is limited, resulting in limited
understanding of the scope and impact of this work. The literature focused on library
exhibitions is largely anecdotal, and whilst this has value and purpose there is a clear gap in
the knowledge on this topic.

Whilst there is a wealth of literature on the topic of exhibitions ranging from practical
guidance to theoretical studies on purpose of the museum exhibition, it is not directly
relevant to exhibitions in a library context. A lack of underpinning expert knowledge exists
concerning the exhibition of library materials as the theoretical literature is focused on
museums rather than exhibitions in libraries,. For example the definitions of what
constitute an exhibition are largely focused on museum exhibitions; these definitions
underpin the rest of the literature influencing discussion of the required skills and
expertise, as well as the practical how-to guidance. The result of this is that the provision of
guidance is not tailored towards the library profession and may not be as useful in a practical context.

The breadth of the topic covered in the literature is extensive even if the discussion is does not often reach a deep level of critical analysis. Overall much of the literature from a library perspective provides good insight into the scope of exhibitions in libraries, the purpose and potential benefits, and the problems and challenges which information professionals may encounter. Key reasons for exhibitions in libraries include education, advocacy, promotion of collections, and entertainment; whilst the benefits include increased customer numbers, stronger community links, improved staff knowledge and the potential for increased funding.
3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The research framework for this project incorporates components of a qualitative cross-sectional study with case study elements (Bryman, 2008). The first stage in the research design aims to collect both quantitative and qualitative data about the scope of contemporary exhibition work by means of a questionnaire. Specific sectors are then further investigated through the case study elements using interviews as the primary means of data collection. The research design utilises the concurrent triangulation strategy set out by Creswell (2003) incorporating a literature review, questionnaire and small case-studies which involve interviews and observation as the main investigative components, giving the study added rigour.

3.1.1. Theoretical Framework

The research adopts an inductive framework, taking an exploratory stance on the topic; the research approach seeks to identify common patterns and emerging themes, allowing a theory to be derived from the data as an iterative process (Bryman, 2008). Essentially the collection of data is informed by the data which has already been gathered (Silverman, 2006). An inductive approach was chosen to develop a theory out of the research.

Figure 2: The inductive research process (adapted from Bryman, 2008)

The inductive approach allows the identified gap in current knowledge to be thoroughly addressed, allowing a broad range of themes to emerge rather than focusing on specific
pre-determined issues (Bryman, 2008). Figure 2 illustrates the inductive research process implemented for this study.

3.1.2. Research Strategy

Cross-sectional design elements incorporated with case studies bring together quantitative and qualitative research tools as a research strategy. This strategy draws upon the theoretical underpinnings of mixed-methods research incorporating both data types within one study (Creswell, 2003). The strategy has been chosen as mixed-methods allowing both quantitative and qualitative data to be collected, crucial to fully investigating the topic. Quantitative data is useful for establishing what happens whilst qualitative data can be used to understand why something happens. A stronger hypothesis can be established by incorporating both types of data into the research (Gorman and Clayton, 2005).

3.1.2.1. Meeting the Research Aims and Objectives

Objectives 1 and 2 are investigated through collection of qualitative data using a questionnaire. These research questions seek to develop an understanding of the scope and scale of exhibition work in libraries and what the involvement of the information professional is.

Objectives 3 and 4 seek to understand the implications of the ‘what’ and are thus more suited to a qualitative approach, in this case using interviews, observation and qualitative open ended questions in the questionnaire. For the analysis quantitative and qualitative data are brought together, with the conclusions drawn from both datasets.

3.1.2.2. Benefits of the Research Strategy

According to Creswell “the results from one method can help develop or inform the other method” (2003: 15); by incorporating qualitative and quantitative data the results of the study can be contextualised by drawing upon different datasets. Quantitative data is required for this study to give contextualisation to the research; an indication of the extent of exhibition work is required to fully understand the experiences of the individual participants. Due to the sparse coverage of the topic in the literature it is essential that the research design incorporates the collection of this data to provide necessary contextualisation (Pope and Mays, 1995). Ultimately a more complete and comprehensive
understanding of the challenges for information professionals involved in exhibition work can be established by use of a combination of methods.

3.2. Methods of Investigation

The research design comprised of three main methods of investigation: a questionnaire, case-studies involving interview and observation, and a literature review. These methods are illustrated in Figure 3 in which the different phases of data collection within the research design are exemplified. This diagram is a simplified representation of the process; stages such as Phase 1, the literature review, continued throughout the process rather than at solely at the beginning.

Figure 3: The data collection process

3.2.1. Literature Review

A literature review was conducted to scope the topic and identify key areas of focus; reviewing existing literature allowed gaps in the body of knowledge to be identified, giving scope for areas of further research. This formed the first phases of the collection process as illustrated in Figure 3, however, this process continued throughout the study, to ensure that the research was underpinned by the most current literature. The literature review provided a theoretical context to underpin the research and assist in the formulation of the research objectives (Walliman, 2010). This stage in the research was conducted to identify key topics for inclusion in the questionnaire and interviews.
3.2.2. Questionnaire

The questionnaire comprised of a mixture of closed and open questions to gain a quantifiable overview of exhibition work whilst also gathering qualitative information about the challenges faced by library staff. Although a questionnaire is traditionally viewed as a quantitative research tool, by using open questions the questionnaire also generates qualitative data. The questionnaire forms the quantitative element of the research project, surveying library staff about exhibition work in their libraries to gain an indication of the scope and extent of this type of work.

A questionnaire was selected as the method for this phase in the research, as a means of data collection suitable for surveying a large community was required. Moreover, as it was clear from the literature review that exhibition work is not limited to one particular sector, it was essential that the method could reach a diverse population. This method was most appropriate as it was an excellent method for collecting data from the “large and geographically dispersed community” in question (Pickard, 2007: 183). The questionnaire was conducted online using the web-based tool SurveyGizmo, significantly reducing time and cost factors and increasing the number of respondents as participation was relatively quick and easy.

The questionnaire was split into a number of sections; the first asked about participation in exhibition work and sectors of involvement. The next section focused on questions about the exhibitions, gathering data about elements such as frequency and duration. The third asked respondents about their own experience of exhibition work, including questions about training and the problems encountered whilst working in exhibitions. The final section focused on the perception of skills required to undertake exhibition work. A copy of the questionnaire is included in Appendix B.

3.2.3. Case Studies

For this research project the case studies focus on different sectors in which library exhibits take place. Three case studies were conducted investigating in more depth the scope of involvement for information professionals and the challenges presented by each sector. Yin (2003) discusses representative case studies as a research method; a representative case study was chosen because “the objective is to capture the circumstances and conditions of an everyday or commonplace situation” (Yin, 2003: 41); the individual case
studies act as examples of the broad category to which they belong. The case studies draw upon interviews as a primary source of data. Each case study involved visiting a participant at their place to work to conduct the interview and observe any exhibition work at the organisation. The case studies draw upon data from the questionnaire for contextualisation and are supported by evidence from the literature.

3.2.3.1. Case Study Interviews

Interviews “facilitate the collection of a large quantity of rich data” (Gorman and Clayton, 2005: 126) from a participant. The method was chosen for this research project to provide additional data in supplement to the questionnaire. Interviews allow for rich and in-depth data to be collected about a particular case. A semi-structured approach was chosen as set out by Gorman and Clayton (2006); it allows for in-depth consideration of the ‘soft’ aspects of the topic. Another important advantage of the interview method is that it offers scope for clarification of questions and further exploration of meaning, thus producing more reliable and relevant results when used in conjunction with the questionnaire research method.

The interview was structured using a guide, setting out the key topics to ensure nothing critical was excluded. However it was ensured that the interviews retained an element of spontaneity as recommended by Seidman (2006); an interview guide was merely used as a tool for prompting where necessary allows the topic to be more comprehensively investigated. Whilst the researcher may have an idea of what can be discussed it is important that opportunity is given to explore causation and for new and unexpected ideas to emerge. Furthermore semi-structured interviews allowed the same key issues to be discussed in each case study (Seidman, 2006). A sample interview guide is included in Appendix C.

3.3. Conducting the research

3.3.1. Conducting the Literature Review

Initially keyword searches were undertaken searching the LISA, Emerald Management Reviews, Scopus and Google Scholar databases. This method returned some relevant results and provided an idea of the journals and publications to browse for further literature. Another method of searching for relevant literature was citation searches and reference browsing.
3.3.2. **Piloting**

3.3.2.1. **Questionnaire**

The questionnaire was piloted using a small sample of volunteers drawn from MA Librarianship students and connections on the micro-blogging service Twitter, to ensure the questions followed an appropriate structure and were free from ambiguity. As a result of piloting alterations were made; the wording of questions was changed in response to feedback. Subsequently a follow up test was carried-out after making adjustments to double-check that the questionnaire was suitable for use.

The research methods literature recommends piloting using a sample knowledgeable about the research topic (Yin, 2003); however this was impractical for the research project, hence volunteers outside the target population were selected. Piloting using a sample not connected to the topic ensured that all data collected from professionals involved in exhibition work could be used as part of the research project. It was not deemed viable to waste data which could potentially be used in the final study.

3.3.2.2. **Case Study Interviews**

Due to the short duration of the study a pilot case study was not fully conducted as recommended by Yin (2003) however the interview element of the case studies was piloted. Before interviews were conducted the interview schedule was piloted to ensure the researcher was practiced at asking questions with clarity and in a logical order. As the interviews were semi-structured it was not possible to pilot a strict interview but the process allowed the interview guide to be tested. Piloting the interview also allowed the researcher to test the practical elements such as the recording equipment as well as develop an effective method of note taking.

As with the questionnaire the interview schedule was piloted using volunteers drawn from the study body rather than those involved in exhibition work. Again this was for practical reasons; piloting using other library school students ensured that all data collected from professionals involved in exhibition work could be used as part of the research project. As a result of piloting the interview guide, using postgraduate research students with experience of conducting interviews for projects, the order of topics was changed to make the flow of questioning more logical.
3.3.3. **Samples**

Initial research highlighted that exhibition work takes place across a range of organisations, in libraries but also in archives and other collection-based services. To focus and standardise the sample for this research the emphasis was upon libraries although an exception was made with regards archive collections which form part of university libraries. Often services are merged thus making a distinction between a university’s library, special collections department and archive can be difficult. The samples used for the research reflect this decision.

3.3.3.1. **Questionnaire**

For practical reasons self-selecting sampling was used to conduct the questionnaire (Bryman, 2008); due to the unknown extent of the relevant population the easiest way to distribute the questionnaire was via a web link giving people the choice of whether or not to participate. The questionnaire was distributed as widely as possible to ensure a sufficient level of response. Distribution channels such as library orientated email lists on The National Academic Mailing List Service known as JISC Mail were used to circulate the questionnaire. Social networks (such as Twitter and LIS New Professionals Network) were also used to circulate the questionnaire. It was further distributed on a personal level; specifically to individuals already identified as undertaking exhibition work in libraries who may not be part of those online channels.

The questionnaire was initially distributed via JISC’s LIS-LINK mailing list and Twitter, which resulted in 87 completed responses. However initial analysis of the results highlighted a weakness in the methodology. The LIS-LINK mailing list is primarily used by information professionals working in the higher education sector, thus the results were heavily skewed towards universities and special collections. From the literature review it was apparent that exhibition work is more universal; the questionnaire was therefore redistributed. For the second circulation of the questionnaire sector specific JISC mailing lists were used such as LIS-PUB-LIBS, LIS-MEDICAL, and LIS-RAREBOOKS. An additional nine responses were received during the second distribution from previously underrepresented sectors. By countering this methodological weakness the questionnaire data is more valid and reliable as a representation of the current situation as regards exhibitions in libraries.
3.3.3.2. Case Study Interviews

The sample for the interview component of the research was drawn from volunteers who participated in the questionnaire. The sample was purposive and selected using a non-probability sampling method (Leedy and Ormond, 2005); the interviews were part of sector-specific case studies so individuals were selected according to their sector of current employment. The sample was a convenience sample to ensure the research was practical to carry out in the timeframe available. However selecting from volunteers at the questionnaire stage ensured a relevant sample, maximising the rigour of the study.

3.4. Data Analysis

3.4.1. Quantitative Data

The survey tool allowed raw data to be exported into Microsoft Excel for analysis of quantitative data; as the amount of quantitative data collected was small and primarily used to contextualise the analysis of qualitative data this software was deemed adequate for the purpose. Excel is simple and easy to use, making it an ideal software choice considering the time frame for the project and the contextual nature of the data. SPSS was also used to create more sophisticated visual outputs such as cross-tabulated tables of data.

Excel was used to present most of the data through use of tables or charts, depending on which method was best suited to the data. According to Denscombe (2003) visual representation of data using charts and tables should only be included in the presentation of findings when they “say something of interest” (243); thus data was only presented in using graphics were deemed most appropriate.

3.4.2. Qualitative Data

Qualitative data analysis methods form the primary mode of analysis for the study; it is an iterative interpretative act, in which data is collected, analysed and reinterpreted, as illustrated by Figure 4. Figure 4 has been adapted from the ‘six steps of analysis’, as set out by Kvale (1996) to fit the analysis process undertaken during this study. Glaser (1998) states that an in-depth analysis of data is best achieved when analysis occurs as a simultaneous process alongside collection. This approach was adopted for the analysis of qualitative data.
during the study; analysis occurred after the data had been collected but also during collection as highlighted in Figure 4

![Figure 4: Data analysis process for qualitative interview data (adapted from Kvale, 1996)](image)

This data analysis approach can be described as “pragmatic eclecticism” (Saldaña, 2009: 47); Saldaña refers to pragmatic eclecticism as the decision not to pre-determine a coding strategy during data collection and initial analysis when letting a strategy emerge may be more appropriate. It is suggested that an appropriate coding strategy cannot be chosen until initial analysis has been undertaken. For this study the choice of specific coding strategies was not made at the outset of the analysis stage, but was rather informed by an initial reading of the data to ensure the coding strategy was appropriate to ensure substantive results (Saldaña, 2009).

### 3.4.2.1. Coding Qualitative Data

For qualitative data analysis the cyclical coding process set out by Saldaña (2009) has been adapted to suit the purpose of the research project. Qualitative data gathered from the questionnaire and case study interviews has been analysed through the assignment of codes.

“A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data”

(Saldaña, 2009)
Saldaña describes a code as simply a word or phrase to denote the content of a passage of data. For this study the coding approach was developed based upon the guidance offered by Saldaña (2009); following the idea of coding as a multi-stage process the data was analysed in stages as illustrated by Figure 5.

Figure 5: Process for coding qualitative data (based on Saldaña, 2009)

The first stage involved exploring the data gathered from the questionnaire and interviews in an open process which let themes and ideas emerge. Coding strategies such as ‘Initial Coding’, ‘Descriptive Coding’ and ‘In Vivo Coding’ were adopted. The second stage in the process involved refining the coded data from the first stage using ‘Focused Coding’ and ‘Theoretical Coding’ as strategies. Finally the technique of ‘Post-Coding’ was adopted, as recommended by Saldaña (2009) as a means of clarifying the key findings further.

3.5. Validity and Reliability

Through incorporating cross-sectional design involving a questionnaire with case-studies, utilising interviews and observations, the research design has greater validity and reliability.
A combination of qualitative and quantitative data is deemed to be the most effectual method of meeting the aims of the research, whilst triangulation ensures that the research holds rigour. Both types of data have strengths and weaknesses; however using a combination of both is more likely to lead to strong results and conclusions (Gorman and Clayton, 2005). The research draws upon the unique strengths of each method to consider multiple perspectives and compensate for the weaknesses of each data collection method (Gorman and Clayton, 2005). However there are still weaknesses in the methodological approach which are further explored in the limitations section of this chapter.

3.6. Limitations

As a small scale study focused on a broad topic there are unavoidable limitations, which impact on the reliability and validity of the study. The scale of the study is a limiting factor; in order to gain a complete picture of the scope and extent of exhibition work in libraries a larger scale study would be required, identifying and investigating a larger sample of organisations. Ultimately time and financial constraints were limiting to realising the full potential of the study. It would have been beneficial to examine organisations which are not involved with exhibition work to identify the reasons for this, to further contextualise exhibition work in libraries. As a key limitation to the study, time and cost placed significant restrictions on the potential for face-to-face interviews. As a result of these limitations potentially key participants were not able to be interviewed.

3.6.1. Questionnaire Limitations

Although the questionnaire had the potential to reach a wide audience it was restricted by difficulty in identifying the population and targeting the study accordingly. The use of a self-selecting sample by emailing the questionnaire to a broad population gives no guarantee of an adequate sample size or that the sample will be representative of the population (Gorman and Clayton, 2005). As there is no means of identifying everywhere that exhibition work takes place targeting participants was difficult. As a result of difficulty in targeting an appropriate sample the questionnaire element was distributed twice; initial results from the first distribution highlighted a bias towards academic libraries in the chosen distribution method. Thus the questionnaire was distributed a second time using distribution channels relating to other sectors to redress the bias in the results. Furthermore whilst the questionnaire provides an indication of the scope of the topic, the results could be considered unreliable as the sample is limited.
3.6.2. **Case Study Limitations**

Case studies are often viewed as a weak method for research as the limitations can lead to studies with a lack of precision, objectivity and rigour (Yin, 2003). However the limitations do not entirely weaken the research outcomes, particularly as the case studies are strengthened by the inclusion of other methods. With case study based data external validity is a serious limitation (Yin, 2003); essentially the results of a case study cannot easily be applied to a wider population as each case is unique. Thus it is difficult to use the case study elements of this research as an indication of the topic as a whole without making great assumptions. Bryman (2008) highlights the importance of maintaining an understanding that the outcome of case study research cannot be generalised. This research utilises three small case studies. The results from these case studies must be treated as specific individual examples of exhibition work in different sectors rather than as a generalised assumption about a sector as a whole to maintain the rigour of the study.

The main method of data collection for the case studies is interviewing which also presents limitations; interviews generate vast amounts of data in a short time frame however the researcher needs to be able to capture the data effectively to ensure reliability. Small but significant details can be missed in the transcription of interviews, which impacts on the outcome of the study.

3.6.3. **Data Analysis Limitations**

The viewpoint of the researcher presents another limitation to the analysis of data, as highlighted by Silverman (2006). When qualitative data is analysed the viewpoint of the researcher is applied to data provided by participants about experiences and attitudes. Here the viewpoint of the participant may differ from that of the researcher. For example coding is conducted by the researcher within the context of a specific social viewpoint; this may differ from that of the participant. However this will always remain an unknown quantity and is an unavoidable problem with social research. Ultimately consideration must be made for the process of assumption which occurs during data analysis, as the experiences of the participant are interpreted within the context of the researcher. Furthermore coding presents the problems of anecdotalism and the decontextualisation of data. By the process of coding data becomes fragmented; it is removed from its original context within a discussion or story.
3.7. Ethics

Approval for the research was gained through the Department of Information Studies’ ethics review procedure. The research was classed as ‘low-risk’; the data collected was not of a sensitive nature, ensuring that research did not cause distress to those involved. Before collecting data from participants an information sheet was provided giving full details of the project ensuring all participants were clear about the nature of the research and the purpose of their involvement (Appendix D). In addition to this a consent form was completed by each participant (Appendix E). Guaranteeing the project complied with research ethics was essential in ensuring the validity of the research.
4. Findings: Questionnaire Results

The data presented in this chapter is a selection of key findings from the questionnaire responses.

4.1. Response Rate

Overall 96 responses were received; however, a response rate cannot be calculated as the total number of recipients of the questionnaire is unclear. The questionnaire was distributed via a number of channels including to mailing lists where membership cross-over is expected. The questionnaire was also distributed through informal internal channels with the invitation being circulated within the library community by email and Twitter, making it difficult to estimate how many individuals were invited to participate.

It is important to note that not all questions were answered by all 96 participants; some questions were left blank either because they were optional or because they were not applicable to some participants. The response rates for questions are indicated when necessary in the findings.

4.2. Information Professionals Involved in Exhibition Work

The questionnaire gathered quantitative data, which provides an indication of the sectors in which exhibition work takes place and levels of involvement of information professionals.

4.2.1. Involvement and Experience

4.2.1.1. Current Involvement

The questionnaire asked participants about their level of experience and involvement in exhibition work to gain an indication of how many information professionals were currently involved in exhibitions; 68% (65) indicated that they were currently involved in exhibition work, whilst 32% (31) are not.

Participants who were not currently engaged with exhibition work were asked to give a reason for this; the key findings are presented in Table 3.
Table 3: Reasons for not currently being involved in exhibition work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for not currently being involved in exhibition work</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not part of remit of current job</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library does not hold exhibitions</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibition work is a shared responsibility</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Time</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient Space</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of Responses=28

Overall 28 (90%) respondents chose to provide a reason for why they are not currently involved in exhibition work.

The quotes below illustrate key individual voices identified within the data which highlight reasons for not participating in exhibition work:

- “We do not have any space for exhibitions.” (Special Collections)
- “Insufficient time.” (Private Membership)
- “No requirement for an exhibition except during special events.” (Commercial & Business)
- “I job share - my ‘other half’ is doing it this time” (Universities)

4.2.1.2. Previous Involvement

Participants were then asked whether they had previous experience of exhibition work within a library; 93% (89) replied in the affirmative.

Table 4 displays the correlation between current and previous experience of exhibition work. Of the 65 respondents currently involved in exhibition work, 89% (58) indicated they had previous experience beyond their current role.
Table 4: Current and previous involvement in exhibition work

Number of Responses = 96

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Have you previously been involved in exhibition work in a library?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you currently involved in exhibition work within a library?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2.1. Sectors in which Exhibition Work Occurs

A sector breakdown for both overall responses and current involvement in exhibitions can be found in Appendix F. Chart 1 illustrates that special collections (29%, 19) and universities (26%, 17) are the largest sectors in which information professionals are currently involved in exhibition work. A significant total of responses were also received from informational professionals currently involved in exhibitions in public libraries (17%, 11) and national libraries (9%, 6).

It is important to note that the categorisation of sectors within this data set has largely been dictated by the participants. Participants were required to select a sector from a defined list or specify an alternative. Responses from the other option have been grouped together into broad categories however these are not definitive.

Findings relating to sector are complicated by a blurring of special collections with other libraries across sectors. The definition of a special collection means it is distinguished from the main library collection and treated as a separate collection, thus for the purpose of this research the findings will treat special collections as a sector in its own right. For example, university libraries often have special collections attached to the service whilst many of the smaller peripheral sectors identified within the other category may also be special collections. For this research, however, sector data will be analysed according to the categorisation given by participants.
Chart 1: Sector breakdown for current involvement in exhibitions

Number of Responses = 65
Figure 6: Flowchart mapping correlation between involvement in exhibition work and sectors
The relationship between involvement in exhibition work and sectors is further explored in Figure 6; the flowchart maps the different combinations of responses to questions about involvement in exhibitions by questionnaire respondents.

4.3. Exhibition Characteristics

4.3.1. Types of exhibitions

Chart 2 illustrates the types of exhibitions held by libraries. According to the questionnaire the dominant type is the physical exhibition; all respondents were involved in exhibition work with a physical component. In total 49% (43) libraries hold physical exhibitions whilst 51% (44) libraries have exhibitions with both physical and online elements. No respondents were currently involved in exhibition work which was only online or digital.

In total two respondents indicated that the library was engaged in other types of exhibitions in addition to physical ones. The other types of exhibition work included CD-ROMS, projected images and ‘apps.’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What type of exhibition does the library hold?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Responses = 87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chart 2: Types of exhibitions

4.3.2. Duration and frequency of exhibitions

Chart 3 shows that most library exhibitions are held as frequently as every one to six months; the most popular response was between every three and six months (25, 28%) closely followed by between once a month and every three months (23, 26)
Chart 3: Frequency of library exhibitions

Chart 4: Duration of library exhibitions
Chart 4 illustrates the approximate duration of library exhibitions. The response rate for this question was higher with 96 responses; including 4% (4) don’t know responses. 33% (32) of libraries hold exhibitions with durations of between one and three months whilst 32% (31) hold longer ones.

Table 5 presents a cross-tabulation of the data illustrating the relationship between frequency and duration of library exhibitions. Overall variation can be seen in how often exhibitions are held and for how long these exhibitions last. However the data reveals a pattern suggesting that most libraries hold exhibitions of a longer duration with less frequency. Short duration and quick turnover is not a common occurrence in the libraries according to the questionnaire.

Table 5: Cross tabulation of frequency and duration
Number of responses = 94

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How often does the library hold an exhibition?</th>
<th>How long does an exhibition normally last for?</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Between one month</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and three months</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between every six months and once a year</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Between one week and one month</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Less than once a month</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Longer than three months</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.3.3. Supplementary materials

A total of 30% (28) indicated the library always produces materials to accompany an exhibition. A total of 62% (58) indicated the library sometimes produces supplementary materials. Only 8% (7) indicated that additional materials were never produced to accompany an exhibition.

Chart 5 illustrates the types of supplementary materials created. A total of 76% (73) libraries produce information leaflets to accompany exhibitions. Websites are also a popular accompaniment to exhibitions with 54% (52) indicating this option. Less frequent types of supplementary materials accompanying exhibitions are guidebooks and podcasts. Other types of supplementary materials include catalogues, blog posts and events such as talks and tours.

![Chart 5: Types of supplementary materials produced for library exhibitions](image-url)
The following quotations have been extracted from the data illustrating different approaches to the production of supplementary materials to an exhibition programme:

- “There’s always a website and promotional flyers. Occasionally there are other things, when funding allows.” (Special Collections)
- “Varies depending on exhibition.” (National Library)
- “Opening receptions, speaker series related to exhibit.” (Commercial and Business)
- “Books published occasionally.” (Universities)

4.3.4. Exhibition Spaces

Chart 6 illustrates that in total 72% (69 respondents) indicated the availability of a permanent exhibition space in their organisations for exhibitions whilst for 24% (23%) no such space was available.

Chart 6: Availability of permanent exhibition spaces in libraries
Respondents were asked to provide further information about the exhibition spaces available for exhibitions; half of the respondents provided details about the types of spaces used whilst the other half gave details of display equipment. In total 22% (21) respondents indicated that the library had a dedicated permanent space for exhibitions within the library itself whilst 11% (11) respondents indicated the spaces used for exhibitions were in venues external to the library. Overall 9% (9) respondents provided details about the library holding exhibitions both within the library and in external venues. The data indicates that a wide variety of display furniture is used for library exhibitions including glass museum display cases, shelving units, tables and display boards.

A selection of key quotes has been extracted from the data to illustrate the types of spaces used for library exhibitions:

- “Dedicated exhibition area, supplemented by table-top cases for small displays when necessary.” (Special Collections)
- “On top of capping on shelves - good visuals if you have high ceilings. Library display shelves. Any spare library floor space.” (Public Library)
- “The exhibitions were held not in the library at all, but in the front hall of the Club.” (Private Membership)
- “The lobby of our library has three large glass cases, one vertical and two horizontal. We primarily use these cases for displays. We will sometimes put items from our collection that relates to the display on lecterns near the case.” (Commercial & Business)
- “Ad hoc use of any available space.” (Schools)

4.3.5. **Purpose of exhibitions**

Data from respondents currently involved in exhibition work has been examined to develop a picture of the purpose of exhibitions, as illustrated by Chart 7. This shows that overall the most common purpose current of library exhibitions is promoting collections with 91% (59) respondents indicating this as a reason for exhibiting. A total of 8% (5) libraries exhibit for other reasons, these include entertainment and promotion of other service such as museum services.
Chart 7: Purpose of current exhibitions

Chart 8 provides a breakdown of the purpose of exhibitions within each sector, illustrating the variation in reasons for exhibiting across different sectors. Overall the number of reasons for exhibiting within each sector varies. Promotion of collections is the only reason consistent across all sectors. The importance of promotion of collections as a purpose varies however it is given most significance by the museum library sector as well as in further education. The most diverse range of purposes is found in the public libraries sector with seven different uses indicated by respondents from the sector.
Chart 8: Purpose of exhibitions across sectors
4.4. Role of the Information Professional

4.4.1. Scope of Involvement

4.4.1.1. Frequency of Involvement

Table 6 provides a summary of the key findings relating to the frequency information professionals are involved in exhibition work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of Involvement</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>“Planning: constantly. Curating: once every 18 months.” (National Library)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Always on the back-burner at the very least.” (Special Collections)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Always” (Historic House)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>“Almost all exhibitions” (Special Collections)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“It is a major part of my work.” (Universities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I'm involved in almost every exhibition at my library.” (Seminary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regularly</td>
<td>“Regularly - every week.” (Special Collections)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Quite regularly” (Public Library)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasionally</td>
<td>“Occasionally” (Schools)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Twice a year” (Universities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“One to three times a year” (National Library)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Approx four times a year” (Universities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>“Almost never” (Universities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Rarely - about once a year” (Universities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I was involved in one only” (Special Collections)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Varies</td>
<td>“Rotational basis amongst team” (Public Library)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Varies from daily to bi-monthly” (National Library)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data reveals no conclusive pattern of frequency of involvement in exhibition work, the range of responses is extremely varied across sectors.

4.4.1.2. Scope of Involvement

Questionnaire participants were asked to describe their involvement in exhibition work; the questionnaire provided space for free text answers. This data was subsequently examined during the data analysis stage, with the content of responses and key areas of responsibility drawn out. The findings were grouped into broad categories as illustrated by Chart 9.
As Chart 9 highlights the most commonly occurring activities found within descriptions of involvement in exhibition work are:

- Planning exhibitions including scoping the project and selecting a theme
- Selecting exhibition content and items for display
- Implementation and installation of exhibitions
Activities which occur less frequently within descriptions of exhibition work include;

- Managing the exhibition when open to visitors
- Exhibition design

A selection of key quotes has been extracted from the data to illustrate the variety of work undertaken by information professionals involved in exhibition work:

- “I’m responsible for managing the curators of each internal exhibition. These are usually other members of Library staff who have volunteered to produce a display on a subject that interests them.” (Special Collections)
- “Variable. Sometimes curating exhibitions: selecting material, writing captions. Sometimes editorial: I curated the latest exhibition with two colleagues and pulled everything together. Sometimes I merely run an eye over a colleague’s captions.” (Special Collections)
- “Selecting material, researching, arranging displays, commissioning display materials and supplementary material, arranging launch events.” (Universities)
- “Planning concept, background research, shortlisting items, writing captions, arranging exhibit, photographing exhibit for a supplementary online exhibition, writing and publishing webpages, publicising via website, blog and Twitter.” (Special Collections)
- “Supervising visits to the exhibition and explaining it to visitors.” (Special Collections)
- “As sole librarian I do everything.” (Universities)
- “If I’m a curator, then I have to work at selection, writing copy, and doing much of the work excluding design. If I’m consulting, then I have less work to do.” (Public Library)

4.4.1.3. Job Description

Data was collected relating to the inclusion of exhibition work in job descriptions. The responses of those currently involved in exhibition work have been collated to produce Chart 10 which provides a breakdown of the data by sector.

In total 66% (43) respondents currently involved in exhibitions indicated exhibition work was part of their job description. Exhibition work is not included in the job description of 18% (12) of respondents. The participants whose job description did not include exhibition
work were working in the following sectors: private membership (2%, 1), public libraries (3%, 2), schools (2%, 1), special collections (5%, 3) and universities (8%, 5) as illustrated by Chart 10. Whilst the majority of respondents knew whether or not exhibition work was part of their job description, 15% (10) respondents indicated they did not know. The 10 respondents were working in a range of sectors as illustrated by Chart 10 including the following; government (2%, 1), national libraries (2%, 1), public libraries (5%, 3), seminaries (2%, 1), special collections (2%, 1) and universities (5%, 3).

From Chart 10 variation between sectors is apparent. For example, 47% (8 of 17) information professionals working in the universities sector and 45% (5 of 11) working in public libraries either do not have exhibitions included in their job description or do not know. Conversely, only 21% (4 of 19) working in special collections do not have exhibitions included or do not know.

![Chart 10: Inclusion of exhibition work in job description across sectors](chart.png)
4.5. Key Skills and Expertise

Data from the questionnaire about key skills and expertise for exhibition work has been grouped into the following overarching categories:

- Practical skills
- Project management skills
- Interpersonal skills
- Knowledge
- Creativity

The number of responses for this question was 84. Appendix G provides an overview of the findings for this question.

One respondent with experience in the museum library sector provided an extensive description of the core skills required by the museum professional for exhibition work which acts as a useful frame of reference for examining the library sector.

“For exhibitions in museums (including exhibitions of library and archival content in museums) there are a number of specific skills and areas of expertise that are required, e.g. content research, creating message and narrative documents, writing exhibition labels and panels, working up design briefs, etc. There are also more general skills that are needed, such as the ability to work as part of a team, communication skills (especially when presenting exhibition ideas), editing skills, etc.” (Museum Library)

The respondent has divided skills into two core categories, specific skills relating to exhibition work and general transferable skills.

4.5.1. Practical Skills

Practical skills are identified as essential to information professionals involved in exhibition work. These skills include the ability to conduct research to inform exhibition work, write succinct and appropriate captions for labels, design displays, author webpages and create promotional material. Practical skills such as these are referred to frequently in response to questioning about essential key skills and expertise. The manual skills relating to the
physical construction of exhibitions are given less importance, referred to by a small number of individuals.

Key quotes from the data have been selected to highlight the core skills:

**Writing Skills:** “Ability to write concise, informative and even entertaining labels for a variety of audience.” (Universities)

**Design Skills:**
- “Knowing how to make things look legible and attractive.”
  (Special Collections)
- “Visual / spatial awareness to ensure displays look good.”
  (Special Collections)

**Promotional Skills:** “ability to promote the exhibition – either make or commission posters, graphics etc.” (Special Collections)

### 4.5.2. Project management

Many of the respondents stressed the importance of general transferable project management skills as important for exhibition work; skills such as planning and organisation, people management, liaison and negotiation, marketing and promotion, and the ability to work towards deadlines.

Key quotes from the data have been selected to illustrate the importance of project management skills:

- “Everything I learnt in my former career as a project manager has served me well.” (Commercial and Business)
- “Project planning skills – timetabling work, liaising and leading where necessary – are increasingly important in straitened times.” (National Library)

### 4.5.3. Interpersonal Skills

The questionnaire data also highlights the importance of interpersonal skills such as communication, teamwork and managing staff, with a quarter of respondents listing these
skills. The emphasis on interpersonal skills is placed on their application when working with colleagues and external organisations, although the need for communication with visitors was also raised as important.

The following selected quotes illustrate participants’ views on interpersonal skills:

- “Ability to communicate with public.” (Public Library)
- “People and communication skills...Interaction with others to create exhibition. Teamworking.” (Schools)
- “Able to work alone but also as part of a team.” (Public Library)

4.5.4. Knowledge

“Know your collection. Know what you want to say and why you want to say it. Know who your exhibition is aimed at and what you want them to get from it.” (Museum Library)

Knowledge occurs repeatedly in the responses about the key skills and expertise required for exhibition work, highlighting its importance. In total 44% (37) respondents stated knowledge of library collections was crucial for exhibition work. Other types of knowledge which were highlighted as important were with audience awareness, preservation and conservation expertise, and subject-specific knowledge relating to the exhibition content.

The following selected quotes illustrate participant’s views on the importance of knowledge:

**Collection Knowledge:**
- “Know your collections well enough to exploit strengths.” (National Library)

**Subject Knowledge:**
- “Knowledge of the subject.” (Public Library)

**Preservation and Conservation Knowledge:**
- “Knowledge of conservation best practice for the display of library material.” (National Library)
4.5.5. Creativity

Another expertise which was prominent in the responses was creativity; respondents stated to create exhibitions it is important to be able to think creatively and engage the imagination. Key skills within this category are the ability to create story, select items and deselect items, and awareness of the importance of conceptualisation and context. Interpretation is another skill which was mentioned in some of the responses.

Key quotes from the responses include:

- “A creative approach which is informed, an awareness of appropriate ways of presenting different material for different audiences.” (Special Collections)
- “The ability to tell a story using artefacts.” (Special Collections)

One respondent agreed that creativity is an important quality; however it is not essential to possess a natural creative talent as the art of creating exhibitions can be taught:

“Some sort of natural creativity is helpful, as is a fertile imagination, but anyone can be taught enough to put together something acceptable, even without these natural learning’s”

(Public Library)

4.6. Training

Participants were asked whether they had received training either in the workplace or externally for exhibition work. The total number of responses for this section was 87. In total 66% (58) of respondents had received no training either in the workplace or externally for exhibition work.
4.6.1. **Workplace Training**

In total only 25% (22) respondents had received training in the workplace for exhibition work whilst 75% (65) respondents had not received any training at work.

4.6.1.1. **Satisfaction with Workplace Training**

Chart 11 illustrates levels of satisfaction with training received in the workplace. Overall only 5% (4) indicated they were very satisfied with training received in the workplace. The largest proportion of respondents (24%, 21) indicated a neutral satisfaction level in relation to training received in the workplace.

4.6.2. **External Training**

Overall only 28% (24) respondents had attended external training events for exhibition work compared to 72% (63) who had not.

4.6.3. **Satisfaction with External Training**

Chart 12 illustrates the respondents satisfaction with external training. Whilst only 2% (2) were very dissatisfied, the largest proportion (28%, 24) expressed neutral satisfaction.

4.6.4. **Additional Training Needs**

Overall 52% (45) of respondents indicated they would benefit from further training for exhibition work whilst 38% (33) did not require further training. The remaining 10% (9) did not know if they wanted additional training.

Respondents were asked to provide details of what additional training they thought would be of benefit; 46 responses were received. 67% (31) respondents expressed interest in general exhibition work training covering practical elements of design and display; many indicated they felt confident selecting themes and materials for display but more support was needed for the practical elements of the work. Skills for website work were also highlighted.

Several respondents indicated they were attending the CILIP Rare Books and Special Collections conference in September 2011 to develop their exhibition skills.
The following selection of key quotes illustrates the responses:

- “Proper display of archival materials (physical).” (Universities)
- “Training in exhibition displays - the aesthetics of exhibitions.” (Special Collections)
- “Any + all” (Public Library)

**Chart 11: Satisfaction with workplace training**

**Satisfaction with External Training**

**Chart 12: Satisfaction with external training**
4.7. Key Challenges and Problems

From analysis of the questionnaire data it is clear that information professionals face a wide variety of problems and challenges when undertaking exhibition work. Many are common, occurring at a large number of organisations; these include lack of resources such as time and space. Many respondents also refer to their own lack of expert knowledge and skills as issues.

Only one respondent indicated they do not face any problems or challenges whilst undertaking exhibition work. The respondent working in a museum library stated that he / she receives significant amount of support and investment in resources to enable exhibition work in the library. He / she indicated the museum environment is a supportive environment for exhibitions with advice and guidance available as a result good relationships with curators, designers, conservators and technicians.

A selection of key findings from the data is presented in Table 7.
| Money | • Impact on potential for training.  
• Resources available for exhibition can be limited if funding is lacking. |
| Space | • Limited space for exhibitions is a common problem for libraries restricting potential for exhibitions and what can be exhibited:  
  o “Physical constraints of the space available.” (Special Collections)  
• Exhibition spaces can have restricted access for visitors:  
  o “Exhibition spaces inaccessible to a broad range of people.” (Universities) For example access is only for library members so external visitors can’t visit the exhibitions.  
• Display space for exhibitions is not a library priority. |
| Time | • Finding time for exhibition work alongside demands of the rest of the service is a common problem:  
  o “Time consuming work” (Museums)  
  o “Good exhibitions take a very long time which usually isn’t available.” (Public Library)  
  o “Not having enough time to get things done as thoroughly as we would like.” (Special Collections)  
• Finding time to prepare can be challenging as disruption to the library is a problem:  
  o Preparation for exhibition “causes massive disruption” which affects the service. (Schools) |
| Scale of Projects | • Large number of staff involved leading to challenges in ensuring everyone knows their role and can deliver on time.  
  • “Complexity of working with many people.” (National Library)  
  • “Ensuring everyone knows what they need to do and by when.” (Universities) |
| Partnerships | • Collaboration with others especially external organisations can lead to miscommunication and reliability issues. |
| Lack of Support | • Lack of support from management causes problems:  
  o “Ignorant management” (Public Library)  
• Colleagues can also be unsupportive:  
  o “Often do not appreciate the amount of time and work necessary.” (Special Collections) |
| Training | • Limited opportunities for training:  
  o “Learnt to use essential software such as Photoshop in own time using own resources.” (Special Collections) |
| Skills of the Exhibition Creator | • “Selecting materials and writing a story that will be interesting to a general audience.” (Seminary)  
• “A few generalists often have to do the work of many specialists.” (Special Collections)  
• Limited knowledge of collections can hinder exhibition work:  
  o “The current exhibitors’ lack of skill.” (Universities) |
5. Findings: Case Studies

The following section presents the results of three case studies investigating exhibition work in different sectors. The data for each case study is primarily drawn from an interview with a member of staff and the questionnaire data received from the respondent. Each interview followed the same broad thematic structure, but was largely guided by the experiences of the individual participant and the specifics of the sector in which they worked. This data is supplemented by observations made during visits to the organisations.

5.1. Case Study A: University/Special Collections

Case Study A is a special collections and archive service in university library. The questionnaire and interview participant was the Head of Special Collections and Archives within the university library.

5.1.1. Exhibitions

Exhibitions are viewed as an “integral part” of the special collections and archive service. Exhibitions take place on varying scales; small exhibitions are held within the library building, whilst larger scale exhibitions are hosted in a public access gallery space elsewhere within the university.

5.1.1.1. Exhibition Spaces

The department has recently moved into new accommodation within the library allowing greater scope for exhibitions within the building; this move has created a permanent exhibition space consisting of “three large integral wall cases within Special Collections and Archives area of the library.” This space is used for regular small scale exhibitions of materials from the collection. Exhibitions also take place outside the library in the University art gallery when larger scale exhibitions are possible. Larger scale exhibitions have on occasion been accompanied by other activities such as public lectures and private tours.

Exhibitions at the library also have an online component: selected highlights from each exhibition are hosted in an ‘exhibitions gallery’ section on the Special Collections and Archives website. The website element is currently supplementary to the physical exhibitions rather than a standalone exhibition.
The University Library’s Special Collections and Archives department also often loans out material from its collections for exhibition in other organisations, for example in museums both nationally and internationally.

5.1.1.2. Frequency of the Exhibitions

According to the questionnaire data the library holds exhibitions every three to six months; the interview further revealed that exhibitions are a regular activity for the department, changing routinely over the course of the academic year. From the questionnaire data it is apparent that the exhibitions normally last at least three months.

5.1.1.3. Purpose of the Exhibitions

In response to the questionnaire, the following aims or purposes of the exhibitions were indicated:

- Promotion of Collections
- Education
- Community Outreach
- Commemorative Exhibition.

The subject of exhibition purpose was investigated further in the interview. It is understood that promotion of collections is a core aim of exhibitions at this library following further discussion of the purpose of the exhibitions; widening access to the collections and making them accessible beyond the immediate university community is regarded as highly important. The participant spoke of the role played by exhibitions in opening up the collections to a wider audience and making them more visible. Exhibitions allow the library to “provide a snapshot of collections” with the aim of increasing usage. The online exhibition element plays a key role, allowing more people to find out about the collections; during the interview, an example was given of people coming in to use the library after discovering the online component of the exhibition. The interview also provided further evidence of the community outreach purpose behind the exhibitions. Many of the collections held at the library have a local point of interest which is drawn out within the exhibitions.
5.1.2. The Information Professional’s View

5.1.2.1. The Role of the Information Professional

The participant listed key activities undertaken as part of their exhibition work role in response to Question 15:

- Select materials for exhibiting
- Write labels
- Set up physical displays.

Following the interview additional key activities undertaken as a part of the exhibition work role were identified:

- Devise topic or theme for the exhibition
- Research exhibition topic
- Organise lectures, talks and tours when necessary.

5.1.2.2. Key Skills and Expertise

Key skills and expertise for exhibition work were identified through both the questionnaire and interview:

Design skills / aesthetic vision: It is important for anyone involved in exhibition work to understand that visual appeal is a key aspect of an exhibition. Visitors require a visual hook to engage with, thus creative skills and an aesthetic eye are essential to ensure the exhibition is visually appealing.

- “Pick out the things that appeal visually or tell some kind of story.”

Interpretation: An exhibition needs to possess a narrative to offer the visitor an informative, entertaining or enlightening experience, thus it is vital the exhibition creator has an understanding of the importance of creating stories or providing contextualisation.

- “You need an ability to select the stuff with an intellectual arrangement, or a theory, or a story in mind.”

Selection / Deselection: In addition to having the skills to select the best items for display, it is important to understand when to stop filling a display cabinet.

- “Knowing what to leave out is just as important as knowing what to put in.”
5.1.3. Problems and Challenges of Exhibitions

In the questionnaire response the participant indicated that space for exhibitions was a major challenge;

“[The] main challenge was securing a dedicated exhibition space to exhibit rare books/mss/manuscripts/archives.”

The topic of problems and challenges was discussed further during the interview. From this the practical issue of preservation and conservation arose as another main challenge;

“The material is rare, it’s old, it’s valuable, and some of it’s quite fragile. It is about making sure the environmental conditions are right, the lighting is right, the security is acceptable.”

5.1.4. Training

Staff at the organisation had not received any formal training for exhibition work. The main sources of information, advice and guidance are informal; guidance is normally sought from colleagues rather than published literature.

5.1.5. Summary of Key Points

Purpose and benefits: Promotion of collections is the primary purpose, thus exhibitions are held on a regular basis to ensure the collections are being made publically available. As a result of exhibiting the library has seen increased usage of the special collections department. Exhibitions are targeted beyond the library and university, at the local community to raise the profile of the service as well as give something back to those who contribute to public funding of higher education.

Role of the information professional: In this case study the information professional takes responsibility for the exhibitions alongside the other core duties of their role as the head of department. Key skills required are creativity and design skills, combined with knowledge of the collections to select the most suitable items for exhibition.

Problems and challenges: The key challenges are availability of space and the materials to be displayed. Space is at a premium within an academic library so securing a permanent exhibition space was a challenge. Spaces need to be both visible and accessible for an
exhibition to be successful, thus publicly accessible spaces elsewhere in the university are often used to increase the visibility of the exhibition.

5.2. Case Study B: Local Studies/Public Library

Case Study B is an archive and local studies library service located within a shared building with the central public library and a museum. The questionnaire and interview participant was the local studies librarian working at the local studies library.

5.2.1. Exhibitions

Exhibitions are a key part of the outreach activities undertaken by the organisation. As the library is the local studies service for the district exhibitions have a local focus, utilising materials from the local studies collections. The scale of the exhibition work can vary greatly, ranging from small table top or exhibition panel displays of copies of materials to exhibition of library materials in large exhibitions in partnership with the museum service. Exhibitions feature both original items and or copies of materials, depending on the nature of the exhibition.

5.2.1.1. Exhibition Spaces

The library has permanent exhibition spaces within the library building with museum cases available for the display of original materials whilst exhibition panels are available for the display of copies of materials.

5.2.1.2. Frequency of the Exhibitions

The questionnaire response for Case Study B indicates exhibitions take place regularly at a frequency of every one to three months. Exhibitions normally last approximately between one month and three months.

5.2.1.3. Purpose of the Exhibitions

In response to the questionnaire, the following aims or purposes of exhibitions were indicated:

- Promotion of Collections
- Promotion of Library Service
- Education
- Community Outreach
- Commemorative Exhibition

The issue was investigated further in the interview. The benefit of exhibitions for the library service is a main driving factor behind the programme. Exhibitions are viewed as an important tool in promoting the local history service and its collections. Exhibitions are one of the approaches used in creating awareness of the service and developing the user base.

“Local history has a drop off rate of users so we need to continue to gain new users.”

Attracting new users is crucial to the local history service. Exhibitions allow people to discover the service exists; the participant explained that as a result of exhibitions “people who have lived in the area discover and use you”. Additionally exhibitions are a way to provide an extra service to the existing users of the library; the interviewee explained that offering extra value to existing users was of great importance. Exhibitions also serve the purpose of highlighting particular collections which may ordinarily not be seen, for the local history library exhibitions are used to raise the profile of particular items in the collection.

Another purpose of exhibitions in this case study is to provide value for its community of users. The library is a local studies library and therefore exhibitions have a local focus with the intention of creating a connection for the community; another means of giving something to it. In addition to the exhibitions showing “people things in the collection that people wouldn’t know were local”, they are used as a way to build partnerships with the local community. Partnerships have been formed between the library and local interest groups and societies, for example a local history group.

5.2.2. The Information Professional’s View

5.2.2.1. The Role of the Information Professional

The participant listed key activities undertaken as part of their exhibition work role in response to Question 15:

- Select materials for exhibiting
- Exhibition design
- Write labels
- Design and writing exhibition web content.
Following the interview additional key activities undertaken as a part of the exhibition work role were identified:

- Research
- Set up physical displays
- Creating supplementary materials including leaflets and brochures
- Liaison with other organisations for loan of items.

5.2.2.2. Key Skills and Expertise

Key skills and expertise for exhibition work were identified through both the questionnaire and interview:

**Creativity:** Creative thinking is deemed a core skill for exhibition work. Innovative, creative ideas are employed to make exhibitions more visually appealing and attractive for visitors.
  - For one exhibition library staff wore historical costumes from the period of focus in the exhibition to add an additional visual dimension and bring the collection to life.

**Communication skills:** Exhibition work in this case requires effective collaborative working in partnership with others in the library and also with external organisations. Effective communication skills are needed for many aspects of exhibition work; communication is needed between the librarian and those involved in the exhibition including local groups contributing to the project.

**Interpretation:** The ability to interpret collections and provide a point of interest for the visitor to engage with is a vital skill; the librarian must have the skills to draw out the themes and narratives whilst creating an exhibition as exhibitions must offer something of interest for the visitor.

**Knowledge:** Exhibitions in a local studies library require a good amount of local knowledge to ensure exhibitions are interesting and relevant to the local community. An awareness of key dates and local events is useful for devising exhibition ideas.
5.2.3. **Problems and Challenges of Exhibitions**

Resources such as time, money and equipment are a notable challenge for exhibition work in this case. Finance is a particularly limiting factor. During the interview the participant indicated that the organisation has “no budget for exhibitions” except for the larger scale events which occur in collaboration with the museum. As a result the exhibition work is conducted “on a shoe-string” creating limitations as to what it is possible to achieve.

From questionnaire data it is evident that time is also a problematic issue for exhibition work in this case study, particularly in relation to working in partnership with others. “Waiting for others to carry out their part” is a notable challenge when coupled with other time constraints.

Touring exhibitions round smaller branch libraries in the area is a possibility which creates additional challenges. Sending exhibitions to branch libraries is in theory a good way to increase visibility of the collection and facilitate greater access, however, there are many logistical challenges.

5.2.4. **Summary of Key Points**

**Purpose and benefits:** Promotion of the library is the main purpose of the exhibitions. Exhibitions play a key role in creating awareness of the service to attract new users. Developing links with the community is important so the exhibitions always have local relevance.

**Role of the information professional:** Involvement encompasses all elements of exhibition work, such as design, selecting items and installation, as well as liaising with external groups and other staff, and writing web content. A wide range of skills is required as a result.

**Problems and challenges:** Finance is the main barrier to exhibition work in the organisation. There is no budget for exhibitions meaning most projects face limitations to what can be achieved.
5.3. Case Study C: National Library

Case Study C is a national library. The questionnaire and interview participant was a curator working at the library.

5.3.1. Exhibitions

5.3.1.1. Exhibition Spaces

The library has a range of dedicated permanent and temporary exhibition spaces including; “1 x permanent treasures gallery, 1 x major temporary exhibition space, 1 x medium exhibition space, 1 x small temporary exhibition space.” The permanent galleries display priceless treasures held by the library such as rare illuminated manuscripts and historic documents. These items are exhibited on an ongoing basis. The remainder are described as temporary galleries. These are dedicated spaces used for regularly changing exhibitions.

5.3.1.2. Frequency of the Exhibitions

As detailed above the exhibitions in the permanent galleries are ongoing whilst the other spaces are used for exhibitions on a varying basis. In response to the questionnaire the following timescales were indicated:

- major exhibition: six months
- medium exhibition: three months
- other exhibitions: ad hoc.

5.3.1.3. Purpose of the Exhibitions

In response to the questionnaire, the following aims or purposes of the exhibitions were indicated:

- Promotion of collection
- Community outreach
- Commemorative exhibition.

The subject of exhibition purpose was developed further during the interview.

A key idea which emerged was the importance of promoting the collections to enable people to see the treasures the library has within. The participant spoke of the purpose of
the library: “we are there to show off what we’ve got.” Many items held by the library are items of significance to the national social or cultural heritage, particularly the items exhibited within the permanent ‘treasures’ galleries. As a public funded organisation it is crucial the public is given access to the collections.

Another key purpose of the exhibitions is to enable the library to reach new audiences

“What the exhibitions do is they connect with the general public in a way and they connect with tourists and connect with families and those sorts of people we wouldn’t normally get to.”

From the interview it emerged that the exhibitions are viewed as a medium for connecting with potential visitors. Exhibitions allow the library to become more accessible to a wider range of people; it’s about showing the library is not just a resource for scholars and researchers but for curiosity fillers and entertainment seekers.

Education is another purpose with exhibitions designed to make collections not only accessible but also to ensure visitors have a knowledge-enriching experience. The exhibitions showcase the collection whilst engaging and inspiring visitors of all ages; there is a strong consideration of the educational experience for children as well as everyone else.

5.3.2. The Information Professional’s View

5.3.2.1. The Role of the Information Professional

The participant listed key activities undertaken as part of their exhibition work role in response to Question 15:

- Curate exhibitions
- Manage staff curating major exhibitions
- Manage staff curating small exhibitions
- Advise colleagues on the selection of material and the development of storylines
- Assist in the revision of panels and labels
- Provide training.
Following the interview additional key activities undertaken as a part of the exhibition work role were identified:

- Propose exhibitions
- Scope ideas for exhibitions
  - Develop storylines and themes
  - Selection of potential materials from the collections for exhibiting.
- Interpretation
  - For panels and labels as well as supplementary materials
- Media work
  - Contribution of material for publicity and promotion
- Liaison with designers, technical specialists, interactive team, press and publicity, security.

5.3.2.2. The Exhibition Process

During the interview detailed information was gathered about the process undertaken to develop and execute an exhibition project at the organisation:

Idea → selection of materials → staging the exhibition

A detailed example of the participant’s involvement in an exhibition from the generation of ideas to the selection of materials is given below:

- **Ideas** - develop ideas and create a storyline, considering the key messages for the exhibition.
- **Different interpretations** – consider what the different sections could be and the key messages for each.
- **Scoping document** – sets out the sections of the exhibition and the aim of each section.
- **Research other exhibitions** – look to see what other organisations have exhibited on the same theme.
- **Assessing the collection** – conducting subject searches in your catalogue then going to look at collection, taking photographs.
- **Consult the specialist** – discuss the collections with the specialists responsible to gain an expert opinion and find out about items you may not have already found.
• **Revisit the collection items** – use printed photographs of the selected items from the collection to plan how the exhibition might fit together. Assess how well the arrangement conveys the storyline and meets the aims set out in the scoping document.

• **Gaps in the storyline?** - Look for gaps in the storyline. If there is a gap then start over again until it works.

• **It works!** – The exhibition can be put together, think about how best to display, what labels and panels are needed.

### 5.3.2.3. Key Skills and Expertise

Key skills and expertise for exhibition work were identified through both the questionnaire and interview:

**Knowledge:** the information professional should possess a variety of knowledge when involved in exhibition work including:

- Collection knowledge
- Knowledge of the history of printing and publishing
- Good general knowledge as a background to label writing.

**Communication Skills:** From the questionnaire data it is understood that excellent written communication skills are essential for exhibition work; information professionals must possess “developed writing skills particularly for panels and labels”. Another element of the exhibition work for the participant in this case is managing staff. Communication skills are vital; much of the work to create the exhibition including the design element is undertaken by other teams. Thus the role requires good communication skills to convey the exhibition ideas to the individuals working on the exhibition.

**Creativity:** In the questionnaire response the participant stated that an “ability to gather disparate ideas into coherent exhibition proposals” as a key skill. It is essential the information professional is capable of using creative and practical thinking skills to develop coherent and workable ideas for exhibitions. Creativity is also required in the development of storylines and narratives for the exhibition, drawing upon the context of the items as well as their visual appeal to produce an informative but visually stimulating exhibition.

**Curatorial skills:** The exhibition creator needs to be skilled at both selecting of items from the collection as well as deselection.
5.3.3. Problems and Challenges of Exhibitions

Size of the Organisation: The size of the organisation compared to other library organisations causes problems for exhibition work.

“Any exhibition has so many people involved in it, it becomes hard to be fast, so many people want to have their say and need to have their say.”

National Remit: As a national library the organisation has a national remit, meaning it must provide services for the nation. Therefore its exhibitions must offer an experience or relevance to the whole country:

“[The library] has a UK role, perhaps something other libraries don’t have to worry about. We have to show engagement with all corners of the UK.”

However, being based in one place creates problems. Often it is difficult to bring a regional or national element into an exhibition as it is about a collection of objects which are in geographically removed from the majority of the population.

Partnerships: In the questionnaire response, “working with contracted interactive developers” is listed as an example of a main problem encountered. Many elements of the exhibitions are not possible without external contractors as the skills are not available in house.

5.3.4. Training

The organisation has a training programme, in which knowledge and experiences are shared and external speakers are brought in. Inexperienced staff are partnered up with experienced staff to work on a smaller scale exhibition before working on larger projects.

5.3.5. Summary of Key Points

Purpose and benefits: As a publicly funded organisation it is important for the library to make its collections available and accessible to the public. Exhibitions enable new audiences to be reached. Rather than the library being just research library for scholars, it is
positioning itself alongside museums as a visitor attraction offering an educational experience.

**Role of the information professional:** The role of the information professional is primarily as a project manager. Much of the work involves managing staff and overseeing the work of others, thus project management skills such as communication and leadership are essential.

**Problems and challenges:** The national remit is identified as the main challenge for the library. Although based in one location, the exhibitions must engage with the entire country to fulfil the organisation's national purpose. This is a challenge as it is not possible to tour exhibitions, and making them relevant to the country as a whole is not always easy. Online components are used as a solution to this problem.
6. Summary of Findings

This chapter provides a summary of the questionnaire and case study findings presented in the previous two chapters.

6.1. Meeting the Research Objectives

The findings from the data collected meet the research objectives set out in the introductory chapter. Key findings have been made about the extent to which exhibition work takes place and the involvement of the information professional through analysis of the questionnaire data. Furthermore the range of sectors in which exhibition work takes place has been identified using this data. Through analysis of the questionnaire data and case studies, findings about the skills and expertise required for exhibition work have been made in addition to the development of an overview of the main problems and challenges of this work.

6.2. Overview of Findings

The findings show that exhibitions are part of the promotional and outreach work of libraries across a wide range of sectors; however universities, special collections and public libraries are particularly engaged in this type of work. The scope and scale of exhibition work differs between libraries across all sectors. The majority of exhibitions are staged with the intention of promoting collections, thus increasing visitor numbers and engagement with collections.

The role of the information professional varies in accordance to the exhibition programme, however a large proportion of those involved in exhibitions have responsibility for the overall process, from planning to installation. Project management is a significant aspect of the work. Information professionals working for small libraries usually complete the majority of the work themselves. Even in some larger organisations such as universities, information professionals take sole responsibility for exhibition projects, calling upon other staff for assistance when necessary. Furthermore the majority of information professionals working on exhibition projects have received no training for this work, either in the workplace or externally, despite it often being a part of the job description.
It is clear from the questionnaire and case studies that each sector and each individual organisation faces their own unique set of problems. The next chapter will present a more detailed discussion of the findings of this research.
7. Discussion of Findings

7.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings from the survey and the case studies, together with the literature. However as the literature is limited in many areas to, its scope to confirm the findings is reduced. Firstly, the extent to which information professionals are involved in exhibition work across sectors is examined. The purpose of library exhibitions is discussed followed by findings regarding the benefits of exhibiting collections. The chapter then explores the problems and challenges experienced by information professionals in exhibition work. The discussion focuses on the reasons for these problems and challenges, and identifies strategies to overcome them such as training and other measures. Here findings about key skills and expertise required for exhibition work are drawn upon to inform the discussion.

7.2. Involvement of Information Professionals in Exhibitions

7.2.1. Sectors

Participants in the study represented a range of sectors. Respondents to the questionnaire provided evidence of exhibition work taking place in all library sectors. The findings drawn out of the data indicate that exhibition work is more prevalent in special collections (29%, 19), universities (26%, 17) and public libraries (17%, 11). These findings are consistent with the emphasis on exhibition work in special collections and academic libraries in the literature (Kemp and Witschi, 1997; Dukta, Hayes and Parnell, 2002; Prendergast, 2003).

There is a degree of crossover between universities and special collections, with many university libraries encompassing a special collections department as part of the service. It is not known whether respondents defining their sector as “universities” work with special collections or whether participants from special collections work within a university or other organisation. It is also important to note the problem is not confined to universities and special collections. The distinction between special collections and other sectors is also blurred. A special collection can be defined as “rare, often unique materials generally houses in secure, monitored environments” (Council for Library and Information Resources, 2008). They are generally viewed as “separate and identifiable collections” (Northumbria University, 2007). Thus the collections held by the library of a historic house or museum, for
example, could be deemed a special collection, depending on the properties of the collection. Furthermore the private membership category is comprised of responses which were marked as other in the findings and indicated membership was private. These responses included the libraries of private members clubs and private membership societies. Again depending on the characteristics of the collections these organisations may fit the definition of a special collection. With consideration of these factors it is clear that the sector with the most involvement in exhibitions (when measured in its broadest sense) is special collections. This may be because the items held in special collections are inherently more exhibitable, or because there is greater scope for holding exhibitions in this sector.

The findings illustrate the occurrence of exhibition work in other sectors, albeit to a lesser extent. Responses were received, although in much smaller numbers, from information professionals involved in exhibition work within schools and further education, business, and private membership organisations. The findings highlight the importance of collections which tell stories or have visual impact when creating a successful exhibition; all interview participants emphasised the importance of having interesting collections to exhibit, an idea which is reflected in further comments given by questionnaire participants. These views reiterate the stance held by Traue (2000), who argues that interesting exhibitions are not frequently created from library collections. It can be concluded that not all library collections are suitable for an exhibitions project. Different types of collections are held by libraries in different sectors; not all will be appropriate for an exhibition. For example the collections of a law or business library will be on the whole less visually interesting than a special collection of manuscripts or children’s literature and will therefore hold less scope for exhibitions. The exhibition potential of collections could be a factor explaining a lower response rate from some sectors. Exhibition potential is largely based on whether the library has collections with an exploitable social, cultural or historical context from which an exhibition can be created. This is arguably more likely in special collections. Thus during examination of the involvement of information professionals according to sector, consideration must be given to the fact libraries in certain sectors are less likely to hold exhibitions than others.

The distribution of the questionnaire must also be considered as a factor explaining variation in responses across sectors; the choice of distribution channels may have resulted in a bias towards the academic sector and special collections as reflected in the findings. It
is possible that other sectors are engaged in exhibition work but are not represented by this study.

### 7.2.2. Levels of Involvement

The level of involvement of information professionals in exhibition work is an area of research which is lacking, as highlighted by the literature review. Overall the range of responses about involvement was varied; however more respondents were involved as a regular ongoing aspect of their role rather than on an ad-hoc basis. It was indicated that involvement depended on availability of time and resources as well as the frequency of exhibitions. The data relating to frequency and duration of exhibitions points to a large amount of variation and no discernable pattern with regards to how often libraries hold exhibitions. This explains the diversity and variation in responses about how often participants were involved in an exhibition project. From the data it can be concluded that the level of involvement by each individual is subject to the duration and frequency required by the project. Levels of involvement are also determined by the extent to which exhibition projects are workable around other duties and demands of the library service. As this issue has not been discussed in the literature no comparisons can be drawn between the findings and existing research.

### 7.3. Purpose and Benefits of Library Exhibitions

#### 7.3.1. Purpose of Exhibitions

Almost all respondents currently involved in exhibitions (91%, 59) indicated that promotion of collections was a purpose for exhibition in the library. Other reasons for library exhibitions given in the literature are highlighted in the findings including library advocacy (or promotion of the library) and to a lesser extent education and entertainment.

This finding correlates with the literature where promotion of collections was given as a key purpose for library exhibitions. Of the six respondents for which promotion of collections was not a reason, three were from the public library sector. It is understood that these libraries open up the exhibition spaces to external groups within the community, for example local artists can hire the space to hold exhibitions of artwork. Here the exhibitions are viewed as an outreach tool to build partnerships with the community rather than a tool to promote library collections. Similarly, other libraries that do not exhibit for the purpose
of promoting collections primarily do so for the purposes of community outreach and education.

The findings indicate that 75% (49) of libraries hold exhibitions for an educational purpose whilst only 37% (24) are held to promote the library. The literature however places greater emphasis on promoting the library as a purpose than education. In the literature exhibitions are considered a key part of the strategies used by libraries to market themselves (Byrd, 2001; Dent, 2002). Exhibitions are viewed as a solution to the need for more creative and engaging marketing strategies. However the findings reveal promoting the library is not given as much priority as promoting individual collections. In some sectors, such as further education, museum libraries and historic houses, promotion of the library was not given as a reason by any respondents whereas the findings suggest it is held as a higher priority by school libraries and public libraries. The reason for this can be further understood through examination of the role of the library within its parent organisation or community. For example Case Study B, a local studies library, revealed the importance of exhibitions in raising awareness of the library service within the community. Exhibitions are a means of bringing people through the door and then showing what else the library can offer. Rather than aiming for increased use of a specific collection, exhibitions are intended to highlight the existence of the service.

The findings reveal entertainment is not a key priority for libraries. Entertainment was only listed as a purpose by one respondent, a historic house library. The reason for this is the historic house functions as a visitor attraction, thus the exhibitions must play an entertainment role within the visitor experience. As entertainment is not generally a core library function this finding is to be expected.

**7.3.2. Benefits of Exhibitions**

The findings of the study indicate exhibitions can have many benefits for libraries. This correlates with consensus identified in the literature. Within the literature the main benefits are identified as increased visibility and awareness of collections (Cleeve, 1995; Prendergast, 2003), demonstration of the value of the library (Dent, 2002), and education of staff and users (Chadbourne, 1976). Schaeffer’s (1991) four key benefits for exhibitions can be identified in the findings: aesthetics, economics, efficiency and enthusiasm are given by respondents to the questionnaire and in the case studies.
However not all opinion about library exhibitions is positive. The quotes below were given by questionnaire respondents illustrating negative opinions about library exhibitions:

“Most of the ones I’ve seen have been boring and uninformative as hell." (Health)

“Too often [I] still see cases of insufficient depth, books opened too flat, books badly supported and too much light.” (Historic House)

Cleeve stresses that “bad display work, incorrectly aimed, can do a lot of damage.” (1995: 31). Users may be put off by poor aesthetics or perceive a lack of knowledge and skills in the library staff. The findings highlight quality of exhibitions is a reoccurring problem. One of the key skills required for exhibitions is an understanding of audiences, this ensures the exhibitions are correctly targeted and meet with visitor expectations. Case Study C can be considered an example of best practice; the library conducts audience research as part of its planning process to ensure success of exhibitions. Poor exhibitions are not conducive to promoting libraries; ultimately one could negatively impact upon aesthetics, economics, efficiency and enthusiasm.

7.3.2.1. Promotion of Collections

The overall opinion of participants about the value of exhibitions as a tool for promoting collections was positive, with benefits including greater awareness of collections amongst library users and increased usage of collections indicated in the responses. Both questionnaire respondents and the participants interviewed for the case studies expressed enthusiasm for the potential of exhibition in promoting their collections, providing anecdotal evidence of the benefits. Case Study A emphasised the importance of exhibitions:

“Generating interest, generating local enthusiasm, letting people know what you’ve got to raise the profile.” (Case Study A; University/Special Collections)

The organisation benefited from exhibiting, the user base for the university special collections is believed to have increased as a result of exhibitions. Similarly Case Study B highlighted benefits citing the gaining of new users as a result of exhibitions. The
participant spoke of the importance of showcasing collections as it increases their visibility, encouraging increased usage. Gaining new users as a result of promoting collections is paramount in this case; the participant explained local studies libraries have a regular drop off rate of users as often people use the library temporarily for a specific project.

The findings also reveal that many libraries surveyed are part of publically funded organisations; there is an obligation to make collections accessible to the public. Promotion of collections is therefore a main purpose of library exhibitions. Case studies A and C highlight this issue, citing their responsibility as publically funded organisations to give something back to the communities of which they are a part.

Despite the many benefits listed by participants, not all responses alluded to benefits as a result of exhibitions; one questionnaire respondent commented on their experience of exhibitions in a university library:

> “Often I wasn’t sure whether they [exhibitions] were the best way to promote the collection.” (Universities)

The participant questions whether the input of time and resources is equal to the gains. A good exhibition requires a large amount of effort and resources to be effective in promoting collections. The benefits may not be forthcoming for libraries that do not have the resources to implement the project effectively.

### 7.3.2.2. Promotion of the Library Service

Closely linked to promotion of collections is the promotion of the library service. The literature suggests promoting the library is a common purpose of exhibitions, however the findings show less than half (37%, 24) are held for this purpose. Similar economic benefits may be seen when exhibitions aim to promote the library service. However, promoting specific collections may prove more beneficial as specific potential user groups can be more easily targeted. Nonetheless, exhibitions can be useful in raising the profile of a library within the community. Case Study B stresses the importance of promoting the library as a whole and raising awareness of its existence.

> “Local history has a drop off rate of users so [we] need to continue to gain new users.” (Case Study B; Local Studies/Public Library)
In this case exhibitions form a core part of the library’s strategy to draw in new users. A similar strategy was found in Case Study C, the library uses exhibitions as a way of introducing the library to a new user base that it would not ordinarily be able to reach through promoting its collections.

7.3.2.3. Education of Staff

“I have always felt that exhibitions are hugely important, not just for promoting the collection, and engaging new audiences, but for the opportunity it gives staff to increase their knowledge of their collections.” (Special Collections)

Analysis of responses to the questionnaire indicates educational benefits for those involved. Exhibitions require information professionals to really know what is held in the collections and develop a good level of background knowledge about them. This corroborates with the literature where Chadbourne (1976) and Prendergast (2003) identify educating staff as a benefit of exhibition work. This benefit was highlighted by the participants of case studies A and B; both indicated that working on exhibitions has proved to be a learning process where exhibition work provided the opportunity to learn more about the collections and develop expert knowledge.

7.4. Problems and Challenges of Library Exhibitions

Despite the benefits of exhibitions many problems and challenges remain. The questionnaire identified a range of problems and challenges.

“Every exhibition has its own challenges.” (Special Collections)

One respondent commented that each exhibition comes with its own set of challenges, a concept which can be applied to the topic as a whole. Each exhibition, library and sector is bound by its own set of circumstances which present challenges for the information professional. Problems and challenges for an exhibition stem from a range of factors including the choice of topic, available time and resources, space, other library projects and work commitments. In support of this idea the case studies illustrate the individual nature of the problems faced, highlighting the relationship between organisational context and problems encountered whilst undertaking exhibition work.
Problems and challenges identified during the study can be split into three main categories: the challenge of displaying library collections, resources, and people.

7.4.1. Library Collections

7.4.1.1. Aesthetics

The findings suggest a key challenge for information professionals creating exhibitions is ensuring library collections look interesting when on display. According to Traue (2000) the display of library materials is problematic as library collections often do not lend themselves towards exhibitions. Books and manuscripts do not have the same visual appeal as artefacts found in museums. Prendergast states “eye appeal is of paramount importance,” (1995: 31) as engagement with exhibitions begins with visual stimulus. Participants commented on the challenge of ensuring exhibitions are engaging for the visitor:

“Difficulty of making cases containing open books look varied and engaging.” (National Library)

Case Study C expands on the challenges presented when displaying library collections; visual appeal is difficult to achieve as books become flat and 2D when on display as they can only be displayed from one perspective. You can either have the book open, but to only to one page, or closed showing the binding. Without multiple copies you cannot display both. There is also risk of a “butterfly effect of everything looking the same” (Case Study C; National Library) which will result in the visitor losing interest. Cleeve (1995) shares this view, stressing the importance of variety. Similar skills are emphasised as important in Case Study A. The questionnaire results highlight design skills and an aesthetic eye as core skills. Participants expressed an interest in more training opportunities for design; however some believed it is an area which is difficult to teach so training opportunities would not be highly beneficial.

7.4.1.2. Interpretation

Further to the issue of training, the findings indicate a greater awareness of exhibition theory could prove beneficial in overcoming the challenges of exhibition work. Some questionnaire respondents indicated that broader knowledge of the theoretical aspects of exhibitions would improve their exhibition work. However as the literature review
highlights exhibition theory is aimed at museum professionals. The case studies illustrated the importance of creating themes and storylines for exhibitions, a task for which interpretation is a key skill. For example Case Study B emphasised the importance of drawing up local connections as part of the interpretation of the collection when creating a storyline.

In the literature Greenblatt’s (1991) theory of resonance and wonder is discussed as a framework for categorising exhibitions. The case studies suggest that library exhibitions fall into the resonance category. Collections are exhibited with a view to sparking ideas, creating connections and sharing knowledge (Greenblatt, 1991; Traue, 2000). Case Study B draws upon elements of the collection which resonate with the community whilst Case Study A often adopts a similar approach, exploiting local connections to give the exhibitions appeal. Only the exhibitions of Case Study C can be viewed as ‘wonder’ exhibitions; the library has a permanent display of treasures which are more likely to be invoke a wonder response from the viewer. However, exhibitions held by Case Study C do also fall into the resonance category as they seek to educate and impart knowledge. In the literature Prendergast (2003) discusses the importance of considering how appealing the exhibition will be for the community, and focusing the choice of themes and storylines on topics which will resonate with the target audience. From this evidence it can be argued that information professionals must have a solid understanding of exhibition theory; of interpretation, themes, and audiences to create an exhibition which is most effective.

7.4.1.3. Preservation and Conservation

The quote below from Case Study A illustrates the another challenge posed by library collections;

“The material is rare, it’s old, it’s valuable, and some of it’s quite fragile. It is about making sure the environmental conditions are right, the lighting is right, the security is acceptable.” (Case Study A; University/Special Collections)
The questionnaire also highlights this issue with respondents stating the importance of possessing knowledge of preservation and conservation issues:

“Knowledge of conservation [is the] best practice for the display of library material.” (National Library)

“Understanding of the impact of environmental conditions on display.” (Special Collections)

Most items from library collections can only be exhibited with consideration for practical issues; therefore it is important information professionals are knowledgeable. To ensure the preservation of items, the exhibition must have appropriate environmental conditions and use of the right display equipment is paramount. Issues of security must also be considered to ensure collection items are not put at risk of theft, loss or damage by being put on display. Respondents indicated training on practical issues relating to preservation and conservation would be beneficial. Findings relating to training opportunities reveal over half the respondents (66%, 58) have received no training for exhibitions. More training opportunities are clearly a recommended strategy for overcoming issues arising from lack of knowledge and expertise.

7.4.2. Resources

Analysis of the findings reveals time, money and display equipment as other limitations for exhibition work; this confirms the findings from the literature in which Chadbourne (1976), Cleeve (1995) and Dent (2002) highlight availability of resources as a limitation.

Time is a major concern for those involved in exhibitions, across all sectors. Dent (2002) considers managing exhibition work alongside other duties of the job to be a major challenge, an idea which is confirmed by the findings of the questionnaire. 44% (42) of respondents cite time restrictions as a challenge to exhibition work. Finding time to work on exhibitions whilst undertaking other core responsibilities of the job is particularly difficult, particularly for those working solo or in small organisations. Often for the solo information professional less time can be dedicated to exhibitions as it is important that provision of other services is not compromised.

A small budget or even a non-existent budget for exhibition work is another challenge which information professionals commonly face according to the findings of the study. The participant in Case Study B emphasised financial constraints are a major limitation on what
can be achieved. In this case the organisation has no budget for exhibition work apart from
when larger exhibits are taking place. Thus information professionals involved in exhibition
projects need to be able to employ creativity and imagination to work with limited budgets
and resources. Cleeve (1995) recommends a contingency budget as costs can be extensive
and increase easily, however this may not be practical for those working with an already
limited budget. This finding is to be expected given the continual and increasing financial
pressures facing libraries across all sectors (CIBER, 2009; Research Information Network,
2010).

7.4.3. People

7.4.3.1. Staff

Respondents indicated that not having enough staff was a problem restricting the scope to
develop exhibitions to their full potential. Many libraries, in particular small organisations,
do not have enough staff to commit to exhibition work on an ongoing basis. In many small
organisations information professionals undertake exhibition work on their own. One
respondent commented that:

“In a small library or special collection, a few generalists often
have to do the work of many specialists.” (Special Collections)

To refer back to the museum literature, Boylan (2010) states that exhibition work is
becoming increasingly professionalised. The national library investigated in Case Study C is
increasingly bringing in staff from the museums sector possessing the required expert skills.
For most libraries this is not an option, therefore other solutions such as training and advice
networks may need to be improved to alleviate potential problems. Several respondents
indicated they take responsibility for the entire exhibition process, from the initial ideas to
planning and installation, meaning a highly rounded and well developed skill set is required.
The findings reveal one library is planning to overcome the challenge of staff availability by
taking an altogether different approach:

“One of many areas that we’re considering may be suitable for
volunteers to be involved in.” (Public Library)

This model, whilst effective in ensuring exhibition work remains an activity of the library,
does not overcome the issue of money and appropriate resources. In contrast larger
organisations such as the national library, examined in Case Study C, are increasingly outsourcing exhibition projects to experienced contractors. A concern which develops from this finding is that the use of volunteers may result in lower quality exhibitions. Exhibition design is a professionalised area requiring training and experience. Cleeve (1995) states a poor exhibition can be damaging; if volunteers do not possess the skills to create successful exhibitions, the quality of the exhibition may be compromised as could the reputation of the library.

Respondents also highlighted having too many staff involved in the exhibition projects as a problem. Large project teams often lead to the slowing down of the process as there are too many decision makers and too many points of view to consider.

“Exhibitions are also quite resource-heavy and usually involve a number of different colleagues - so ensuring that there everyone knows what they need to do and by when is essential.” (Universities)

This issue is identified by Dent (2002) who cites external partnerships and collaborations as a challenge for exhibitions. This is further evident from Case Study C.

“Any exhibition has so many people involved in it, it becomes hard to be fast, so many people want to have their say and need to have their say.” (Case Study C; National Library)

Here exhibition projects involve large numbers of staff, drawn from different departments in the library as well as external contractors. Several respondents emphasised the importance of interpersonal skills such as teamwork and communication for exhibition work. These skills are essential in preventing and overcoming problems related to having large numbers of staff involved.

7.4.3.2. The Skills Gap

The museum literature places great emphasis on skills and expertise for exhibition work, in line with the professionalisation of the work (Dean, 1996). Information professionals need to possess the right skills and expertise for exhibition work. The findings illustrate lack of skills is a problem, which confirms the suggestion of Schaeffer (1991) that skills for exhibitions are not possessed by information professionals.
Lack of skills for exhibition work may result in poor exhibitions which will not be beneficial for the library, as Cleeve (1995) highlights, a poor exhibition can be damaging. Information professionals considering exhibiting need to understand what makes a good exhibition and how to create a successful exhibition.

The findings point to a number of solutions including training and outsourcing. Case Study C is an example of the use of outsourcing to overcome the problem of not all the essential skills being available in house. Training is the most obvious solution to remedy the lack of skills for exhibition work, however cost and availability of training is currently an issue. As 66% (58) respondents have received no training it is clear that training is not currently available or accessible for information professionals. This is attributed to a lack of useful and cost effective training opportunities. The findings of Case Studies A and B highlight a reliance on informal guidance, for example seeking advice from colleagues rather than formal training opportunities. Case Study C can be viewed as a model of best practice for training; the organisation ensures all involved in exhibitions are trained in house. Training includes mentoring in which inexperienced staff are partnered with more experienced colleagues to work on a small exhibition before undertaking large scale projects. When asked about what training would be of benefit, many cited practical training to acquire more skills, for example training in aesthetics and design, display techniques, and handling materials.

**7.4.4. Support for Exhibition Work**

Cleeve notes that many within the profession regard exhibition work as a “frivolous, non-cost-effective pastime.” (1995: 32). Findings drawn from the questionnaire data indicate this view is a problem for some information professionals involved in exhibitions.

“More support from managers is necessary.” (Special Collections)

The participant quoted above felt that management support is essential; without it exhibition projects cannot be fully successful. For an exhibition to be effective in raising the profile of libraries, the participant believes they must be highly professional, well planned and visually appealing. This is only possible with support from management to enable the appropriate resources to be utilised. According to Dent (2002) exhibitions
should be a key part of a libraries strategy to prove its value and relevance whilst the benefits of exhibitions are clear from the findings of this study. Management should be more supportive of the activity as exhibitions can be a highly beneficial activity. Cleeve warns that those wishing to embark on exhibition projects “must be prepared to justify a display project to the library management.” (1995: 32). As well as providing justification from management, support must also be sought from colleagues.

“[We receive] little support from colleagues or superiors, who often do not appreciate the amount of time and work necessary to set up an exhibition.” (Special Collections)

As with support from management, the support of colleagues is essential, particularly if towards the opening of an exhibition when the workload will intensify, assistance in covering other core duties is required from the remainder of the library staff. Many questionnaire respondents indicated they must balance exhibition project with other duties; it is to be expected therefore that colleagues’ support and assistance will be required.

7.5. Summary of Key Discussion Points

This study found that exhibition work mostly occurs in special collections, universities and public libraries. Information professionals are also involved in exhibition work in national libraries whilst involvement occurs in other sectors but to a much lesser extent. The reason for this is that information professionals must be able to exploit the visual appeal and interesting stories of collections to create an exhibition. It is thought that the items held in special collections, as well as universities and national libraries, are more likely to be appropriate for exhibitions. Although the level of involvement varies, for many exhibition work is large part of the job, taking place on a regular basis alongside the day to day running of the library service.

From the findings it is clear that exhibitions are a core activity for many libraries, making a significant contribution to marketing and promotional strategies as well as to educational and outreach work. The main reason for libraries to hold exhibitions is to promote collections. Education and community outreach are also key reasons for exhibiting. It is clear from the findings that most exhibitions are multi-purpose, generally aiming to promote collections whilst offering educational value. Whereas the literature cites
promotion of the library as a key purpose for exhibiting, the findings of the study reveal this
reason to be given less focus in practice.

The study has found many benefits of exhibitions for libraries, primarily increased
awareness and usage of the library as a result of exhibiting. The educational benefit for the
information professional is also understood to be a benefit of exhibiting, increased
knowledge of collections is cited by many as a benefit to working on an exhibition project.
The findings about the benefits of exhibitions correlate with the literature. However for the
benefits to be realised the information professional must possess certain key skills and
expertise, not normally associated with the traditional skills of a librarian, such as design
skills, aesthetic vision and interpretation expertise.

The study found the key problems and challenges faced by information professionals to be
primarily related to either insufficient resources, such as a lack of space and equipment, or
restrictions on the time staff could give to exhibition work. Increased support from
management could be a solution to some of these problems. However increasing budgetary
pressures as a result of the current economic climate prevent many libraries from allocating
additional financial support and resources to exhibition work. The solution of using
volunteers has potential however concerns about skills and expertise are a factor for
consideration. Another key issue was identified as a lack of the right skills to undertake the
work effectively. It was found that respondents felt more training could benefit them and
help reduce the problems resulting from not having the right skills. Finally library
collections present a challenge for exhibition work, with issues concerning suitability for
exhibiting and preservation as key limiting factors.

This chapter discusses the findings from the survey and the case studies together with the
literature presented in the previous chapters and the findings of the literature review.
Firstly, Findings about the extent to which information professionals are involved in
exhibition work across sectors will be first examined. The purpose of library exhibitions will
then be discussed followed by findings regarding about the benefits of exhibiting
collections. The chapter will then explore the problems and challenges experienced by
information professionals involved in exhibition work. The discussion focuses on
discussing the reasons for these problems and challenges, and means to overcome them
such as, as well as findings about how they can be overcome through training and other
measures. Here findings about key skills and expertise required for exhibition work will be
drawn upon to inform the discussion.
8. Conclusions

8.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses how the aims and objectives of the research have been met and examines the conclusions which can be drawn from the results of the research. The chapter also considers the contribution of the study to the topic and makes recommendations for further research. Recommendations for improved practice in libraries are made based on the conclusions as well as recommendations for further research.

8.2. Summary of the Aims and Objectives

The study successfully achieved its aim of investigating exhibitions in libraries from the perspective of the information professional. An understanding of the skills and expertise required for exhibition work has been developed, and an overview of the challenges faced by information professionals engaged in this type of work established.

As the topic has not previously been extensively researched and the literature is largely anecdotal there is a lack of substantial evidence from the literature to support many of the conclusions which have developed from the findings of the study.

8.2.1. Objective 1: Scope of Exhibition Work in Libraries

The study has shown that exhibition work occurs across all library sectors however exhibitions are more prevalent in special collections, as well as universities and public libraries than other sectors due to the collections being more appropriate for exhibiting. Whilst exhibitions can hold many benefits for libraries, exhibitions will only be successful in attracting visitors if they are interesting. It is clear from both the literature and the findings of the study that not all libraries hold collections which have enough appeal to make an exhibition a worthwhile activity.

The findings clearly show exhibition work is a valuable and beneficial activity for libraries, forming a key part of strategies for marketing the library’s collections and services. Exhibitions are also used as a strategy to further community outreach, allowing greater scope for engagement with the community. Moreover, they allow partnerships to be developed across organisations and within the local community
8.2.2. **Objective 2: Role of the Information Professional**

Exhibitions have a role as a core library activity, both from a promotional and an educational perspective. The study has found that many information professionals are heavily involved in exhibition work on a regular basis, with the aim of either promoting particular collections or offering added value to the service provided by the library. The study has identified no specific pattern of involvement in exhibition work; there is great variation in the frequency of involvement in exhibition work and in the roles undertaken. It is concluded that levels of involvement are largely determined by various factors. The scope and scale of the project is a key determinant to the level of involvement required. Another is the extent to which exhibition projects are workable around other duties and demands of the library service.

8.2.3. **Objective 3: Key Skills and Expertise.**

The study has identified a range of core key skills and expertise for exhibition work which fall under the following five categories: practical skills, project management skills, interpersonal skills, creativity, and knowledge. Whilst some of the core skills are general transferable skills which information professionals will be able to apply from other areas of their work, others are not normally associated with the information profession. The findings highlight the importance of developing skills and expertise more commonly associated with the museum profession. These findings correlate with suggestions made in the literature about the skills required for exhibition work. However, little detail is given in the literature about how information professionals involved in exhibition work acquire and develop these skills. The findings highlight a lack of training opportunities; levels of training for exhibition work were low and many respondents felt they would benefit from further training if it were available. It is concluded that training tailored to libraries would be beneficial in helping reduce the skills gap problem. The findings suggest training which addresses practical skills such as installation and book display would benefit information professionals would be beneficial.

8.2.4. **Objective 4: Problems and Challenges.**

The findings of the study confirm the points made in the literature relating to the problems and challenges which information professionals encounter during exhibition projects. The key problems are associated with lack of or limited resources, particularly space and
appropriate display equipment. Insufficient time and restrictive budgets are also significant limitations to the scope of exhibition work in libraries. Other problems were related to staff; insufficient skills and lack of expertise are major challenges for the information professional. It can be concluded that these problems have an impact on the benefits of exhibitions. For an exhibition to be beneficial to the library, it is generally agreed that it must be both interesting and executed to a high standard. If exhibitions in libraries are of a poor quality there is potential for a negative impact on the reputation of the library service. Even if a poor quality exhibition does not impact negatively upon economic factors, a poorly executed exhibition that does not achieve its aim of promoting the library collections results in an inefficient use of staff time and resources. Therefore it is vital for information professionals to possess the skills and expertise to overcome the challenges encountered. It is concluded that a number of strategies can help including increased training, greater availability of guidance and information, and support from management and colleagues.

8.3. Contribution to the Topic

As highlighted in the literature review, up-to-date research about exhibitions in libraries is limited. There is currently no research examining the involvement of information professionals in exhibition work, or about the skills and expertise required for the work. There is also no substantial evidence concerning the problems and challenges encountered by information professionals involved in exhibition work. The existing body of literature on the topic is largely anecdotal whilst much of it is outdated. Therefore this study makes a significant contribution to the topic, providing a comprehensive overview of the key issues. Furthermore, whilst the existing body of literature is limited and outdated, the findings of this study do correlate with the key points in the literature. Many of the problems and challenges identified by the study are highlighted in the literature, including problems cited in the older literature, for example Chadbourne (1976) and Schaeffer (1991). The problems faced by information professionals involved in exhibition work have not changed greatly over the last couple of decades
8.4. Recommendations

The following recommendations are forwarded, based on the findings of the evidence collected.

8.4.1. Recommendations for Libraries

- It is recommended that libraries aim to provide access to training or guidance for information professionals involved in exhibition projects to ensure exhibitions are effective and successful.
- The creation and implementation of a library exhibitions policy setting out guidelines for all aspects of exhibition work is recommended. Policy documents provide staff with a framework to work towards and help ensure consistency and quality in exhibition work.
- Visitor research is recommended to ensure exhibitions are fulfilling their intended purposes.

8.4.2. Recommendations for Further Research

- The research could be developed further through a larger scale study, involving a larger and more comprehensive survey to develop a more detailed picture of the extent of exhibition work in libraries.
- Investigation through more in-depth case studies could be beneficial towards developing greater understanding of the implications for information professionals.
- Further research into the current training provision for information professionals involved in exhibition work would be beneficial in developing recommendations for improvements in this area. A greater understanding of the requirements for, and the availability and benefits of training would provide a clearer picture of how training programmes can be developed.
- Further investigation of the benefits of exhibitions in libraries would be beneficial in establishing a case for the value of the work.
- Online exhibitions are growing increasingly popular as a supplement or alternative to physical exhibitions. Development of this study by researching the role of the information professional in relation to both physical and online exhibitions would be beneficial.

Word Count = 24,902
Bibliography


## Appendix A. Problems and Challenges of Exhibition Work in the Literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem/Challenge</th>
<th>Critic</th>
<th>Key ideas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time</strong></td>
<td>Chadbourne (1976)</td>
<td>Exhibition work is limited as other work takes priority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dent (2002)</td>
<td>Working on exhibition alongside other workload can be challenging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Money</strong></td>
<td>Cleeve (1995)</td>
<td>Contingency budget is essential as costs can be extensive and increase easily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Space</strong></td>
<td>Chadbourne (1976)</td>
<td>Accessible and visible space is essential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prendergast (2003)</td>
<td>Environmental factors such as temperature, lighting and humidity are a potential risk to items on display</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Skills and Training</strong></td>
<td>Dent (2002)</td>
<td>Inexperience of the librarian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Putting together the exhibition</strong></td>
<td>Cleeve (1995)</td>
<td>Problems commonly occur when designing an exhibition, particularly lack of focus, lack of variety, and lack of currency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Byrd (2001)</td>
<td>Often required to deal with a backlog of uncatalogued and unprocessed items before exhibiting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dent (2002)</td>
<td>Selecting and interpreting information for labels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prendergast (2003)</td>
<td>Impossible to include everything; deselection is as crucial as selection when choosing items for display</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Canavan (2010)</td>
<td>Exhibition items are often fragile, delicate or rare raising the access versus preservation debate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Targeting the audience</strong></td>
<td>Byrd (2001)</td>
<td>Challenge to make exhibitions appealing and relevant to the interests of the organisation, the individual and the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prendergast (2003)</td>
<td>Must be comprehensible to both the expert and layman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Partnerships with external organisations</strong></td>
<td>Dent (2002)</td>
<td>Loan of items from other organisation can place restrictions on exhibition scope or duration, create logistical problems and indemnity issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Perception of exhibitions value</strong></td>
<td>Cleeve (1995)</td>
<td>Exhibitions undervalued by the profession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Byrd (1991)</td>
<td>Not deemed a core library activity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B. Copy of Questionnaire

Introduction

Dear respondent,

I am currently undertaking research into the experiences of library staff involved in exhibition work my MA Librarianship dissertation.

This survey aims to collect information on the subject to gain an insight into the scope of exhibition work in libraries and investigate the challenges or problems faced by information professionals involved in this type of work.

Responses are welcomed from any information professional that is currently or has previously been involved in exhibition work within libraries. Exhibitions can be either physical or digital exhibitions. Experiences can include any activities related to exhibitions within a library. Any level of experience or involvement of exhibition work is welcome, regardless of the scale of the project or the scope of involvement.

All responses will be treated anonymously and data confidentiality will be maintained. The survey should take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. Please email lip10ljw@sheffield.ac.uk with any queries relating to this research.

Many thanks for taking the time to complete the survey.

Page 1

I confirm that I have read the information provided about this study in the invitation email and understand the purpose of the research. I understand that my answers will be treated confidentially and that I have the right to withdraw from this study by contacting the researcher at: lip10ljw@sheffield.ac.uk

Radio button style used to limit responses to one answer

( ) I agree to participate in this research and for my answers to be analysed
( ) I do not agree to participate in this research (please close browser to end the survey)
Page 2

Question 1: Are you currently involved in exhibition work?
Radio button used to limit responses to one answer

( ) Yes
( ) No

Question 2: Have you previously been involved in exhibition work?
Radio button used to limit responses to one answer

( ) Yes
( ) No

Page logic: If NO to both Q1 & 2 direct to end of survey.
If NO to Q1 direct to Question 3.
If YES to Q1 skip Q3 and go straight to Question 4.

Page 3

Question 3: If you are not currently involved in exhibition work are there any specific reasons for this?
Free text essay style response

Page 4

In this section you will be asked to respond to questions about the exhibitions. Please select the answers appropriate to your current or most recent role involving exhibition work.

Question 4: In which sector are you currently working?
Radio button to limit response to one answer

( ) Public libraries

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Question 5: Are you or have you been involved in exhibition work in this sector?

Radio button to limit responses to one answer

( ) Yes
( ) No

Question 6: Have you been involved with exhibition work in any other sector?

Please select all that apply.

Checkbox to allow for multiple answers

[ ] Public libraries
[ ] Universities
[ ] Further education
[ ] Schools
[ ] Commercial and business
[ ] Government
[ ] Health
[ ] Law
[ ] Special collections
[ ] Other (please specify) ___________________

[ ] N/A
In this section please select the answers most appropriate to your current or most recent role involving exhibition work.

Question 7: What type of exhibition does the library normally hold?

Please select all that apply.

Checkbox to allow for multiple answers

[ ] Physical
[ ] Online
[ ] Both
[ ] Other (please specify) ______________

Question 8: Approximately how often does the library hold an exhibition?

Radio button used to limit responses to one answer

( ) More than once a month
( ) Between once a month and every three months
( ) Between every three and every six months
( ) Between every six months and once a year
( ) Don’t know
( ) Other (please specify) ______________

Question 9: Approximately how long does an exhibition normally last for?

Radio button used to limit responses to one answer

( ) Less than 1 week
( ) Between 1 week and 1 month
( ) Between 1 month and 3 months
( ) Longer than 3 months
( ) Don’t know
( ) Other (please specify) ______________
Question 10: Does the library have a permanent exhibition space?

Radio button used to limit responses to one answer

( ) Yes
( ) No
( ) Don’t Know

Question 11: Please could you provide further details about the spaces used to hold exhibitions with the library.

Free text essay style response

Page 6

In this section please select the answers most appropriate to your current or most recent role involving exhibition work.

Question 12: What is the aim or purpose of the exhibitions?

Please select all that apply.

Checkbox to allow for multiple answers

[ ] Promotion of collection(s)
[ ] Promotion of library service
[ ] Education
[ ] Community outreach
[ ] Commemorative exhibition
[ ] Other (please specify) ____________________
Question 13: Are supplementary materials produced to complement the exhibition?

Radio button used to limit responses to one answer

( ) Yes
( ) Sometimes
( ) Never

Question 14: What types of supplementary materials are created to complement exhibitions?

Please select all that apply.

Checkbox to allow for multiple answers

[ ] Information leaflet
[ ] Guidebook
[ ] Website
[ ] Podcast
[ ] Other

In this section you will be asked to respond to questions relating to your role within exhibition work. Please select answers most appropriate to your current or most recent role involving exhibition work.

Question 15: How frequently are you involved in exhibition work?

Free text short answer style response

Question 16: Could you please provide details about the nature of your involvement in exhibition work?

Free text essay style response
Question 17: Is exhibition work included within your current job description?

Radio button used to limit responses to one answer

( ) Yes
( ) No
( ) Don't Know

Question 18: Has exhibition work been included in job descriptions for previous roles?

Radio button used to limit responses to one answer

( ) Yes
( ) No
( ) Don't Know

Page 9

In this section you will be asked to respond to questions about your experiences of training relating to exhibition work.

Question 19: Have you received training in the workplace for exhibition work?

Radio button used to limit responses to one answer

( ) Yes
( ) No
( ) Don't Know

Question 20: How satisfied are you with the training available in your organisation relating to exhibition work?

Radio button used to limit responses to one answer

( ) Very Satisfied
Question 21: Have you attended external training events related to exhibition work?

Radio button used to limit responses to one answer

( ) Yes
( ) No
( ) Don’t Know

Question 22: How satisfied are you with external training opportunities related to exhibition work?

Radio button used to limit responses to one answer

( ) Very Satisfied
( ) Satisfied
( ) Neutral
( ) Dissatisfied
( ) Very Dissatisfied
( ) Not Applicable

Question 23: Would you like more training for exhibition work?

Radio button used to limit responses to one answer

( ) Yes
( ) No
( ) Don’t Know

Question 24: If yes, please explain what training you feel would benefit you?

Free text essay style response
106
In this section you will be asked about exhibitions and the role of the information professional.

**Question 25:** What skills and expertise do you think are important to have for exhibition work?

Free text essay style response

**Question 26:** What are the main challenges or problems you have faced in undertaking exhibition work?

Free text essay style response

Thank you for your participation in this survey.

Do you have any other comments relating to exhibitions in libraries?

If you would be willing to participate in interviews for this research project please enter your email address below.

__________________________________________

Thank You!

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this research. Your responses are greatly appreciated.
Appendix C. Sample Interview Guide

This interview will cover in more detail the ideas explored in the online survey which you recently completed.

There is a set of questions, but I am happy to side track if necessary. Please elaborate on anything you feel is necessary to give as full answers as you can.

Any questions please ask at any time.

I will make a few notes but will let the recorder capture everything. If you wish to stop the interview then please let me know.

**TURN RECORDER ON**

Introductory questions

- How much experience do you have of exhibition work?
- Could you tell me about any current or future exhibitions at your library?

Involvement in exhibition work

- Could you briefly talk me through the typical process for an exhibition?
- Could you explain what your role within the exhibition process entails?
  - Which elements are your responsibility?

Further questions depending on the participants’ involvement with exhibitions

- How do you plan what exhibitions to hold?
- How do you select materials for exhibition?
- How do you display the materials?
- How are the exhibitions promoted?

**Skills**

- What are the important skills for exhibition work?
Why are these skills important?

Problems and Challenges

- How does exhibition work fit in with the day to day responsibilities of your role?
  - How much of your time is spent working on exhibitions?
  - What is the balance between exhibitions and other work?

- What are the main problems you have encountered whilst working with exhibitions?
  - Time
  - Financial Cost
  - Handling and presentation of materials
  - Lack of resources – money, space, display furniture etc
  - Publicity/attracting visitors
  - Lack of skills and training
  - Disruption to other services

- Have you overcome these problems?
  - How?

Skills, Training and Guidance

- Are you aware of any training opportunities for exhibition work?

- When working on exhibitions are there any sources you use for information or advice for exhibition work?
  - E.g. websites, books, colleagues...
  - Is information or advice easy to find?
  - Is it useful?

- Do you think there is a need for more advice and guidance to be made available?

Concluding question

- Is exhibition work a valuable activity for libraries to engage in?

- Is there anything else you think is important to mention about your work with exhibitions?

Thank you, that’s the end of the interview.
Appendix D. Copy of Information Sheet for Participants

An investigation into exhibition work in libraries to and the challenges for information professionals.

Outline

You are being invited to take part in interviews for a research project in follow up to an online survey ‘Surveying the Experiences of Information Professionals Involved in Library Exhibition Work’. Before you decide to participate it is important to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information before agreeing to participate. If you choose to participate a consent form will be signed to confirm this understanding.

What is the purpose of the research project?

This research is being undertaken for a dissertation research project which forms part of the MA Librarianship at the University of Sheffield. The research project aims to develop greater understanding of the challenges presented by exhibition work for information professionals.

What will be required if I participate?

An interview lasting approximately 30 minutes will be conducted at a time to suit you, ideally at your place of work to allow the researcher to observe any current exhibitions or exhibition preparations if possible.

Why have I been chosen and do I have to take part?

Respondents to the online survey who have chosen to leave an email address if interested in further participation have been invited to be interviewed. Participation is voluntary and there is no obligation to take part in an interview.

Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential and what will happen to the data collected?

The interview will be recorded to allow the researcher to analyse the data at a later date. All data will be treated with respect for confidentiality and you will not be personally
identified in any reports. Data will be kept secure and appropriately destroyed upon completion of the project.

**Does the project have ethics approval?**

The project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Sheffield Information School ethics review procedure. The University’s Ethics Committee monitors the application of the University’s Ethics Review procedure. The project is classed as low-risk and should not cause harm or distress to participants.

Laura Williams (Researcher) lip10ljw@sheffield.ac.uk

Barbara Sen (Supervisor) b.a.sen@sheffield.ac.uk

*Thank you for taking part in this research*
Appendix E. Participant Consent Form

Project Title: An investigation into the challenges of exhibition work for information professionals

Name of Researcher: Laura Williams

Participant Identification Number for this project: ______________

1. I confirm that I have read and fully understand the information sheet explaining the above research project. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition I understand I am free to decline to answer any particular question or questions if I do not wish to give information.

3. I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.

4. I agree for this interview to be recorded. The audio recordings of interviews compiled for this research will be used only for analysis and then deleted upon completion of the project.

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

________________________________        _____________________________
Name of Participant                        Signature                        Date

________________________________        _____________________________
Lead Researcher                              Signature                                         Date

To be signed and dated in presence of the participant.
### Appendix F. Overall Involvement in Exhibitions Sector

#### Breakdown

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sectors</th>
<th>Overall Responses</th>
<th>Currently Involvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Universities</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Collections</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Library</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Library</td>
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<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Membership</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial and Business</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further Education</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Government</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Museum</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historic House</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seminary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>total</strong></td>
<td><strong>96</strong></td>
<td><strong>65</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix G. Key Skills and Expertise

The tables below provide an overview of the findings from the questionnaire in relation to key skills and expertise for exhibition work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SKILLS</th>
<th>Writing Skills</th>
<th>Research Skills</th>
<th>Design Skills</th>
<th>Web Skills</th>
<th>Marketing/ Publicity/Promotion</th>
<th>Technical/Manual Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Practical Skills</td>
<td>“ability to write concise, informative and even entertaining labels for a variety of audience” (Museum)</td>
<td>“ability to research background and context” (Universities)</td>
<td>“an eye for visually appealing material” (Museum)</td>
<td>“web skills for online presentation” (Universities)</td>
<td>“good promotional /PR skills” (Public Library)</td>
<td>“be handy with a Stanley knife and polyboard” (Museum)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Planning and Organisation</td>
<td>“project planning skills” (National Library)</td>
<td>“good organisation and planning” (Public Library)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Managing Staff</td>
<td>“people and communication skills” (Schools)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>“good communication skills” (Universities)</td>
<td>“communication skills (especially when presenting exhibition ideas)” (Museum)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td>“ability to collaborate with people from other organisations and sectors” (National Library)</td>
<td>“ability to liaise and relate to partners and contributors…teamwork!” (Special Collections)</td>
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</table>
## EXPERTISE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KNOWLEDGE</th>
<th>Collection Knowledge</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “Knowledge of collection, ability to present that knowledge.” (Special Collections)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “Knowledge of collections of institution and how to research them.” (National Library)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject Knowledge</td>
<td>“Broad knowledge of subject area.” (Special Collections)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Preservation and Conservation Knowledge</td>
<td>• “an awareness of the preservation needs of the items.” (Special Collections)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• “understanding the structure and conservation needs of the items to be displayed” (Special Collections)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• “expertise in handling and display of materials” (Special Collections)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Audience Knowledge</td>
<td>• “Knowledge of different audiences and their needs” (Universities)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “empathy with visitors’ expectations” (Special Collections)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CREATIVITY</td>
<td>Creativity and Imagination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “Imagination” (National Library)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “an eye for visually-appealing material” (Universities)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “creative thinking” (Universities)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• “imagination and creativity” (Law)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• “a creative approach which is informed an awareness of appropriate ways of presenting material for different audiences” (Special Collections)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “imaginative selection of subjects &amp; themes for displays”</td>
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