

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE PERCEPTION HELD BY THE  
LIBRARIANS AT LEEDS LIBRARIES OF THEIR ROLE AS  
REGARDS THE TEACHING OF INFORMATION LITERACY

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## **Abstract**

### **Background**

Public libraries have gone through considerable changes over the last twenty years, due to advances in technology and cuts in government funding. The result has been a diversification of public library services and the redundancy of some of the more traditional duties of public librarians. Information literacy emerged as key in this context, but the literature indicates a gap in the research as regards the teaching of related skills in public libraries.

### **Aims**

The aim of this study was to investigate the perceptions public librarians hold of their role as regards the teaching of information literacy. This was done by looking at one public library authority, Leeds Libraries, as a case study in order to provide a small scale analysis on the subject. This research aimed to contribute to a clarification of the feelings of public library staff on this issue, also in the hope that an insight into Leeds Libraries might benefit studies into the experiences of other public libraries.

### **Methods**

A review of the literature was carried out in order to identify key themes and concepts, following which an interview schedule was developed. The research consisted of a case study and was of a qualitative, inductive nature. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six librarians at Leeds Libraries. These interviews were recorded, transcribed and subsequently analysed. Additional analysis of documentation provided by the participants was also carried out.

### **Results**

The research revealed that Leeds Libraries provides an extensive programme of formal learning sessions and performs a valuable educational role. These sessions are delivered by librarians who have embraced the teaching element of their role. Information literacy learning sessions, however, are mostly informal. The participants called for a clarification and formalisation of their role as regards the teaching of information literacy. A central authority for public libraries was found to be crucial to achieve this.

## **Conclusions**

It is considered that the study's aim and objectives were met. A summary of the main issues to emerge from the research is provided in this last section, followed by recommendations to Leeds Libraries and implications to departments of Library and Information Studies.

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## 1. Introduction

Over the last two decades, public library services have gone through considerable changes. This has been mainly due to the emergence of new technologies, but also significant cuts in Government funding (Poustie, 1999). In the United Kingdom, public library attendance has been reported to be down by 2.6 percent in 2007/8 compared to the previous year (Akbar, 2009). The outcome has been the diversification of public library services and the redundancy of some of the more traditional duties of public librarians, who have experienced considerable professional upheaval and whose role has changed from custodian to facilitator (Hull, 2001). In this context, the concept of information literacy (IL) has begun to emerge as key in public libraries.

According to the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP), IL can be defined as:

“knowing when and why you need information, where to find it, and how to evaluate, use and communicate it in an ethical manner” (CILIP, 2011).

Acknowledging the changes brought about by technology to the information world, in April 2011 the Society of College, National and University Libraries (SCONUL) revised its 1999 version of the Seven Pillars of IL model, which librarians around the world had since then been using as a framework for delivering IL skills education. While the original model was mainly aimed at a higher education setting, the updated version recognises that IL is also taught in other settings: in addition to the Core Model, other “lenses, representing different groups of learners” will be devised and applied to it. The SCONUL Seven Pillars of IL are: identify, scope, plan, gather, evaluate, manage, present (SCONUL, 2011).

IL is considered a core literacy for the 21<sup>st</sup> century and essential for the exercise of citizenship in the digital age (Julien and Genuis, 2009; Lloyd and Williamson, 2008). IL is also a key component of lifelong learning (LL), of which public libraries have always been at the centre (Jehlik, 2004).

According to Boughey and Cooper (2008), from the late 1990s, the government’s attention on public libraries has increased, as demonstrated by initiatives such as Framework for the Future and The People’s Network, articulations “of a central view of libraries’ role in society” (Boughey and Cooper, 2010: 175). The People’s Network, launched in 2000 and which equipped all public libraries with computers, tried to address the issue of accessibility

to the new technologies and placed public libraries as the core providers of that access. However, the implementation of the technology is not enough by itself – there is also a need for education, since public library users need to know how to use these new resources effectively. In fact, their complexity calls for higher levels of support for users (Homann, 2003) – IL development is more crucial than ever and public libraries are beginning to play an essential role in that development by offering more formal educational initiatives, which are mainly devised by librarians.

This educational purpose and the teaching element it adds to the role of public librarians do not appear to have been fully researched – the perceptions and feelings public librarians have on this subject are still widely unknown. This study aims to address this gap in the research by looking at the specific case of Leeds Libraries.

### **1.1 Aim and Objectives**

The aim of this study was to investigate the perceptions public librarians hold of their role as regards the teaching of IL. This was done by looking at one public library authority, Leeds Libraries, as a case study in order to provide an initial, small scale analysis of the thoughts and feelings of public library staff on this issue.

For that purpose, the research sought to identify key current issues as regards the role of librarians and IL, which was done through a review of the literature. Subsequently, focused data collection and data analysis was carried out in order to meet the objectives of addressing five main issues:

1. How librarians perceive lifelong learning (LL) and IL and the importance they attribute to these concepts.
2. How they see the role of public libraries as regards education.
3. How much they perceive the teaching of IL skills as part of their role and to what extent they consider themselves teachers.
4. How do librarians approach the teaching and support of IL, not just of the public but also of other library staff.
5. How do they see their role in the future.

The study aims to address these questions and to contribute to a clarification of the current perceptions of library professionals as regards the teaching of IL. The aim was achieve this

by identifying and exploring the different conceptions that may be held among the librarians at Leeds Libraries. It is hoped that an insight into this specific public library authority may benefit investigations of other public libraries' experiences.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This review is organised thematically, according to the themes that emerged from the literature as most relevant to the aim and objectives of the study. Five main themes have been identified: public libraries and education, lifelong learning, information literacy and public library staff, this one with a sub-section on the increasingly more prominent figure of paraprofessionals. From the review it emerged that the role of public libraries has evolved from the old educational mission to a transitional period in which the public perceived its main role as recreational, to the present, when information technology (IT) aspects are becoming dominant.

### **2.2 Public libraries and education**

A 'new role' for public libraries based on LL, the teaching of IL and education in general has supposedly been emerging since the 1990s (Poustie, 1999). However, several authors point out that this is not a new role for the public library service (Newton et al., 1998; Poustie, 1999): education has always been at the core of public libraries, the original aim of which was to provide for the urban working classes of the nineteenth century who still had little access to education beyond basic literacy (Chowdhury et al., 2008).

Akbar (2009) quotes Roy Clare, chief executive of the Museums and Libraries Archive (MLA), as saying that:

“The tenet on which the library was founded – as a place for learning – still held strong. The core values in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century were around a learning agenda and access to information; libraries are still a wonderful, democratic way to access information and reading” (Akbar, 2009: 1).

Public libraries have in fact been hailed as street corner universities and were considered to be instrumental in the newly elected Labour Government's vision for education in the late 1990s (Broady-Preston and Cox, 2000). Moreover, Broady-Preston and Cox (2000) identify a return to its original educational purpose as not only the possible future direction for the public library service, but the one which can guarantee its survival. That purpose is endorsed both by the political authorities and public library staff, but the relationship between politicians and the library profession has always proved strained and this return to the original mission of the public library service may be hard to achieve; public libraries are directly responsible to local authorities, and central and local policies may not always be in agreement. After a long period in which the perception of the main role of public libraries as a recreational one prevailed, collaborative partnerships are presented as a solution that can help achieve the "return to founding principles" (Broady-Preston and Cox, 2000: 155), especially when funding is harder to come by. The authors warn, however, that "while educational and recreational roles are not necessarily mutually exclusive, nonetheless, the service needs to avoid the potential pitfall of appearing to lack clear direction or purpose" (Broady-Preston and Cox, 2000: 156).

In July 2011, at the SINTO (The Information Partnership for South Yorkshire & North Derbyshire) Members' Day held at Sheffield Hallam University, Ronan O'Beirne spoke on this topic and read from his book *From Lending to Learning: the Development and Extension of Public Libraries*. He also argues that "the role of the library is not about books but about learning. It follows that the impact of libraries is measured not by the number of loans but by learning outcomes" (SINTO Newsletter, 2011: 2).

According to Jehlik (2004), "if lifelong information literacy is defined as the ability to use information and the tools to find it, public libraries become a natural extension of the formal educational process" (Jehlik, 2004: 7); while Koltay (2011) states that "with the sweeping popularity of Web 2.0, the need of enabling a wider acceptance of libraries educational role has become especially explicit" (Koltay, 2011: 246).

If the educational role is not new, the resources are and they have increased in complexity (Poustie, 1999). Libraries provide free internet access and the number of people using library services via the internet is on the rise as well (Akbar, 2009). Questions about the educational purpose appear not to have been resolved.

The People's Network, launched in 2000, equipped public libraries with the technology necessary for the public to access the new electronic resources (Sommerlad et al., 2004), but then it became necessary not only that the public knew how to use them, but that library staff did as well. Poustie (1999) states that:

“public libraries need to provide their clients with access to training so that they can use information technology and enhance their overall information literacy. [...] Unless this occurs many people will effectively have no access to much of the most current information” (Poustie, 1999: 60, 65).

Poustie (1999) describes the creation of an Information Technology Service, set up as a teaching centre. This was done in partnership with the Internet Training Institute (ITT) of Australia and was set up by librarians to provide Internet training for library staff, aiming also to encourage libraries to offer the same training to users so that they could use it effectively as an access point to information. However, the ITT believed libraries could charge for this (Poustie, 1999). According to Goulding (2006a), public library services charging for access to information and communication technology (ICT) was strongly condemned in the 2005 Department of Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee Report, which claimed the provision of Internet access should now be part of the statutory service. Also, the public mostly expects training to be free if provided by a public library (Newton et al., 1998; Poustie, 1999).

Eve et al. (2007) report on PuLLS (Public Libraries in the Learning Society), an European Union (EU) project which:

“signals that libraries are building on traditional strengths in supporting learners, and in addition, beginning to move towards a more active service delivery, which targets services at groups of users, and also specifically develops content for those users. Staff also are gaining new skills and beginning to see a development of their role from passive facilitator to active provider, and in some cases, tutor” (Eve et al., 2007: 405).

### **2.3 Lifelong learning**

LL has different meanings in different contexts. However, the main distinction between the different definitions tends to be a stronger economical element, with an emphasis on workplace learning and employability, and learning for personal development. The Scottish Government website provides a good example of the first type of definition:

“Lifelong learning policy in Scotland is about personal fulfilment and enterprise; employability and adaptability; active citizenship and social inclusion. [...] Lifelong learning encompasses the whole range of learning: formal and informal learning, workplace learning, and the skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours that people acquire in day-to-day experiences” (The Scottish Government, 2011).

Grace (2004), on the other hand, writes of how LL is not always the answer for dislocation in life and work.

The literature overwhelmingly argues for education and LL as a major role of public libraries (Chowdhury et al., 2008; Koltay, 2011; Poustie, 1999; Wijetunge, 2000). Public libraries were created under the principle of adult education and independent learning and have, therefore, always been at the core of LL (Wijetunge, 2000). According to Poustie (1999), “the self improvement model of the mechanics institutes and Carnegie libraries has been carried through to today’s public libraries” (Poustie, 1999: 60). In a rapidly changing world such as the one we live in, LL is even more important because continuous learning becomes vital (Wijetunge, 2000).

Pacios (2007) carried out a comparative analysis of several libraries’ mission plans in order to identify the current priorities of public libraries and found that LL was the second priority, only surpassed by collection and resources (technology appears in sixth place).

Public libraries play a key role in realising people’s potential and supporting the disadvantaged. They must provide for different groups and different life stages (Poustie, 1999). Gust (2006) describes an IL programme which aims to support adult learning, “MAGIC in the Library”. This is a LL course offered at Michigan State University’s Evening College, “which offers a unique opportunity for non-credit, continuing education on a variety of topics – including information literacy instruction through a library and web-searching course” (Gust, 2006: 558). Gust (2006) writes that “for this course to be successful and so users can benefit the most from their own self-directed learning, it certainly should be held in a computer lab setting, and preferably, one within the library” (Gust, 2006: 560).

A study by Whitehouse (2005) on library staff training on LL and IL at Peterborough Libraries found that the majority had received no training in the area of LL. One Library Assistant had attended several courses on topics such as basic teaching skills, but it was

found that “this training did not seem to be on offer to the majority of the library staff (Whitehouse, 2005: 46).

## 2.4 Information literacy

In 2003, the first international conference on IL issued *The Prague Declaration: Towards an Information Literate Society*, according to which “the creation of an Information Society is key to social, cultural and economic development of nations and communities, institutions and individuals in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond” and which declared IL “a prerequisite for participating effectively in the Information Society, and [...] part of the basic human right of life long learning” (Breivik, 2005).

IL is a key component of LL (Jehlik, 2004) and a core literacy for the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Lloyd and Williamson, 2008). According to Julien and Genuis (2009), “information literacy skills are basic requirements for successful personal and professional life in the digital age” (Julien and Genuis, 2009: 927). The same point is made by Breivik (2005), Hill (2009) and Newton et al. (1998). However, IL is absent from Pacios’ (2007) list of current public libraries’ priorities, apart from some basic IL associated to LL. The provision of a more formalised teaching of IL is a new element in the role of public libraries (Julien and Hoffman, 2008).

The development of the World Wide Web (WWW), and of Web 2.0 in particular, have led to a debate on the quantity and quality of information which can nowadays be readily available, and to the development of the concept of digital literacy (DL) (Bawden and Robinson, 2009; Koltay, 2011). In fact, it is argued that DL should be understood as digital *literacies*, considering the diversity of accounts of DL and resulting implications for DL policies (Lankshear and Knobel, 2008). According to Paul Gilster, who popularized the term, DL can be defined as:

“the ability to understand and use information in multiple formats from a wide range of sources when it is presented via computers. The concept of literacy goes beyond simply being able to read; it has always meant the ability to read with meaning, and to understand. It is the fundamental act of cognition. Digital literacy likewise extends the boundaries of definition. It is cognition of what you see on the computer screen when you use the networked medium. It places demands upon you that were always present, though less visible, in the analog media of newspaper and TV. At the same time, it conjures up a new set of challenges that require you to approach networked computers

without preconceptions. Not only must you acquire the skill of finding things, you must also acquire the ability to use these things in your life” (Gilster (1997), in Lankshear and Knobel, 2008: 164).

The concept of information overload is not new, but it started being referred to as a problem in the 1990s (Bawden and Robinson, 2009). A few examples Bawden and Robinson (2009) present of why we may nowadays complain of being burdened with ‘too much information’ are:

- the English language of the late twentieth century contains about 50,000 words, five times more than in Shakespeare’s lifetime
- more information has been created in the past 30 years than in the previous 5000 years
- it would take over 200,000 years to ‘read all the Internet’, allowing 30 minutes per document (Bawden and Robinson, 2009: 184).

Information overload and the diversity of information have generated the concept of *information anxiety*, defined by Bawden and Robinson (2009) as “a condition of stress caused by the inability to access, understand or make sense of, necessary information”. The authors speak also of *library anxiety*: “a sense of powerlessness when beginning an information search in a library, and feelings of being lost, unable to find one’s way around, and afraid to approach the library staff” (Bawden and Robinson, 2009: 185). Critical thinking is presented as the antidote to both (Bawden and Robinson, 2009; Gross and Latham, 2007). According to Breivik (2005), the very democratic and accessible nature of the Internet, requires higher critical thinking skills for evaluation.

Koltay (2011) introduces the distinction between amateur and professional information needs, each to be met by offering IL and DL. According to the author, the amateur, Web 2.0 needs are more suitable for public libraries; academic and research libraries “require information that is highly reliable and authoritative, thus less compatible with the spirit of Web 2.0 and Library 2.0” (Koltay, 2011: 247). This might explain why public libraries have been “in the vanguard of the information technology revolution”, as stated by Poustie (1999: 60). Koltay (2011) argues for raising user awareness to the fact that the nature of the content can be the problem, because of a general lack of critical thinking in Web 2.0. The author

asserts the responsibility of public librarians in IL education in this context, stating it an integral part of the role of librarians in all sectors.

However, a very valid point raised by Kempster and Palmer (2000) may prove relevant here: according to the authors, “the very freedom at the core of public libraries – of being able to do what you want without being asked why – means that people don’t necessarily want to tell us what they’re doing” (Kempster and Palmer, 2000: 212). The willingness for interaction may not always be there, on either side. This can have a negative impact on IL teaching initiatives in the public library sector. Hull (2001) points out how even a tour of the library can be crucial, since for many members of the public the physical space of a library may be totally new and intimidating, which may lead them to leave without asking for assistance possibly never to return.

The teaching of IL in public libraries as a means of promoting independent learning is advocated by many (Andretta, 2008; Pacios, 2007; Wijetunge, 2000). Wijetunge (2000) states that “the modern information retrieval actually will need a higher level of literacy and sophisticated knowledge, in order to reap the maximum benefits” (Wijetunge, 2000: 105).

As IL means different things in different situations, there are different contexts of teaching it. A community context is more difficult for its diversity (Koltay, 2011) and Lloyd and Williamson (2008) warn that “in community and cross-cultural settings IL may [...] take on a different shape that cannot be accommodated by library driven frameworks and standards” (Lloyd and Williamson, 2008: 8).

Some challenges emerging from community research and relevant for the present study may be:

- the idea that IL is more than just a text based literacy, but is also a social and physical experience with information;
- a need to study community IL processes and social practices, including the extent that they enable easy participation by newcomers (Lloyd and Williamson, 2008: 9).

However, O’Connor (2009a) argues that the concept of IL emerged from academic and school librarianship, stating that “information literacy has provided a framework for libraries’ educational mission for nearly 25 years” (O’Connor, 2009a: 272).

O'Connor (2009b) indeed argues that the concept of IL developed in consequence of the need felt by librarians to reassess their role in the information age, successfully asserting their educational role this way. The author warns, though, "that the stability of their jurisdictional claims will ultimately work against their efforts to expand their jurisdiction" (O'Connor, 2009a: 286), while Osuwu-Ansah (2005) stresses that libraries should not claim total ownership of IL if they are to be successful in establishing an educational role. Lloyd and Williamson (2008) in turn argue that:

"the dominant conceptions of IL that have emerged from library and information science research may be too narrow to accommodate the claims which have been made for IL as generic sets of skills and attributes which are pre-requisites to prepare people for lifelong learning" (Lloyd and Williamson, 2008: 9).

In a study that attempts to address the gap identified in the research, Julien and Hoffmann (2008) deal with the role of Canada's public libraries in developing the public's IL skills. The authors find that the majority of staff interviewed perceives the teaching of IL as a significant role of the public library; the users, however, consider themselves adequately skilled.

Andretta (2005) refers to "a dearth of information literacy initiatives in public libraries" (Andretta, 2005: 31). Notwithstanding, Goulding (2006b) acknowledges their willingness towards the teaching of IL, stating that "persuading other learning providers that they have a contribution to make in this area seems to be their biggest challenge" (Goulding, 2006b: 294). According to Homann (2003), German libraries are doing this and asserting their educational role by developing their teaching activities. The authors are in agreement that formal collaboration between libraries and educational institutions is fundamental to establish a teaching role, but that a central public library authority is also essential (Homann, 2003; Hull, 2001).

This is corroborated by Jehlik (2004), according to whom, in the USA, the Public Library Association published a planning model – Planning for Results – which allows libraries to "choose information literacy as a library service response for their communities" (Jehlik, 2004: 8) – many have chosen to do so and offer formal learning sessions.

The literature indicates that the role of the librarian in the teaching of IL is well established (Bewick and Corral, 2010; Chowdhury et al., 2008; Clyde, 2005; Hart, 2006; Julien and

Genuis, 2009; O'Connor, 2009a, b). However, the vast majority of the research has been conducted in an educational rather than a community context (Lloyd and Williamson, 2008).

The role public librarians can have in the teaching of IL is extremely well illustrated by Collen (2008), who describes her frustration at trying to effectively conduct teaching sessions over the reference desk. Having investigated whether anyone was actually teaching IL skills to the school children that used the library, and finding that neither the majority of public libraries nor the schools had IL programmes for children, she devised Computer Camp. The aim was to allow the children to “learn how to play with words” (Collen, 2008: 13), which is to say, to learn how to search for information, but with a view to teaching them skills that they would keep for life. Computer Camp ran over 3 days, (for 1 ½ hours each day) in the library’s computer lab, with two children per laptop and a laptop-projector for the librarian, as well as one assistant (all components described as essential by Jehlik, 2004). Collen (2008) wrote a specific curriculum and a handout for the children, so that they could repeat what they had learned. The programme was well received with both children and parents and achieved good results. Following on from this successful initiative, the author argues for formal information literacy in public libraries and encourages other librarians to follow her example.

The challenge is in the variety of different groups a public library service has to provide for (Hull, 2001). Gust (2006) reminds us that, at this stage, when they still represent tentative steps, these initiatives benefit not just the users, but also library staff, who this way can find out what works and what does not.

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) has produced *Guidelines on Information Literacy for Lifelong Learning* (Lau, 2006) and the literature provides several other good examples of IL teaching initiatives aimed at different groups, at different life stages: children (Van der Walt et al., 2007); distance learners (Newton et al., 1998); students (Pors, 2006); senior citizens (Jehlik, 2004).

However, one thing should be kept in mind: “A quest to improve information literacy may simply be covering up a more fundamental need for improved literacy itself, as a part of a better general education” (Bawden and Robinson, 2009: 187).

## 2.5 Public library staff

In the United Kingdom, the staffing situation in public libraries over the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has been compared to the 1980s/90s, with heavy reductions in staff, particularly professional staff. According to Akbar (2009), full-time library staff has fallen by 6.5 per cent compared to 2002/3, “with trained specialists most greatly in decline” (Akbar, 2009: 1). This effectively means that public library staff has had to take on new responsibilities and acquire new skills (Goulding, 1995). The emergence of new materials and new resources and the provision of new services, all have had training implications.

For some this means more job satisfaction (Goulding, 1995: 31, Waller, 2008); others are not as welcoming of the changes they have had to face (Broady-Preston and Cox, 2000; Jehlik, 2004; Goulding, 1995; Spacey and Goulding, 2004). In a study that addresses the skills and knowledge the ‘librarian of the future’ may require, Kealy (2009) describes a scenario where morale is low and there is staff resistance to change, caused mainly by the expectation that they deliver new types of service to meet user demand. In the example given, the University decided to take action and show staff that they were valued and that it was prepared to invest in training for them, through swift ‘workforce analysis and planning’. Staff development and training are deemed priorities in the ‘library of the future’. However, in Pacios’ (2007) list of current priorities of public libraries staff comes fourth.

Broady-Preston and Cox (2000) state that:

“If the role of the public library service is to change, then it can only do so in an effective fashion with the support of its staff. [...] The number of professionally qualified staff in public libraries has fallen significantly, while those remaining find their role increasingly managerial in content as well as in title” (Broady-Preston and Cox, 2000: 153).

The qualified staff remaining have seen their role develop as well. Clyde (2005) deals with the involvement of librarians not just in user training but also of other library staff, and found that libraries in general have been looking to recruit staff with skills in user education and information literacy development: “library orientation, face-to-face instruction, developing materials for remote library users, [...] managing teaching facilities used for library instruction, creating print materials, [...] and providing one-to-one information literacy instruction for library users at point of need” (Clyde, 2005: 431) are just a few of the duties that this staff is expected to take on. However, there is the question of how prepared they are

to perform these duties. Andretta (2005) explores the role of the librarian in IL education and acknowledges the need for adequate training in educational programmes for library professionals. The author provides the example of the Applied Information Research module, included in the MA in Information Services Management at the London Metropolitan University, which is aimed at professionals working mainly in the voluntary and public sectors – IL education has been embedded in that module.

European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) training for staff was made available following the implementation of the People's Network (Whitehouse, 2005). ECDL (ICDL outside Europe) is an international computer and Internet skills certification programme offered by the ECDL Foundation, which purpose is to enable ICT proficiency around the world (ECDL Foundation, 2011). A report on the People's Network and the ICT training for public library staff programme that accompanied it has been published in 2004 (Sommerlad et al., 2004). It states that the staff training impact was limited “because the organisational changes required for it to be effective were not in place”, but “a solid basis for future workforce development” was laid (Sommerlad et al., 2004: iv). A study that explored the gap between the skills acquired and the ones needed by the staff at Peterborough Libraries at this time found this to be true, with the skills provided by ECDL not always proving adequate to the service, while the need for other skills was still being felt. The staff also believed they had not received sufficient training in the areas of LL and IL, the latter being a concept most were not familiar with (Whitehouse, 2005).

Clyde (2005) argues for the need to include a core element of user education and library instruction in educational programmes for librarians, as well as the creation of continuing professional development programmes, as do many others.

Wijetunge (2000) claims Library and Information Science educators have a responsibility to raise awareness of the significance of concepts such as LL among new professionals through their education programmes. German librarians started discussing the need for additional pedagogical training at the end of the 1970s (Homann, 2003).

Most librarians do seem willing to embrace a teaching role. Bewick and Corral (2010), in a recent study of librarians' pedagogical training and knowledge, conclude that teaching should be included in professional courses: the participants showed

“a strong preference for teacher education designed specifically for librarians as a core element of the professional curriculum, with support for a specialist module, a designated pathway or a whole programme devoted to the subject” (Bewick and Corral, 2010: 107).

This teacher education would be aimed at all library and information professionals. In an academic context, concepts such as that of the ‘blended librarian’ have emerged - a professional with the traditional set of librarianship skills, but also technology and teaching skills (Bell and Shank, 2004).

Shortage of staff and financial resources are generally indicated as the barrier to more training initiatives, but Julien and Hoffmann (2008) found and describe an ideal scenario in which “a dedicated training coordinator [...] prepared workshops when specific requests were made by library staff or the community” (Julien and Hoffmann, 2008: 38).

In some parts of the world, librarians are just becoming aware of this development: Hart (2006) reports on the limited conception of public librarians in South Africa as regards IL and deals with the need, first of all, to address this issue, so as to have librarians seek a more active role.

Another study in New Zealand found that “public libraries are aware of the need for information literacy education, and are working on various aspects of it, but there is much potential for development. This is hampered by a lack of time, resources, a need for staff development and a recognition by government of the role of public libraries in IL education” (Koning, 2001: 163). Similar conclusions were drawn by a study in Sri Lanka (Wijetunge, 2000), and the same can be said to be true of the UK, where government awareness and responsibility in this matter have long been called for (Goulding, 1995; Wijetunge, 2000; Koning, 2001).

The importance of direct action from the government soon emerges: the vast majority of authors call for more staff training and development (Goulding, 1995; Hull, 2001; Jehlik, 2004; Pacios, 2007), with Goulding (1995) pointing out that “government training initiatives have had the greatest impact in the public sector” (Goulding, 1995: 32). Several of the authors insist that this central responsibility increases at a time when government documents and services are made available online, and knowing how to access and use them is

effectively crucial to the full exercise of citizenship (Chowdhury et al., 2008; Hill, 2009; Jehlik, 2004).

On the other hand, Julien and Genuis (2009) point out that not all librarians are enthusiastic about this shift in their profession and some feel reluctant to become teachers; the authors speak of ambivalence and even hostility towards this move, and describe one very important consequence of the current professional circumstances in libraries, which they define as “role stress”: a consequence of the upheaval and professional uncertainty.

### **2.5.1 Paraprofessionals**

Mostly as a consequence of staff shortages, the figure of the paraprofessional – someone with intermediate skills – began to emerge. This figure is explored in the literature (Goulding, 1995; O’Connor, 2009b). The decrease in trained specialists already mentioned, and issues around the role of senior staff and staff’s perception of the public having become more demanding, all have led to a staff restructuring (Goulding, 1995). According to Goulding (1995), “paraprofessional staff are increasingly being viewed as playing a key role in attempts to reduce staffing costs and improve productivity” (Goulding, 1995: 31). Training for this staff is therefore crucial.

Shortage of staff, funding and time do not always allow for regular training initiatives, but initiatives such as Investors in People have had a positive impact. This is an award given “to organisations which demonstrate a real commitment to continuous improvement and development of their staff” (Goulding, 1995: 34). The scheme also provides a valuable framework for structured training. Formal, well structured, in-service training programmes “would leave support staff better equipped to deal with the many changes their services are undergoing” (Goulding, 1995: 33).

O’Beirne (2006) describes a successful initiative promoted by Imperial College London and the City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council, Library Service, to develop an online learning programme, POP-i, for IL instruction aimed at public libraries. The author reports on how the library staff involved embraced the concept of IL and “saw the relevancy of the concept as being a practical benefit to their everyday working life” (O’Beirne, 2006: 6). As a result of this project there has been a continued use and development of IL training at

Bradford Libraries, and the development of POP-i into a “real-life” tool, Lollipop, means that other libraries can now benefit from this experience.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

An examination of the literature reveals evidence that the role of the librarian in the teaching of IL is well established, particularly in an academic context. The majority of authors argue for the educational role of the public library, with only a few cautionary warnings. However, more research is needed in relation to the educational role of public librarians, how they perceive this element of their role and how confident they feel about it. The authors agree that IL is a key skill in the digital age and that public libraries are establishing their contribution to citizenship in the information society by developing their role in IL education. In general, though, there is a call for clarification and formalisation of this educational role of public libraries, which can only be achieved through political intervention. Conflicting ideas between central and local government, which public libraries are directly under, may prove a barrier to this intervention; but training programmes for library staff are generally being implemented and more initiatives are widely called for.

### **3. Methodology**

This section will describe the qualitative approach of this research, the interviews which were conducted to gather the study's primary data and subsequent analysis, as well as the ethical considerations.

#### **3.1 Research Approach**

The research, which consisted of a case study, was of a qualitative, inductive nature and was conducted in collaboration with Leeds Libraries, which gave permission to members of staff to participate in the study and granted the researcher access to the Central Library.

According to Gorman and Clayton (2005), "the ultimate goal of qualitative research is to understand those being studied from their perspective" (Gorman and Clayton, 2005: 3). Since the project aimed to investigate the perception held by librarians of their role as regards the teaching of IL, a qualitative approach was considered to be the most suitable.

Still according to the same authors, when research is being conducted, "the context, description, process and participant perspective must be analysed in a meaningful and coherent manner" (Gorman and Clayton, 2005: 7). In qualitative research this is primarily done through the process of induction, which allows the researcher to develop an explanation of events based on the evidence gathered on the ground and "establish a theory based on observed phenomena" (Gorman and Clayton, 2005: 7). This can be referred to as 'grounded' theory and it means that:

"the researcher begins by collecting, observing and studying as widely as possible, and uses this broadly based approach to data acquisition and interpretation to help understand emerging concerns and to offer specific analyses of those concerns" (Gorman and Clayton, 2005: 7).

#### **3.2 Case Study Approach**

The project was carried out over a period of three months and was divided into three stages:

1. literature review and preparation of interview schedule
2. data collection (interviews and observation)

### 3. data analysis

Because the research aims to gain insight into a specific situation and context, a case study approach was deemed to be the most suitable, as it allows the study of the phenomena in a real-life context, where on-going events and situations are taking place (Bryman, 2008; Gorman and Clayton, 2005). Taking the context into consideration is now a recognised need in IL research (Lloyd and Williamson, 2008), as IL means different things in different settings. The authors argue that “exploring context becomes the first task in order to understand how a phenomenon like IL is revealed as socio-cultural, context specific processes” (Lloyd and Williamson, 2008: 9).

A case study can be defined as:

“an in-depth investigation of a discrete entity (which may be a single setting, subject, collection or event) on the assumption that it is possible to derive knowledge of the wider phenomenon from intensive investigation of a specific instance or case (Gorman and Clayton, 2005: 47).

While it provides a reassuring sense of feasibility to the first-time researcher, “it must be recognized that concentrating on a single site or event is in no way inferior to (and certainly no easier than) more complex techniques” (Gorman and Clayton, 2005: 47).

The chosen public library authority as a case study was Leeds Libraries because of the researcher’s place of residence and interest in looking into their local library. No significant costs were involved in the research.

The issue being investigated is the perception of the public librarians at Leeds Libraries of their role as regards the teaching of IL. It is acknowledged that the sample does not represent the whole class of the object in hand, in this case public library authorities (Bryman, 2008).

In addition, analysis of documentation provided to the researcher by the participants in the project and site observation were also carried out, in order to reinforce the data collected through the interview process.

## 3.3 Data Collection

### 3.3.1 Literature Review

This was started in May, for the preparation of a dissertation proposal, and subsequently conducted over several months. The majority of sources are journal articles, which were mainly selected through electronic databases, namely LISA (Library and Information Science Abstracts), Emerald and Google Scholar; relevant books were identified using the reading list for the MA Librarianship Public Libraries module as a starting point, followed by a search in several library catalogues. In addition, information was also gathered from websites.

The purpose of conducting a literature review was to identify key concepts and themes which allowed the formulation of the study's aim and objectives. The literature review was also used to develop the interview schedule.

An initial analysis of the literature indicated that the vast majority of the research in relation to IL and the role of the librarian has been conducted in an educational context (academic or school libraries); as regards the role of public librarians in the teaching of IL, few sources were found which deal directly with the topic, but the ones that were proved to be very insightful and provided extremely good examples with which to illustrate some of the study's key points. The dearth of literature dealing with IL in public libraries may be a result of a lack of incentive for public librarians to publish, but less research has certainly been conducted in public libraries because it is less clear what role they play as regards the teaching of IL. Therefore, this study draws significantly more on research conducted in a formal educational setting rather than a community one (Lloyd and Williamson, 2008).

### *Limitations*

For a period of about two weeks, there was no acknowledgement from an initial contact within Leeds Libraries of the researchers' attempts to assess the willingness of the library authority to collaborate. This delayed the project somewhat. An eventual contact by phone was met with a refusal to participate. However, several channels had been tried by the researcher to assess the willingness to collaborate and an enquiry through the online Express Enquiry Form proved successful and the willingness of other members of staff to participate in the study was finally established. The initial intention was to involve all library staff in the

project, but only librarians came forward and agreed to be interviewed. Therefore the study's participants are all qualified librarians.

### 3.3.2 Interviews

In order to carry out a qualitative assessment of the perception public librarians at Leeds Libraries currently hold of their role in relation to the teaching of information literacy, research interviews were carried out with a carefully selected sample of library staff. The researcher was assisted in selecting the interviewees and scheduling the interviews by a contact within the public library authority, who informed other members of staff of the project, inviting them to participate and subsequently directing those willing to be interviewed to the researcher. An information sheet with details of the project was always provided to anyone asked to participate. All interviews were arranged by email correspondence between the researcher and prospective participants.

The intention was to conduct the interviews at a convenient time and place for the interviewees, not long after the pilot interview had been carried out. Accordingly, the participants were all interviewed at Leeds Central Library where most are based; those not based at the Central Library found it more convenient to meet there as well. Because the interviews took place during the participants working hours, which was only possible with the permission of the public library authority, considerable flexibility was required on the researcher's part, as well as extremely good preparation, as it was very unlikely that they could be re-arranged; re-scheduling the interviews would also have been difficult because of the time limitations of a small scale research project, which has been undertaken over the summer months, when staff were also likely to be on holiday.

The interviews were carried out in late July, early August. Each lasted on average from 30 to 45 minutes, with only one interview lasting longer than 50 minutes. They were recorded and subsequently transcribed. The interviewees were made aware of the process and asked to sign a consent form at the start of the interview.

In the first two interviews, a copy of the interview schedule was included with the documentation handed out to the participants to keep, namely the information sheet and consent form. Both interviewees kept the interview schedule on the table and referred to it as the interviews proceeded. However, four of the interviewees had access to the interview

schedule beforehand. This was due to the fact that on the first day of interviewing three participants unexpectedly met the researcher as a group. The researcher then requested to speak to each individually, but, conscious of the waiting time involved for them, decided to hand out a copy of the interview schedule to the two participants who would be waiting, inviting them to think about possible points they might wish to discuss. It is not unusual to provide the questions in advance to interviewees (Goulding, 2006a) and, in this instance, it was found to have very good results: when comparing the two interviews in which the interviewees had not seen the questions with the two in which they had, it was found that awareness of the questions had proved to help the interviewees provide much more focused answers. It was decided, therefore, not only to handout the interview schedule to the last two interviewees, but also to allow them a few minutes to read them before starting the interview.

The research interviews were conducted in person and semi-structured, based on selected topics and a pre-designed interview schedule. The number of interviews, and therefore the sample, were limited by the time constraints of the project and the willingness of the staff at Leeds Libraries to participate. Interviewees are identified by the order in which they were interviewed and it was decided to identify each respondent so as to make the variety and diversity of opinions clear.

Semi-structured interviews have been found to obtain better results in qualitative research than structured interviews (Bryman, 2008), as they allow the interviewer “some latitude to ask further questions in response to what are seen as significant replies” (Bryman, 2008: 196). Both the interviewee and the interviewer, but most importantly the former, are this way provided with freedom to reflect on what is being discussed, but still in a controlled, focussed way. The intention was to have the question provide the core of what was for the interviewee an opportunity to reflect; a semi-structured interview allows the interviewee time to consider and expand the answer (Bryman, 2008). The research interview questions were formulated with this in mind.

The interview schedule was developed after a review of the literature was conducted in order to identify key concepts and themes. It was composed of open-ended questions, to allow the interviewees freedom to veer their own thoughts as stated and therefore elicit extensive, detailed answers. They were in-depth questions, intended to instigate reflection and aiming to elicit insights into the core research question, which addresses each interviewees’ conception and experience of their role in developing the public’s IL skills.

Foddy (1993) states that “the researcher should also ensure that the respondents have accepted the researcher’s goal in asking the question and that they are not motivated to pursue their own goals instead” (Foddy, 1993: 75) – this was taken into consideration.

The interviews were recorded, as taking notes is considered more intrusive. The method of recording interviews proves especially good in the open-ended process, because it gives the interviewer the opportunity to engage in a dialogue with the interviewee and direct the interview according to the answers given.

A pilot interview was carried out to assess the schedule and the structure of the interview, as well as the researcher’s skills and abilities to carry out the interviews.

The interviews were fully transcribed and the transcriptions analysed separately – this provided the study’s primary data. The transcription sought to accurately reflect the emotions and emphases of the participant, with the aim of allowing an in-depth analysis (Ashworth and Lucas, 2000). The analysis of the content of the transcriptions was then carried out.

### *Pilot interview*

The pilot interview was conducted with a former member of staff of Leeds Libraries, who is currently a Subject Librarian at the University of Bradford Library, the researcher’s workplace. The purpose was to identify any limitations with the interview schedule or the researcher as an interviewer. From it emerged that the researcher’s main challenge might prove to be to maintain the interviewees focus on IL, without diverting too much to other topics, which is a risk of open-ended questions.

This interview produced valuable data, which the researcher felt should not go to waste and decided to include in the study. This was possible because the interviewee had mainly discussed her experience as a Learning Librarian at Leeds Libraries in the late 1990s, early 2000s.

### **3.4 Ethics**

The project was ethically approved and classified as low risk by the Information School Ethics Committee in conformity with the University of Sheffield's Research Ethics Policy. This policy was followed throughout the study to ensure participant safety and anonymity.

Data was only collected after the research ethics application was reviewed and approved by the project's Supervisor and informed consent was obtained from all participants.

The study addresses current professional roles and circumstances of the participants, which have recently experienced significant upheaval. The research was consequently designed in a way so as to avoid any distress to those involved. However, this is a sensitive topic that might have proved emotional and even distressing for the participants. The concept of 'role stress', as defined by Julien and Genuis (2009), was therefore kept in mind throughout data collection.

## **4. Results**

This section will be divided into a small introduction to Leeds Libraries and the five main issues the study aimed to investigate. The findings will be presented with illustrative quotes from the participants.

### **4.1 Leeds Libraries**

Leeds is a sizeable library authority, which until recently was comprised of 53 libraries. In 2011, the entire library service was restructured and 13 libraries were closed. The participants frequently referred to the significant change their role has undergone in the last six months. The council operated a voluntary redundancy scheme, but did not make any compulsory redundancies. The participants work in different departments, such as the Information Centre and Europe Direct.

## 4.2 Conceptions of lifelong learning and information literacy

### *Lifelong learning*

*“You might try and learn how to crochet, go to your local library, get a book out and do it totally independently and learn a new skill. [...] That is lifelong learning.”*

(Interviewee 1)

Some of the participants were first employed by Leeds City Council at the time of the implementation of The People’s Network, in the early 2000s. They were part of a team of Learning Librarians whose role included teaching ECDL to all library staff and seem to have retained a strong impression of the concept of LL dating back from that time, even though LL specifically in a work context or for work purposes was not mentioned.

When asked about their conception of LL, the interviewees were unanimous in stressing the importance of the informal aspect of it, and how public libraries represent a unique opportunity for independent learning at all stages in life. As an example, one participant pointed out how quick children are to learn and the positive impact the work of public librarians with parents of 6 month old children (the age Bookstart is aimed at) can have. Below are the two answers that best summarise the participants’ views:

*“Traditionally, I think it’s seen as for people who missed out on school, or didn’t do very well at school, or didn’t pursue their education as far as they could and in later life they want to come back and do a bit more. But [...] it’s equally people who may have done really well at school, but they went to school in the 1950s and there were no computers. So, it is literally at any stage of your life.”* (Interviewee 2)

*“I must confess lifelong learning wasn’t around when I was learning to be a librarian and I’ve no idea what the formal definition of it is, but to me it’s just an opportunity for anyone at any time to learn things. So, it doesn’t even have to be formal.[...] And I certainly don’t think it’s anything to do with qualifications. I hate the idea that you can only do courses and you’re only funded to do it or the course can only exist if at the end of it you have to take a test, because I think that puts people off. [...] Obviously, learning for professional reasons or degrees yes, but I think it’s just giving people an opportunity formally and informally at any time – Open University, Learn Direct, that sort of thing.”* (Interviewee 4)

In the opinion of this group of librarians, LL consists of informal learning one can do independently throughout one's life; public libraries offer the materials and the space for that learning, as well as the additional element of staff who can offer help, if the individual wants that help. One interviewee believes there might even be an element of serendipity to LL:

*“Some people will look for that actively, some people will just come across it, the opportunity will present itself and people will take that opportunity. Not everyone will, but I think a lot of people do, certainly in my experience from working here.”*  
(Interviewee 6)

### ***Information literacy***

The first thing to emerge from the research interviews was that IL is not first and foremost on the participants' minds, perhaps because, as librarians, IL is a concept they are naturally aware of and work with, but have more or less stopped reflecting on. The main distinction made by the interviewees was between book and computer related IL:

*“In my role, it is very much around computers, because I don't have very much to do with books. [...] It's about giving people the skills to find information for themselves and to know when the information is accurate, valid, reliable, trustworthy.”*(Interviewee 2)

*“It's kind of the ability to find something and then see that it's actually something that's correct and from a good source, and, useful to what you actually want to do and not just think, ‘Oh, yeah’, look at Google and click there and it's the advertised link... ‘No, look – it has a yellow thing around it! Do scroll down, please!’. So I guess that's more or less that and obviously with books knowing what an index is and, kind of, not just diving in and thinking, ‘Oh, that doesn't have what I want’. But in chapter 5 it might do, but because you haven't looked further...”* (Interviewee 3)

*“It starts with more traditional based information, such as on paper, you know, books, reference books in the library – encyclopaedias, dictionaries, directories. Nowadays, it's a lot more informal, because of computers and the Internet. If you understand how to use a computer, you can do a Google search on things, you can use Wikipedia. It also means, of course, that in a way you get lazy about finding*

*things out, because you think, 'Well, I can just Google it, I can go to Wikipedia', and it's not always necessarily the best place to go, especially something like Wikipedia, where anyone can edit it.*" (Interviewee 6)

Only one participant stressed the issue of the suitability of information:

*"Is it suitable? Is it an American book, therefore... I was just talking to a colleague and someone had given him a book to help him with something and just from the title, the words were spelt in the American way, and I said, 'Well, just be careful, because that's American libraries that that's talking about. We need to be sure...', I know libraries are libraries, but you need to be sure that what you're looking at is suitable, and certainly if you're giving people information that the information is at the right level and, I say, is how to interpret what you've found or been given and to evaluate it I suppose..."* (Interviewee 4)

However, one interviewee pointed out that IL is also about people:

*"One of the things that people forget when they're talking about information literacy is that isn't just computers that find information, there are people who find information, there are many databases, for instance our Local History Library has many, many databases of information that are yet to be computerised."* (Interviewee 5)

### **4.3 Public libraries and education**

Reflecting on learning in public libraries, all participants seemed to consider mainly the last ten years, clearly looking at it as before and after The People's Network. The majority expressed a concern about a widening information gap over that period.

*"In the late Nineties libraries in general were promoted as street corner universities, which in a way they've always been. If for any reason you can't go to college or university, there's a lot of research material available in libraries. And, nowadays we have the role of teaching people how to actually find things out by themselves, a lot of that is linked with the learning sessions that we run here. A lot of them are computer based."* (Interviewee 6)

In the early 2000s, a lot of investment and resources were aimed at the more deprived areas of Leeds, such as Harehills and Chapeltown. One of the librarians described her experience at Harehills at that time, and the effort on the part of the service and the library staff to offer an adequate service to the children who frequented the public library after school; she describes how the librarians carefully chose educational games:

*“Fun games as well, but obviously educational and this kind of homework club. And we did have lots of encyclopaedias and things, it was all very old-fashioned, because at the time everything was on cd-rom...” (Interviewee 1)*

The participant believes it is harder now to have to explain resources like Wikipedia.

The element of freedom of choice and independent learning was emphasised by all, when asked about the educational role of public libraries:

*“I still take my children on a regular basis down to the public library. [...] It’s the most independent thing they can possibly do, their first library card, before they get any kind of... Other status in life. It’s their freedom to choose what they want for free. I think it’s vitally important, because it’s out of the school atmosphere.” (Interviewee 1)*

The participants agreed that the informal element of learning in a public library is crucial in the educational context, with at least two interviewees convinced that is what mainly draws people to public libraries:

*“There is no teacher, there is no academic curriculum, there’s no Ofsted reports. It’s about [...] going to choose something, and that is a skill of lifelong learning.” (Interviewee 1)*

*“We are not a traditional educational establishment. If you’ve had a bad experience at traditional learning, the libraries may be less threatening. It’s not as formal, you don’t have to come and enrol on a course, you don’t have to come every day at 9.30. It’s much more: you can do what you want, when you want, and we’ll fit around you, rather than you having to fit around the institution.” (Interviewee 2)*

One participant believes the collaboration of Leeds Libraries is significant, since it employs both specialist children’s librarians, for example, and general librarians who cover everything, unlike other library authorities. But the library could play a bigger role in

education if all librarians were able to dedicate more time to it, like the members of staff who are Development Librarians can and do. Still, a lot of work is done in collaboration with nurseries (mostly Sure Start nurseries) and schools. For example, a teacher recently arranged to bring a class to the library and deliver a session in collaboration with the Local Studies Library which will look at land use in the Victorian period at their school site and area:

*“Part of the class will work with me and do basic information skills on how to find information in the library on it. [...] We then get them to look up a bit of information about that time and report back on it, and, they’ll report back on it orally at the library and then back at school.”* (Interviewee 5)

This collaboration is sometimes aimed at the classes, sometimes focused on something the library is trying to implement. The importance of collaborative work was stressed:

*“We try and do a lot of collaborative work with other groups, as much as we can. More and more in fact, because we’re getting less funding, so if you can collaborate with someone else who’s got funding, then you can do more and reach a wider audience.”* (Interviewee 5)

One participant warns that:

*“There is less and less money being spent on things like adult literacy. I mean there is still a huge amount spent, but with the cutbacks you’re going to get fewer and fewer people having access to these things and they’re going to have to do it themselves and the library gives them that opportunity. It gives them the opportunity to look for information that can help them do things, but also to be the provider of it as well.”* (Interviewee 5)

The interviewees feel that the educational role of the library is essential and will remain so. Throughout the interviews it emerged that the library staff strongly feels that clarifying and promoting the work of the library should be a priority for the future, as some members of the public are not even aware that the service is free:

*“I think it’s really, really, really important that people understand that there’s this wealth of information and there are things that they can access. And that it’s a privilege to access, because somebody’s paying some money for it.”* (Interviewee 1)

*“I think we need to be a bit more pro-active and not wait for some national initiative to say, ‘Why don’t you do that?’, but think, ‘Yes, actually, we have this, why don’t we do that?’. Then it’s obviously convincing the higher beings that it’s a good idea. And I think that if we can put it under a good phrase like information literacy, we might be on to a winner.” (Interviewee 3)*

*“Ask a member of the public generally what they think a library is and they will still assume they have to be quiet, they will still assume we have books, they’ll still assume we’re fuddy-duddy – they won’t realise that actually there’s a lot of access and I think that’s a problem with communication, and I think it’s partially the media and its’ partially the fact that we don’t have a very proactive or very powerful lobbying within Parliament and, generally, within local Government, and I think we need that more.” (Interviewee 5)*

According to one participant, the role of public libraries in education in general and IL education specifically has already changed significantly:

*“In the past we would never have tried to teach people how to read. [...] With computers we’re taking that sort of extra step, if you like, to help people at an even lower level, because if you can’t use a computer, all of the information that’s on a computer is inaccessible to you. In terms of computers and information literacy on computers, we’re actually, I think, doing even more than we used to do for books.” (Interviewee 2)*

Perhaps because of the subject of the study, the recreational role of public libraries was barely touched upon, with only one participant referring to the users who only go in to use the computers for the full two hours a day they are allowed, sometimes nowadays just to access social networking sites.

#### **4.4 The teaching of IL and the role of the public librarian**

*“We have information overload, we have too much information. We’re all bombarded with information from the newspapers and, in light of what’s happened recently, with the scandal with the newspapers, it becomes very important that we are very aware,*

*information literate human beings, with the critical minds and the ability to evaluate what's being put in front of us. So, however that is practically implemented in a library, it is vitally important and I do hope that libraries can survive. [...] It's important for a democratic society.” (Interviewee 1)*

### ***Formal learning sessions***

When asked if they considered the teaching of IL an important role of public libraries, all participants answered affirmatively. However, even though they acknowledge the teaching element of their role, the majority feel that teaching is not at the core of what they do and they would not call themselves teachers. Nevertheless, Leeds Libraries offer formal learning sessions in all the libraries around the city.

*“Primarily they are IT sessions, showing people how to use the computers; and once we've shown them how to use the computers, what they can do on the computers. So, how they can find information, the kind of things they can do.” (Interviewee 2)*

The way these sessions are offered has recently changed. The library used to offer a programme of learning sessions which would be advertised to the public whom could simply book a place at the counter. But it was found that, under pressure from impatient users, the library staff would sometimes book the public on any session, which would often turn out to be inappropriate. Now these learning sessions with a librarian, which last from half an hour to an hour, can still be booked in advance, but their topic and regularity are determined by the public's demand. A request made at the counter is logged onto a computerised Learning Sessions Request List which the librarians who deliver these sessions have the responsibility of checking daily. As the requests are added, a librarian will phone the user in order to carry out an initial assessment of the actual enquiry, in order also to evaluate whether or not it falls in the scope of the library's offer. If so, a time and a date for the session are arranged. These sessions can be one-to-one, but if a number of people make a request for a similar subject a group session is arranged. According to one participant:

*“We've now got people coming to sessions which are better for them and better for us delivering the sessions, because we're not suddenly trying to accommodate someone who doesn't have the skills for a certain session. And, also, people are now turning up: a lot of people would book a session about two months in advance and they'd*

*either forget about it or they didn't care because it was free. So they just wouldn't turn up and suddenly you've got an empty room where other people could have had that session. So, now, with actually talking to them to find out exactly what it is they want, they seem to place a lot more value on those sessions and most of them now do turn up.*" (Interviewee 6)

It is all done on a request basis, but there is a librarian whose role is to coordinate this learning offer and there is still a programme. The topics range from IT basics to sessions on job seeking and local or family history. The reliability of sources is discussed in the sessions. All participants argued that much of the value of a public library service resides in the endorsement of the sources that it provides: the role of selection and endorsement, as well as free provision, of resources is seen as unique to the service.

*"We respond to need a lot more now. We used to have a very rigid programme of learning sessions – we've recently changed it to respond a bit more to demand."* (Interviewee 6)

IL related sessions are less structured. One participant stated that even if a more formal session is offered when an enquiry is made, the public does not normally show an interest in learning more. Therefore, the members of staff who are Information Librarians do not deliver formal learning sessions. According to them, they get more computer queries and queries on how to access websites than questions about the contents of those sites. Curiously, this seems to include technical hardware computer queries as well, according to the staff. The Information Librarians run a Work Club and have just recently started an Enterprise Club:

*"We do a Work Club, [...] it's for job seekers. It's two hours every second Monday and, it has a talk at the beginning, so you talk about writing a CV or volunteering or something... And then after, there's some jobseekers advisors and you can, obviously talk amongst yourselves, or talk to an advisor, just get your frustrations out and get a few tips. And you can also book a proper one-to-one session with an advisor. That's part of information literacy as well, I think, because people don't necessarily know where to look."* (Interviewee 3)

According to one of the participants, these learning sessions, including the individual ones, are attended by about 1,000 people every quarter:

*“Over the last ten years, we’ve seen 40,000 people, we get about 4,000 people a year on our sessions [...] across all our libraries in Leeds.” (Interviewee 2)*

There are a significant number of activities for children on offer. According to one of the participants, there has been a very structured approach to the teaching of IL for children since 2004, but that approach is now being revised to address IT literacy. A checklist for the analysis of text, first devised for using in the evaluation of websites, CARS (Credibility, Accuracy, Reasonableness, Support) is used (Appendices 2 and 3).

There are also IL sessions for children in which teaching them basic searching skills starts with ABC’s for the younger children to author and how author works; they are also taught how to use the Dewey classification system from a basic up to a complex level:

*“We do a Humpty Dumpty thing [...] which is looking at the Humpty Dumpty poem and breaking it down into the most simple version of Humpty Dumpty without losing the context. So, for instance, you have to include Humpty, you have to include Dumpty, because Humpty is his first name and Dumpty is his surname; but when he fell off a wall you could just say 'fell' and you could even just write 'fell wall', but would that be relevant, could you understand what that meant when you got back home?” (Interviewee 5)*

The library works with Traveller Services and one participant described his work with traveller children:

*“A lot of them when they go to nurseries especially, and to early primary, feel very isolated, they get picked on, they aren’t used to socialising with people who don’t live in their culture really, so it is a very different world for them. Also, they don’t always go to nursery and school and they don’t always turn up, so they’re not that well known by the other children so they often become isolated, so giving them a bear, you’ll often find they talk to the bear or they’ll listen to a story quietly in the nursery and the very fact they have the recorder pen tends to make them more popular, so lots of kids come to use it and they become more socialised. So, that’s an information skill in itself getting children to socialise.” (Interviewee 5)*

In answer to the importance of developing the public’s critical skills:

*“People don’t tend to ask that, no. [...] For a lot of them it’s the first time they’ve ever been on the Internet, so they may not even have a pre-conception; but, if they do, it’s usually, ‘It’s on the Internet, so...’, it must be good, it must be trustworthy. [...] It’s almost like, ‘It’s in a book, therefore I can believe it’.” (Interviewee 2)*

*“In the olden days we used to have to explain to people the difference between a reference book, and a book that’s been written to make money, you know... [...] I think it was much more upfront, though, in some ways in a book, because you could just turn to the back and read about the author, or you could see who’d published it, and sometimes on websites that’s a bit more hidden away, you know, who’s written a website. Sometimes you have to investigate a little bit further to find out who’s actually put this information up there and what that means. And we try, we do incorporate that in our sessions.” (Interviewee 2)*

*“We’re losing the skills of how to look, you know? Reference books, abstracts, encyclopaedias... Increasingly, it’s just not as important anymore.” (Interviewee 1)*

The participants also mentioned teaching aimed at different learning abilities, including teaching activities for teenagers with difficult learning abilities, but no examples were given due to time limitations. They all stressed that the teaching of IL skills is something difficult to measure:

*“If you’ve got issues, then people know you’re more successful, less successful, you know where you’re going right or wrong, with certain books, but with information... We faithfully record our enquiries, but, as everybody knows, the busier you are the least likely you’re going to be to record it.” (Interviewee 4)*

### **Online resources**

A list of the resources that the library subscribes to and offers to its members for free, such as Ancestry or Encyclopaedia Britannica Online, is available for the public to consult. But even the free resources have to be explained to the users. The reasons given for this were mainly the commercial interests behind some websites and ethical issues posed by the Internet in relation to children.

For non-subscription websites, there is Weblinks on the Leeds City Council website: a list of recommended websites on 26 different subjects created by specialists in the library service to help the public find useful information on the World Wide Web. One participant stated that this list is intended as an alternative to Google search, and users can themselves recommend sites to be added to it.

### ***Staff training***

Staff training sessions are also delivered by the team of librarians and all the participants have been involved in the training of other staff.

All members of staff who deliver formal training sessions have undertaken the programme Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTLLS), a teaching qualification that covers the basics of teaching in continuing and adult education. This has provided the staff with basic training on how to deliver a teaching session, as well as all the other elements of teaching, including assessment. The council has funded this teaching training for some members of staff, acknowledging that delivering learning sessions represents a considerable part of their role and that they needed some grounding on how to do it.

The training sessions for library staff can be on a wide range of topics, from online subscription resources to advanced Google searching, but are “all written by our staff for our staff” according to one of the interviewees. They are hands-on and take place mainly in the Central Library. Apart from training sessions, handouts are also produced and made available to download, which is particularly convenient for staff based at the branch libraries. Online training is also on offer: two examples given were training on the Citizens Advice Bureau and NHS Choices websites, which was delivered online through Moodle, a free web application where learning sites can be created. Finally, informal training and shadowing also take place:

*“We’ve got a new training calendar for next year, where you go into various departments or you can go into a branch library and you just, as a member of staff, see something else, and just learn what other people do, which we find very useful.”*

(Interviewee 3)

One of the participants is leading a recently created group dedicated to innovating staff training and stated that ideally the new staff training package would form the basis of a similar one to be offered to the public in the future. All this in-house training reflects the council's expectation that library staff should have a high level of expertise. On the staff's acceptance of this expectation, it was said that:

*"You have a lot of people who are very aware of information literacy and want to learn, and you have some who don't want to learn, and you have those who do want to learn, but have difficulties in learning, in our staff, just as much as you do in the public."* (Interviewee 5)

One interviewee expressed concern that the librarians are expected to train other staff, but do not receive much training themselves.

Information for staff is also disseminated through email and the intranet,

*"That's used for anything that people think that staff should be aware of and information learning. However, I do think that sometimes we overburden the frontline staff with too much information, because we certainly get overburden with too much information. [...] It's very difficult because different people learn in different ways and however you structure it is going to be different. It's a hard process I think getting everyone informed."* (Interviewee 5)

One participant in particular expressed concern about the professional future:

*"Often people get confused between librarians and library assistants as well. [...] I'm a bit worried about that as well. I went to Newcastle when the new build was there and I couldn't for the life of me all day find out what librarians actually did there, because their learning sessions were senior library assistant led, all their counters were staffed by library assistants, their self-issue machines had someone there who used to be a porter, who loved it, but you kind of think... If librarians are not visible, or not in existence, who knows, what are we doing?"* (Interviewee 3)

### ***IL teachers and approach to teaching***

When asked specifically about IL skills, one interviewee replied that users need the IT skills to begin with. According to him, the public is still considerably less IT literate than was expected ten years ago, when the People's Network was implemented and the team of Learning Librarians was first put together at Leeds to assist users and staff in achieving that computer literacy. All six participants repeatedly used the phrase "a mouse and a keyboard" to illustrate the demand that there still is from people who want to learn the absolute basics of how to use a computer. There is still a strong demand for basic IT skills sessions, before any other needs can be addressed, even simply accessing the Internet:

*"We've been doing this for nearly ten years and when we started almost everybody just wanted the very basics. [...] We thought that would start to die away and that would be replaced by other requests. But, still, at least a third of all the requests that we get are, 'I've never touched a computer before...' [...] A lot of the sessions are literally, 'This is a mouse, this is a keyboard, this is double-click, this is how you open something, this is how you close it'..."* (Interviewee 2)

Still, according to the same participant, ten years ago the library would not be offering sessions on Genealogy or on how to apply for jobs online, but now most major employers will only accept an online application, including Leeds Council. Ten years on, the learning sessions have expanded onto new subject areas.

The teaching of IL in public libraries is considered to have always been an important role which is becoming greater still:

*"Absolutely vital. [...] If they want to go to university [...] the greater their information literacy skills the better they'll do, but, more importantly, the greater their literacy skills at any age the better they'll do in education and education does increase your prospects, so, especially in this area where there's a lot of low literacy levels, the more we can give them the more chance they have of doing something with their lives. [...] I definitely consider myself an information literacy teacher and will happily help anybody who wants to learn."* (Interviewee 5)

Despite this assertion, and although most participants deliver learning sessions with structured lesson plans and are observed to assure a standard of quality, when asked whether they ever perceived themselves as teachers when delivering these activities

the answers were mixed: one said yes, definitely, and actually went on to do an Open University teaching qualification; another enthusiastically said yes, but pointed out that he had had no training and would be paid more if he was a teacher; two said no, for the same reasons; only one categorically said no. The vast majority, however, stated that they would welcome teacher training and that their work would benefit from it.

According to one interviewee, library staff cannot call themselves teachers:

*“It’s all to do with professional rules and demarcations, but we’re allowed to call ourselves tutors or mentors. But, essentially, we’re teachers. [...] I do have a lesson plan for all of the taught sessions that I do, but when I actually go in to a session I don’t take the lesson plan with me, because it’s all in my head now. [...] Every now and then I will look at what I’m doing and think, ‘Well, can I change something?’, ‘Is there something that’s not working?’, ‘Should I maybe look at all of this again and go through it again?’, and, not as often as I should, it’s maybe once year, but I will go through that and update the things that I do and update all of the handouts that I create for these sessions.”* (Interviewee 6)

One participant stated that he sees the team of librarians as educators, but not teachers. This is interesting, as the term ‘educator’ is normally associated with a more complex level of teaching. But even the participants who are Information Librarians agree that they would not call themselves teachers. Two who have worked in academic libraries pointed out that in that context they did feel much more like teachers, on account of having learning plans and targets to meet, as well as having to work closely with tutors, which forced them to have a more structured approach to that part of their work. It was mentioned how the concept of IL provided a valuable framework and helped validate the librarian’s work with the academic staff. However, all enjoy the teaching element of their job:

*“It is a change and it’s obviously worthwhile, [...] I’m perfectly happy to do it, I don’t think people should be obliged to do it, because if you don’t want to do it, you’re not going to be a good choice.”* (Interviewee 4)

Three would welcome the better structure that becoming an IL teacher formally would provide them with, especially when dealing with the management. One of the Information Librarians stated that she would welcome the same teaching education courses that the

members of staff who run the IT learning sessions have undertaken and that her work would benefit from it and she would then feel confident to deliver formal group learning sessions in the future, which she would be happy to do.

The one that answered ‘definitely’ believes this is mostly because a big element of her role when she started working at the library was to teach other library staff:

*“But that was because we were a particular group. [...] It was a wonderful opportunity. [...] We had this wonderful role, but one of the main elements was teaching ECDL. [...] I have got a teaching qualification now, but at the time I didn’t. I’d just got my Library degree. We all... Many of us, not all of us, but many of us had to do our ECDL to enable us, as quickly as we possibly could, to enable us to go out and help everybody else. So it was very interesting there... It took us from the Library background...” (Interviewee 1)*

Leeds Libraries are part of the council’s Adult Learning department, fit in with their rules and regulations, and RARPA (Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement) is part of what they do, but:

*“All of these acronyms are part of what we do simply because we do fit with the council. But the council recognises that we’re not an education provider in the traditional sense. And they know that our staff are not qualified teachers, they are very much at that sort of very... First step on the ladder, if you like, of helping people back into learning.” (Interviewee 2)*

The participants may not call themselves teachers, but some have clearly embraced this element of their role, even showing an evident enthusiasm for teaching equipment:

*“I would love a whiteboard, but we only have one [...] and it’s in amongst really expensive equipment, so generally I’m not allowed to take children in! I would love a whiteboard. When I go into classes, [...] I do use whiteboards there. So, yes, I like to use whiteboards, but I don’t have access to them.” (Interviewee 5)*

Those who do have access to that teaching equipment do not hesitate to make use of it:

*“Yesterday afternoon I was with a group of five Chinese people and I did something a lot more formal. I was chatting to them, but I was also stood at a board, writing down*

*words, all talking together, discussing the sound of the word, how you use this word in a sentence... So that was a lot more formal.” (Interviewee 6).*

### ***The public’s perception***

The staff and the public’s perceptions seem to differ – the librarians may not think of themselves as teachers, but the public certainly perceives them as such, and this is according to the library staff themselves:

*“I don’t think any of our staff do, but I think members of the public do. So, when a member of the public has been on those sessions, we ask them to fill an evaluation form at the end, and very often they talk about the teacher, you know: ‘The teacher was lovely’, ‘The teacher was really nice’, ‘The teacher did this or did that’... So, I think the members of the public perceive our staff in that role, as teaching them stuff. I don’t think our staff perceive themselves as teachers. They would say that they were helping, training... I don’t think they would use the word teaching. [...] They’re not teachers.” (Interviewee 2)*

### ***The willingness for interaction and learning/teaching of IL***

Here the opinions varied: one participant stated there is definitely willingness for interaction and the learning of IL skills on the part of the public, but two mentioned that the desk seems to be perceived as a barrier, while the remaining three feel that people will only ask for help if they have a problem:

*“I remember one woman in Chapeltown seeking my help because she wanted to try and send some photographs over to her family in Africa and she came to me and she was desperate to try and learn how to get her photos on to the Internet, attached to an email and sent to her family. So, yes, there’s hundreds of instances like that.” (Interviewee 1)*

*“This can be quite an intimidating building, so if some people come in they might just have a look around and if someone doesn’t go forward they might walk out again. It*

*would be a terrible shame if we missed those people. [...] But, personally, [as a member of the public] I'd rather wait to be asked.*" (Interviewee 4)

*"I'd say some people just like to search themselves, but especially in Central, a lot of the people we get are first-time learners of English. We get a lot of people who are doing IELTS, learning English as a second language, and they very much want help to start with on how to use our systems, because they're not used to them and they don't know how they work, but we get... We still get people coming in who think they have to pay to join the library service, so even basic stuff like that they have to pick up. But, I'd say, a lot of the public do ask us, still, but libraries are trying to make people self-learners, more and more."* (Interviewee 5)

The participants pointed out that they will always try to show the public how to do something before doing it for them, because their belief is that their role is to increase the skills of the public, so that they can become independent library users. But they also agree on how difficult it can be to stop people from asking the same things over and over again. Two participants argued this is probably because, for a big part of the public, frequenting the library is mostly about the personal interaction. Still, many prefer to be left alone. But not everyone:

*"A lot of Scottish people ask for help. I don't know how their education system is different, maybe they're just more willing to say, 'I don't know this'."* (Interviewee 3)

The librarians always make themselves available and will discreetly approach someone if they think they can help, while still respecting the users' privacy:

*"There was an old lady in the other day, with a shopping trolley and everything, and she wanted to look up a postcode or a hotel or something like that, and she looked like she was going to get stuck and you think, 'Even if I offer you that now, you're not going to ask...' But then, when I puddle past again she's like, 'Oh, yes. I'm so glad you're helping me', and it's like, 'Yes, that's what we're here for', but I think people... Because we still have a desk upstairs, [...] and we sit, I think people are kind of, 'Oh, I don't want to bother you, I don't want to', kind of, 'interrupt your work'."* (Interviewee 3)

The distinction between the teaching of IL in the public and the academic sectors was again pointed out:

*“[In an academic library] you have like a captive audience. But here you have to kind of win people over and say, ‘Well then, you want to come... Now I only need five people more to be able to run a proper session’. Unless you say, a one-to-one is the aim, which normally is just much easier to achieve, because until you have three people wanting to learn something like Cobra or whatever, like a specialised thing, it’s no chance they will come like every few months and you couldn’t just have a waiting list...”* (Interviewee 3)

### **Changes in role**

Asked if over time their role as a librarian had become more interesting, all participants stated that not particularly, just somewhat more difficult. One interviewee named the increase in work with partner organisations such as schools and the NHS as one element that had made the work more interesting: he gave the example of the collaboration with the NHS in supporting the public in the use of the NHS Choices website.

*“Very little of it is the sort of in-depth queries we would have got when I joined, lots of parliamentary stuff, legal stuff... People didn’t have computers, obviously, thirty-five years ago, so... It was more finding information for people and being asked in-depth things.”* (Interviewee 4)

*“My job went from being very specialist to being a bit more generalist – I’m having to cover mobile libraries permanently, which I only used to cover with travellers. It’s having to be far more focused and you’re having to give far more proof of what you do and why you’re doing it.”* (Interviewee 5)

In general, however, there was a certain apprehension or discontent with some aspects of the current roles, with one interviewee stating that “it is all too much about computers now”.

### **Funding**

Even though some acknowledge public libraries as “easy targets” when it comes to cuts in government funding, all participants were unanimous in agreeing that the recent closure of 13 libraries in Leeds was not the negative measure that has been portrayed to be in the media:

*“But it does mean that the public perception is that we’re closing services, even though those services probably aren’t a great loss and it means we’ll be able to provide a better service, because Leeds has had a huge number of branch libraries, far more than similar sized authorities. [...] It’s unfortunate [...] that the public thinks that this is a response to the economic climate and we’re closing them for that reason and it’s just the beginning of a huge diminution in the service that we offer. Whereas, in fact, it might give us more opportunities.”* (Interviewee 4)

All staff from the libraries which were closed has been relocated within the service and this is seen as a great improvement for the service in general. The brand new fleet of state-of-the-art mobile libraries that Leeds Libraries now has driving across the city was mentioned by all interviewees:

*“Leeds having closed a few branches now, there was this big uproar and everything, but we’ve got great mobile libraries now. I think people just need to see that it’s not all bad and that even though there might be less, it’s better. And that you can achieve stuff just by going in.”* (Interviewee 3)

One participant pointed out how Leeds Libraries learning offer is less likely to be affected by central governments’ funding cuts than other public library authorities:

*“We – and it might be different if you’re going and talking to people from different library authorities, they will do it in a different way – but the way that we do this is that, it’s our staff who deliver it, and we train them ourselves, and we deliver it ourselves and use the library computers and they’re already here. [...] It’s a core service now. It’s part of our library staff, our librarians’ job description. So, it’s entirely sustainable because it’s our own staff that are doing it.”* (Interviewee 2)

Other services who outsource their training – from a college, Learn Direct or the respective council’s Adult Education departments, for example – may be let down, if those institutions are under pressure from funding cuts themselves.

## **Mobile libraries**

All participants referred with obvious pride to the re-launch of the mobile services, recently expanded and re-named Libraries Direct. These mobile libraries reach audiences that might otherwise not benefit from the public library service.

As an example, the children's service has been named Mobile for Children and Families in an attempt to reach adults as well:

*“The children's one has Internet access so what we've actually done is that visiting time that the children's mobile goes to that site is now split for half an hour where there aren't children, because they haven't come back from school, and half an hour where there are. So that gives the children time to get out books, but the half an hour before we're going to try and use to get the traveller parents to have basic information literacy courses on how to use laptops.” (Interviewee 5)*

## **4.5 The future of public libraries**

As before, when asked about the future of public libraries and the role of the public librarian, particularly as regards the teaching of IL, the main concern of the participants was with the promotion of what the service offers:

*“I think libraries have to be aware of the competition, if you like, and if people are not borrowing as many books as they were, if they want other things to do with their time, then we have to be aware of that and we have to be offering those other things, and if one of those other things is learning about computers and IT, then that's great. For those people who are still into books and information in a traditional sense, we have all that as well. [...] And we have information for businesses and for people looking for jobs, and we have information for all kinds of people, in a traditional way.” (Interviewee 2)*

*“I'm worried about things where you pay and it's really just what the library does. Like the Summer Reading Challenge that's running at the moment. I came across something in the Waitrose Weekend [magazine]: it had this programme where you paid ten pounds a month and then they send you books to your house, for your child to*

*read, for their reading age. And I thought, 'But that's what the library does...' We do this, this is information literacy, that's library skills and all that... [...] But then at the same time we're not very good at saying that's what we do.'* (Interviewee 3)

One participant was critical of the role of CILIP as regards public libraries:

*"I think the future of public libraries is always dependent upon the Government of the time. [...] I think the public library service very much depends, or its future very much depends, upon the proactive nature of the people in charge of that public library service – the people down on the ground-floor can do as much as they like, but if the people up top don't say, don't promote us, and say, 'This is how important we are', and, 'This is how useful we are', then the people who make the big decisions aren't going to hear us. I think CILIP have a big role in it and I don't think they're very good at it."* (Interviewee 5)

The participants believe Leeds Libraries has always embraced new technologies and has been quite innovative. According to them, what the library offers goes far beyond the traditional, while at the same time retaining the core of what a public library service has always been about: a neutral space open to all, where resources and expert staff are available to assist in the public's learning and leisure pursuits.

## 5. Analysis and discussion

This section will compare the main findings of the study with the literature and discuss them in that context.

### 5.1 Conceptions of lifelong learning and information literacy

The participants in this study are all professional librarians and have a clear understanding of the concepts of LL and IL, which they unanimously considered to have always been at the core of public libraries and to be crucial to their future.

#### *Lifelong learning*

Predominantly, the participants view LL as learning for personal development: none of the interviewees mentioned employability and workplace learning directly.

Their views and experience at this sizeable public library authority reinforce the literature in asserting the role of public libraries in LL as vital: it was said that public libraries offer a unique opportunity for independent learning at all stages in life. That independent, informal aspect of LL was deemed by all to be the most important thing about it and what may draw people to learn in public libraries rather than in a formal educational setting. The importance attributed to it seems to confirm Pacios' (2007) identification of LL as the second priority for the 21<sup>st</sup> century public library.

#### *Information literacy*

There is certainly not a notion amongst the participants that IL and the teaching of it provides, or will in the future, a justification for their role as librarians, as argued by O'Connor (2009a, b). They perceive librarianship as going beyond just an educational role. Even though they have a clear understanding of the concept, IL does not seem to be as clearly defined in the participants' minds as regards their everyday work as LL is. This seems to be a result of the development of the concept of DL as defined by Lankshear and Knobel (2008) and several other authors: IL is mostly addressed by the participants as DL, even though the

latter term was never used. However, they were unanimous in agreeing with the literature by stating that IL is a crucial literacy for our times and essential for the full exercise of citizenship. More training on IL would probably be welcomed at Leeds Libraries, which agrees with the findings of the study by Woodhouse (2005) – the author argued for more training on IL for all library staff: this would help clarify and formalise certain aspects of the work.

Elements related to IL repeatedly addressed by the participants were information overload and the reliability of the sources presented to the users: the development of the public's critical thinking was referred to by all as a priority in their work. One aspect that emerged and is not as prominent in the literature was the argument that before the public can be taught IL skills it needs the basic IT skills and, according to all participants, these are not as developed as had been predicted ten years ago. One participant in particular expressed a concern about a widening information gap between computer literate and non-literate members of the public.

## **5.2 Public libraries and education**

Leeds Libraries seems to present a similar 'ideal scenario' to the one described by Julien and Hoffmann (2008) in Canada and seems to play an important role in the development of those skills the community still lacks. A programme of learning sessions is in place, aimed at both the public and staff, and there is a training coordinator. These sessions are booked in advance and when the previous booking system was found to be less than effective, a new one was devised. The programme has been revised in 2011 and is now driven by demand, but with a wider range of topics on offer than ten years ago. However, and reflecting the participants concerns as regards the lack of basic IT skills of a considerable part of the community, these are primarily IT learning sessions. In addition, a vast number of activities are on offer. The sessions aimed at children provide a good example: the time set aside for the research interview with a librarian involved with these was barely enough to list and describe but a few.

The participants barely touched upon the recreational role of public libraries, which was to be expected considering the focus of this study. However, they all strongly defended their educational role and the unique position they hold at the core of LL and informal, independent learning. Leeds Libraries has definitely "returned to its founding principles" (Broady-Preston and Cox, 2000: 155), if indeed it ever moved away from them. As stated,

this study did not address the recreational role, but no evident signs were found of the service lacking a clear direction or purpose (Broady-Preston and Cox: 2000), quite the opposite.

Reflecting on the changes to the work, one interviewee stated that the biggest change in his case had been the increase in collaboration with partner organisations such as the NHS. This seems good practice, as Broady-Preston and Cox (2000) argue that collaborative partnerships represent the way forward in terms of development of the service, especially when funding is harder to obtain.

The participants also showed a concern in relation to the measurement of outcomes as addressed by O'Beirne (SINTO, 2011), arguing that educational outcomes are difficult to quantify. It is vital that the future sees a clarification and better promotion of the initiatives promoted by the service in order to obtain the necessary support of the political authorities and get them to recognise the educational role of the public library service.

### **5.3 The teaching of IL and the role of the public librarian**

#### ***The teaching of IL***

When asked about the teaching of IL skills, all the participants agreed that it is an important role for public libraries, but they were also unanimous in declaring that before those skills can be taught the public needs basic ICT skills and, in their experience, a considerable part of the community still lacks these skills. Therefore, the priority at Leeds Libraries is the teaching of ICT skills and the formal learning sessions offered by the service are primarily computer literacy sessions. But they advocate the teaching of IL to promote independent learning.

The most formal teaching of IL is to children, in which the CARS checklist is used.

The issue of information overload was raised, as was to a certain extent the concept of information anxiety (Bawden and Robinson, 2009). But critical thinking was pointed out as crucial for our times.

On the willingness of the public for learning IL skills, or even to interact with library staff, it was found that Kempster and Palmer (2000) are justified in warning that the lack of it may prove an obstacle to the teaching of IL in public libraries, as the participants mostly feel that

users will only come to them if they have a problem. Whether or not that is caused by *library anxiety* should be looked into, as the interviewees also provided episodes where they offered help to users and they were grateful for it.

The formal collaboration between public libraries and educational institutions advocated by several authors as a means to establish a teaching role is firmly established at Leeds Libraries who regularly organise joint initiatives, in particular aimed at school children.

### ***IL teachers and approach to teaching***

As it has already been said, all participants answered affirmatively when questioned if they considered the teaching of IL to be an important role for public libraries. However, and even though they acknowledge the teaching element of their role, the majority feels that teaching is not at the core of what they do and they state they would not call themselves teachers.

Even so, all throughout the research interviews the words ‘teaching’ and ‘teacher’ came up all the time. They believe teaching is just an element of what they do, but being a librarian is different is different, as it involves other duties and skills, such as cataloguing and stock acquisition and management. The council, however, recognised a need for teaching training and offered it to the members of staff delivering learning sessions.

While repeatedly reaffirming they are librarians not teachers, and that there is a difference, most have actually embraced the teaching element of their role with great enthusiasm and would welcome more training, confirming the need for more pedagogical training for librarians argued by Bewick and Corral (2010), as well as various other authors. This group of librarians certainly possess technology and teaching skills in addition to the traditional librarianship skills that Bell and Shank (2004) describe.

Evidence of a certain degree of ‘role stress’ (Julie and Genuis, 2009) was found – one participant declared the job had moved away considerably from traditional librarianship and it was too much about computers now.

But the participants train both other staff and the public, they deliver formal learning sessions, in some cases with a lesson plan they devised, they use teaching equipment and if it is not at hand they feel the need for it, as we’ve seen an example.

## 6. Conclusions

This section will discuss to what extent the study's aim and objectives were met and offer recommendations to Leeds Libraries as well as state some implications for Library and Information Studies departments.

### *The aim and objectives*

The aim of this study was to investigate the perception public librarians hold of their role as regards the teaching of IL by analysing Leeds Libraries as a case study. Five objectives were set in order to achieve this and it is considered that all were met. This was done through research interviews with the participants, which were transcribed and analysed.

The first objective was to explore the conceptions held by Leeds library staff of LL and IL, as well as the importance they attribute to them. The participants revealed a clear conception of both LL and IL, but were particularly aware of LL in their everyday work. Both LL and IL were deemed crucial for an effective citizenship in today's society. In addition, the participants also revealed a clear awareness of the concept of DL.

The second was to find out how these librarians see public libraries in an educational context. The interviewees argued unanimously for a vital role for public libraries in education, stating that they represent a unique opportunity for LL. The teaching of IL skills, in particular critical thinking, was considered vital for the 21st century and public libraries deemed to be in the best position to be at the core of this teaching. However, ten years on from the People's Network, a considerable part of the community is still not deemed to be sufficiently IT literate. For this reason, the participants consider the teaching of IT skills to be the priority, before IL skills can be taught to the public. Therefore, the learning sessions on offer are primarily IT sessions. But Leeds Libraries also offers formal learning sessions on a wide range of subjects, various online resources and the staff provide a high level of support to the public: it certainly creates the conditions for learning. IL learning sessions, however, are mainly informal.

The third objective was to investigate these public librarians' perception of the teaching of IL as part of their role and to what extent they consider themselves teachers. These public librarians are delivering structured learning sessions and therefore teaching. The public

clearly perceives them as teachers, not surprisingly taking into consideration the formal learning setting in which it interacts with the library staff. The participants are very confident in this element of their work, but still consider that it would benefit from teacher training. An extremely relevant point was made by one of the participants who stated his belief that public libraries are performing a greater educational role than ever before, because it was never expected that they would teach the public to read, while now libraries teach users IT skills before showing them how to gather and use information from the WWW. All these elements would prove a very valid argument to present to the political authorities, both central and local, whose support is considered to be vital for the development of the public library service.

The fourth objective was to find out how the participants approach the teaching of IL, both to the public and other library staff. All interviewees are involved in the training of other library staff, as well as the public. This training sometimes involves delivering formal learning sessions for which staff devises lesson plans. The council recognised their need for teaching training and offered them a basic teaching qualification. However, this training was not made available to the Information Librarians who deliver informal IL learning sessions.

Finally, the fifth objective was to look into how these librarians see their role in the future. The participants see a very important role for public libraries in 21<sup>st</sup> century. Their main concern is for a better clarification and promotion of their work. CILIP was criticised for not adequately taking on the role of championing public libraries – a central authority that would represent its interests was deemed essential for the future development of the public library service.

According to Roy Clare,

“libraries abroad are in many ways envious of what we are able to do. Big cities abroad have fantastic libraries but they are not so good at having the library at their doorsteps”, said Roy Clare (Akbar, 2009: 3).

Leeds Libraries is a good example of a doorstep library other cities may very well be envious of.

### ***Recommendations***

If the public perceives the librarians delivering learning sessions as teachers, then to a certain extent they are teachers but are not being acknowledged as such: the public's perception clearly is part of what defines teaching. That perception could be a valid argument for a greater degree of formalisation of this element of a public librarians' role, from which the public would also benefit.

A clarification of the informal learning offer of Leeds Libraries and the role of the public librarian as regards the teaching of IL would greatly benefit the service. It was said that public libraries would benefit from an IL framework such as the SCONUL Seven Pillars has been providing for higher education and that is believed to be true. However, a community setting has many different contexts in which IL can be taught and one framework may not fit them all.

The benefits of in-house training were clearly demonstrated by this study. Other public libraries would maybe benefit from the experience of Leeds Libraries in this matter.

### ***Implications for Library and Information Studies departments***

The public's perception of public librarians as teachers indicates a need for pedagogical knowledge and skills of the public librarian of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This analysis into Leeds Libraries shows that librarians are increasingly delivering formal learning sessions even outside formal educational settings. They would benefit from training included in LIS programmes that would allow them to be better prepared for this growing element of their role.

**Word count: 18,891**

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### **Further reading**

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1 – Information sheet

#### Interview Schedule

- What do you understand by lifelong learning?
- What do you understand by information literacy?
- What role do you think public libraries play in education in general nowadays?
- Do you think the teaching of information literacy is an important role for public libraries?
- What does the library offer that could be considered to allow the public to learn information literacy skills (informal/formal activities, electronic resources)?
  - What is your involvement in this?
- Do you perceive yourself as an information literacy teacher in your everyday work, not just of the public but also of other staff? If so, how do you approach this teaching?
- How would you feel about becoming more of an information literacy teacher?
- Do the library users actively seek your help or do they generally prefer to be left alone?
  - Do you feel the library users are interested in learning so-called information literacy skills?
- Do you feel confident at the moment to perform your work or do you feel you need more training?
- How do you see the future of public libraries and of your role specifically?
- Do you think your work has changed significantly since you first started working in public libraries?
  - Do you feel it has become more interesting?
- Is there anything you would like to add?

## Appendix 2 – CARS ckecklist

I did a search for Pluto to see if it is a Planet because I was taught at school that it was a planet, so I thought it would be a pretty easy search to do.

NASA – who are they and why would they know?  
NASA don't know either.

Open Google

Type: PLUTO PLANET

Look at the article called 'Is Pluto a Planet? On the website [www.buzzle.com](http://www.buzzle.com)

Check what else Arjun has written....go here.....

By Arjun Kulkarni  
Published: 1/14/2010

He has written something on everything. Does that mean he is an expert on everything?

Try Wikipedia

Try Britannica Junior

Which is easier?

### CARS Checklist

<p><b>CREDIBILITY –</b></p> <p>Do you trust the information? Do you trust or know the website? What else has this person written and does this show they know what they are talking about?</p>	<p><b>ACCURACY –</b></p> <p>Is it up to date? this year, last year, yesterday? Does it make guesses? Are there any spelling mistakes.</p>
<p><b>REASONABLE –</b></p> <p>Does it give both sides of the argument?</p>	<p><b>SUPPORT –</b></p> <p>Does it tell you where it got it's information from? Can the place the information is from be trusted? <b>THINK CARS</b></p>

## Appendix 3 – CARS checklist

CARS Checklist	
<p><b>IS THE WEB PAGE CREDIBLE?</b></p> <p>Does your teacher say it is a site you can trust?</p> <p>Do <u>you</u> trust or know the website?</p> <p>Why do you trust the website?</p>	<p><b>IS THE WEB PAGE ACCURATE?</b></p> <p>How old is the web page? Is the information out of date? This information can sometimes be found at the bottom or sides of the web page. Ask a teacher if the date is hard to find.</p> <p>Are there any mistakes? Think spelling.</p> <p>Does the page work?</p> <p>Can this website be trusted if they can't be bothered to correct mistakes?</p>
<p><b>IS THE INFORMATION REASONABLE?</b></p> <p>Do you believe what the website says?</p> <p>Do the people making the website have a reason to lie?</p> <p>Why?</p>	<p><b>IS THE WEB PAGE SUPPORTED PROPERLY?</b></p> <p>Does the website say where it gets its facts from?</p> <p>This information can sometimes be found at the bottom or sides of the web page. Ask a teacher if you can't find out.</p> <p>If you have found out where the facts are from, can you trust that they are correct?</p> <p>If you don't know where the facts are from, how can you trust them?</p>