AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE RECREATIONAL READING HABITS OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD

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at

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Abstract

Background
In a rapidly changing information world, flexible reading skills are key to personal and professional success. However, reading is viewed as being in decline, particularly amongst the 18-24 year age group. Students are seen as only reading what is required, rather than developing a wide taste in reading. This study investigated whether undergraduate students read for pleasure and their attitudes and preferences in doing so.

Aims
The study aimed to investigate whether undergraduate students at the University of Sheffield read for pleasure and their attitudes towards it. It further looked at their recreational reading habits, including what they read, in which format, where they get reading material from and whether they believe reading helps with their academic work. A final aim was to make recommendations on a recreational reading collection for the University of Sheffield libraries.

Methods
An online questionnaire was distributed to undergraduates at the University via an email list. Five hundred and twenty five usable responses were received, which were then analysed using MS Excel and the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Results
The study found that undergraduates at the University of Sheffield do read for pleasure, show enthusiasm about doing so, and have a range of reasons for reading. The students indicated a preference for fiction and print materials, and regularly buy rather than borrow books. Time is a major barrier to recreational reading for these students. A recreational reading collection at their academic library was seen to be a good thing.

Conclusions
As a result of the study findings, two recommendations were made for the library service. These were to investigate the possibility of creating a recreational reading collection, and to establish links with the local public libraries in order to promote their services to students. Further research might focus on exploring if there is a correlation between recreational reading, academic attainment and library use.
1. Introduction and context

1.1 Introduction

This research project investigates whether undergraduate students read for pleasure, focusing on students at the University of Sheffield. This chapter introduces the research, discussing the background and rationale to the study. The aims and objectives of the research are then set out, and the structure of the study is clearly explained.

1.2 Definition of terms

Throughout this study, the terms “recreational reading”, “leisure reading” and “reading for pleasure” and their derivatives are used interchangeably. They are all taken to mean any reading that is done outside of academic-related reading; reading that is undertaken voluntarily. This includes fiction, non-fiction, magazines, and online content. This definition is similar to that used by other studies, including Diers and Simpson (2012), Gilbert and Fister (2011), and Clark and Rumbold (2006) for the National Literacy Trust.

1.3 Research background

Today’s 18-24 year olds are referred to as “Millennials”, “Digital Natives” or the “Google Generation” (Jones et al, 2010; Rowlands et al, 2008; Smyth and Carlin, 2012). It is assumed that they have a high level of technology use and knowledge and that most of their information comes from the Internet (Agee, 2005). These “digital natives” are reportedly spending more time on the Internet as a leisure activity than previous generations (OCLC, 2006). News reports have long declared a “decline in reading” amongst all ages, with a particular focus on children and young people (Cassidy, 2005; Vasagar, 2012; Williams, 2013).

In addition, there is a popular notion that students do not read, read just enough to get by academically, or are “put off” recreational reading by academic reading. Academic librarians appear to share this view, with one surveyed by Gladwin (Gladwin and Goulding, 2012: 154) stating:

“[Students] read the textbooks they have to read and that’s it. I don’t think they are interested in anything else.”
Agee (2005) states that the information world revolves around reading so literacy is crucial for everyone, and particularly those who aim for career progression. This literacy encompasses not only being “functionally literate” (able to read and write, Agee, 2005: 249) but being able to identify and use information effectively for personal needs. This is supported by SCONUL’s (2011) Seven Pillars of Information Literacy for Higher Education, which emphasises the ability to read critically, evaluate sources and synthesise information to be successful at university and beyond. Garfield (2008: 476) also notes that reading has “traditionally been at the heart of academic study and university education”. The notion that students “don’t read” is therefore troubling, particularly from librarians, whose historical focus has been on encouraging reading.

With developments in technology, including the invention of the e-reader, the nature of reading has changed. Reading online means people read for shorter periods and in less depth (Smith and Young, 2008), “reducing students’ capacity for concentration and contemplation” (Dewan, 2010: 50). A report by the OECD (2002), Reading for Change suggests that people now need “multiliteracies”; their reading needs to be flexible and able to adapt over time in order to meet changing needs. In addition, the report states that “changing and improving students’ reading proficiency could have a strong impact on their opportunities in later life” (OECD, 2002: 3).

It has been established that reading is a skill that is needed throughout life and requires practice. It is generally expected that students will read material that is related to their course, and will learn to read critically throughout their time at university. However, whether they read recreationally and what benefits this brings has not been a focus of study in the UK. Small surveys of students have been carried out in the US (Gallik, 1999; Rathe and Blankenship, 2006; Salter and Brook, 2007) and Canada (Parlette and Howard, 2010), which show that recreational reading is a habit for undergraduates although the time they have for this is limited. However, the most widely cited study in this area is Gallik (1999), whose research was small scale, arguably localised and is now dated considering advancements in technology in the past 15 years.

Reading theory suggests that recreational reading can be of benefit to general wellbeing as well as having an impact on critical thinking skills and potentially on academic achievement. Rosen (in Elkin, 2011: 239) states that “children who read widely and often are school achievers".
Goodall and Pattern (2011) have found some correlation between use of the academic library and academic achievement. This suggests that encouraging recreational reading in an academic library setting could potentially be of benefit to undergraduate students. As has already been noted however, academic librarians perhaps do not believe that students read recreationally, and leisure reading collections in British academic libraries are uncommon.

Academic libraries are in a state of change, with new challenges (such as the open access agenda) and decreasing budgets the norm. Recreational reading collections have been in US academic libraries for some time, but leisure reading materials are not seen as high priority (Nicholson, 2012). In the UK, Gladwin (2010) concluded that recreational reading collections were becoming more common, but had not become the norm. Surveys of student views on recreational reading collections have found that students have positive attitudes towards these collections (Parlette and Howard, 2010; Rathe and Blankenship, 2006).

In the context of new technologies, rising tuition fees and a perceived decline in reading for pleasure, a study of undergraduate student attitudes to leisure reading will provide an opportunity to dispel myths and make recommendations for the University of Sheffield libraries. This could potentially be of benefit both to the students and the library staff engaging with them.

1.4 University of Sheffield context

The University of Sheffield is a Russell Group university with 17,720 undergraduate students in 2012 (University of Sheffield, 2013a). The majority of these are home or EU students (14,225), with the largest number of international students from China. Most undergraduates are under 21 (92%), with a small percentage aged 21-24 (6%) (University of Sheffield, 2013b). The ratio of female to male undergraduate students is evenly split (University of Sheffield, 2013c). The university has four libraries holding 1.3 million books and periodicals (University of Sheffield, 2013d). The libraries do not currently have a distinct recreational reading collection.
1.5 Research aims and objectives

This study aims to investigate undergraduate students’ attitudes to recreational reading and the involvement of their academic library in this area of their lives.

To thoroughly investigate the research aims, four objectives have been identified:

1. To discover if undergraduate students at the University of Sheffield engage in recreational reading and their reasons for and against it.

2. To investigate undergraduate students reading preferences; what type of materials they read, in what format and where they get reading material from.

3. To discover students attitudes towards recreational reading: When they read, whether they have a history of reading and if they believe this helps with their academic work.

4. To use reported student experiences to make recommendations on a recreational reading collection for the University of Sheffield libraries.

1.6 Structure of dissertation

The dissertation takes the following structure. In Chapter Two, the literature around recreational reading, student perceptions of libraries and student preferences is reviewed and analysed, with gaps in the literature identified. Chapter Three looks at the research methodology of the project, discussing the approach taken as well as the data collection techniques selected. In Chapter Four, the results of the data collection are clearly presented and analysed, with outcomes discussed in relation to the research aims and objectives stated in Chapter One. Finally, Chapter Five draws conclusions about how well the research aims and objectives were met, and suggests areas for further research.
2. Literature review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature around students and recreational reading, discussing findings from previous studies and theories of reading. As there is a dearth of literature focusing specifically on undergraduate students, the literature review will instead concentrate on students as a whole, with some reference to the wider age group studied (18-24 year olds). Themes reviewed are:

- Students and recreational reading, including demographic correlations
- Benefits of reading for students
- Barriers to reading
- Attitudes to recreational reading and preferences
- Students and library use
- Recreational reading collections in academic libraries

Conclusions are drawn at the end of the chapter, in order to relate the literature to discussion of survey results in Chapter 4.

2.2 Students and recreational reading

Studies focusing specifically on students and recreational reading are limited, and generally cannot be compared easily due to the number of different definitions of recreational reading (Elliott, 2007; Salter and Brook, 2007). Whilst some studies focus on fiction reading and print books (Burak, 2004; Dewan, 2010), others have a wider definition that includes online content (Banou et al, 2008; Foasberg, 2013). A focus of the literature is on students and their academic reading, although this research may also feature questions about student’s recreational reading habits (Dewan, 2012; Lin, 2012). In addition, much of the literature is focused on American college students (Burak, 2004; Gallik, 1999; Rathe and Blankenship, 2006), with no major studies of undergraduate students in the UK completed. UK-focused research on recreational reading tends to be on children and young people, then grouping the 18-24 year old age group with other adults.
Overall, there are varied reports on whether 18-24 year olds read for pleasure. Mahaffy (1999) notes that the idea of a decline in reading has been around for a while. In general, studies have found that students do read for pleasure, although the rate of this occurrence has varied (Gallik, 1999; Mokhtari et al, 2009). Banou et al (2008) found that in Greece students read more books than the general audience in a similar age range (18-24 year olds), and Hallyburton et al (2011) reported that undergraduates were particularly heavy users of an academic library’s leisure reading collection.

In contrast, studies focusing on the wider age group find different results. Dewan (2010) states that the 16-24 year old age group constitute the lowest percentage of “heavy readers” in the Canadian population. A Museums and Libraries Archive Council (MLA) and Department for Culture, Media and Sport (MLA/DCMS, 2006) report studying 14-35 year olds found that reading was more marked in older respondents (aged 25-35). An OCLC study (2006) reported that students are reading less because of the Internet.

2.2.1 Demographic correlations

Some studies have focused specifically on particular demographics within the student population, correlating reading for pleasure with information such as age, gender and subject studied.

Overall, studies find that females are more likely to read for pleasure than males, and have a more positive attitude towards reading (Burak, 2004; Gallik, 1999, Xue, 2004). Gallik (1999) states that girls read more than boys at every age. This appears to be supported by studies of the wider age group, including the Nestle Family Monitor (2003) and the MLA/DCMS’s (2006) report.

Limited research is available on the connection between subject studied and pleasure reading (Parlette and Howard, 2010). Jeffries and Atkins (1996) found that humanities students have the highest mean number of books read. A study in Taiwan concluded that humanities majors read more than some students, but not others, with education majors spending the least amount of time on leisure reading (Chen, 2007). Conclusions cannot be generalised however due to the small nature of these studies.
Age appears to be a factor in leisure reading, with interest in it declining during teenage years. The Nestle Family Monitor’s (2003: 7) report stated that 83% of British young people read books in their spare time. However, the report further notes that 13/14 appears to be the age when young people’s interest in reading declines; this is supported by both Gallik’s (1999) findings and the MLA/DCMS (2006) report on libraries and recreational reading. Clark (2011) shows that whilst number of occurrences of reading may decrease, the length of time spent reading increases.

2.2.2 Benefits of reading for students

The benefits of recreational reading for students are often listed in studies but perhaps not referenced to evidence. For example, Parlette and Howard (2010) state that recreational reading can lead to an increase in personal wellbeing for first year students, but do not show evidence to support this opinion.

Other benefits noted include improved critical thinking and writing skills (Nicholson, 2012; Smith and Young, 2008); correlation between frequency of reading and literacy levels (Grenier et al, 2008); and fostering engagement (Smith and Young, 2008). Another potential benefit is impact on academic attainment. Whilst there is a general belief that better students read more (Gallik, 1999), there is limited research on the link between this and reading for pleasure. Paulson (2006: 52) states that it is the “key to academic success and love of reading” but noted that there has been little research on reading for pleasure and academic gains. Goodall and Pattern (2011) reported a correlation between library usage and attainment at one university, but the focus was on academic use. In addition, Bordonaro (2011) linked improved language skills in international students to recreational reading.

The general literature on reading for pleasure notes there are many reasons why people read, including escapism, to solve personal problems, relieve stress and improve communication (Elkin, 2003). However, there has been little investigation in to the reasons why students read for pleasure. Although it can perhaps be assumed these reasons are similar to the general population, further research may uncover other motivations.
2.2.3 Barriers to recreational reading

Most studies find that time is the major barrier to recreational reading for both the 18-35 age group (MLA/DCMS, 2006) and students specifically (Banou et al, 2008; Foasberg, 2013; Gilbert and Fister, 2011). Other leisure activities, social activities and the amount of coursework to do are three main factors reported in lack of time (Paretta and Catalano, 2013; Salter and Brook, 2007). Mokhtari et al (2009) found that college students appear “willing to forego recreational reading for other activities”.

Students tend to report having more time to read during vacation (Gallik, 1999; Foasberg, 2013; Rathe and Blankenship, 2006). Some students express frustration at the lack of time they have for recreational reading during semester time (Foasberg, 2013).

Some students may also report that they do not read or do not like reading (Diers and Simpson, 2012). Reasons for this could perhaps include fear of failure, with people feeling defeated and that it reflects badly on them if they give up or do not like a book. Van Riel and Fowler (1996) found this can be a motivating factor for not reading. Salter and Brook (2007: 27) also note the concept of “aliteracy”; people who are “able to read but not interested in reading”. Libraries may also present barriers to reading for the 18-24 age group, with stock issues (e.g. type and amount of stock), usage issues, and anxiety (feeling intimidated by the library) reported as major reasons for not using the public library (MLA/DCMS, 2006).

2.2.4 Recreational reading preferences

Whilst many studies have covered student’s preference for print or electronic formats for academic reading (Smyth and Carlin, 2012), few ask about preference for recreational reading. Studies of format preference tend to focus on the divide between academic and personal reading (Foasberg, 2013). The studies for both types of reading report mixed results, with no conclusive evidence of a preference for either print or electronic.
Research is particularly mixed on what format students prefer when reading for pleasure. Reading studies appear to focus on e-books rather than other electronic reading (such as blogs, online content, etc.). Print appears to be preferred for long-form reading, including fiction books (Diers and Simpson, 2012; Foasberg, 2013; Joint, 2008; Shrimplin et al, 2011).

Other studies have found students use electronic formats for reading for pleasure although perhaps not in great numbers (Lin, 2012; Smyth and Carlin, 2012). Smyth and Carlin’s (2012) study at the University of Ulster showed 18-24 year olds showed the most bias towards print books over other age groups. Foasberg (2013) states that current students “see themselves as the generation prior to the one in which electronic reading will become commonplace”. This is particularly interesting as today’s 18-24 year olds are referred to as “Millennials”, who are assumed to be competent with technology and have the expectation of 24 hour access to anything they need (Gardner and Eng, 2005; Nicholas and Lewis, 2008).

As noted earlier, studies vary in their definition of what constitutes recreational reading, making it difficult to directly compare results. Nevertheless, fiction reading appears popular with both students and the 18-24 year age group. Foasberg’s (2013) study of student reading practices found that 79% read fiction and non-academic articles for pleasure. Parlette and Howard (2010) found that 50% of their participants were currently reading fiction, although they did note that some participants could not separate pleasure reading from academic reading. The MLA/DCMS (2006: 25) report noted that “respondents defined themselves as “readers” by their consumption of fiction books”.

2.2.5 Students and library use

There has been a general decline in public library use in the UK, with numbers of 18-24 year olds visiting dropping from 51% of those surveyed in 2005/6 to 34.4% in 2010/11 (DCMS, 2011). A MLA/DCMS (2006) report states that 18-35 year olds tend to get their books from bookstores. This research is supported by Diers and Simpson (2012), who note that the main sources of materials are bookstores, public libraries and the Internet. Among the 18-35 year age group, reasons for not using the library include reporting that it’s “not for them” and that they do not want to be like the sort of people that use the library (MLA/DCMS, 2006: 9).
Academic library use appears to be sustained though; Vondracek (2007) found a low rate of non-users of the library at one American university. This finding is supported by OCLC’s (2006) wider study of students in 6 countries, including the UK. The OCLC (2006: 14) study concluded that “college students use both college and public libraries frequently”. Joint (2008) further supports this, stating there has been a 60% increase in loans from UK research libraries, between the years of 1994/5 and 2005/6.

2.3 Recreational reading collections in academic libraries

2.3.1 Purpose of the academic library

The main priorities of an academic library are to support learning, teaching and research; encouraging leisure reading has not previously been considered a key role (Gladwin and Goulding, 2012; Nicholson, 2012). Salter and Brook (2007) note there is a trend to make libraries open spaces, with the focus away from books. This perhaps contrasts with student views, with a major OCLC (2006) study finding that students strongly associate the library with books.

There is a lack of consensus over what students use their academic library for, with Creaser (2011: 57) noting that “there is little evidence available concerning what users actually do in academic libraries and how long they spend there”. Paretta and Catalano’s (2013) observational study found that students were using the library for many different activities, including as a social space; however, Gardner and Eng (2005) found that students were mostly using the library for academic purposes.

Some suggest that the role of the academic library is to produce what Banou et al (2008: 492) call “sensitized citizens” or alternatively “well-rounded student[s]” (Gladwin, 2010: 11), which would appear to support the need for a recreational reading collection. Additionally, some librarians have reasoned that introducing recreational reading collections can engage students and improve the library experience for them (Bosman et al, 2008).
2.3.2 Recreational reading collections in academic libraries

Much of the literature on recreational reading material in academic libraries is from the US (Hallyburton et al, 2011; Salter and Brook, 2007; Zauha, 1993), with the focus on librarian attitudes to recreational reading collections. UK literature on the subject is limited, mainly consisting of one-off reports of events (Waller and Sidwell, 2005), with a study of librarian attitudes completed by Gladwin (2010; Gladwin and Goulding, 2012).

Recreational reading collections are fairly common in US academic libraries (Dewan, 2010; Nicholson, 2012) but Gladwin’s (2010) study concluded that they are becoming increasingly widespread in British academic libraries. The most common reason for not having a recreational reading collection appears to be financial, with librarians citing budget cuts and increased costs of other materials (Gladwin, 2010; Rathe and Blankenship, 2006). Around one third of the budget of British academic libraries is spent on information resources; this figure has not changed significantly over time (Creaser, 2011) despite the increase in cost of materials.

Student engagement is a major theme in justifications for having a recreational reading collection (Bosman et al, 2008; Nicholson, 2012). Reasons cited for introducing and maintaining a recreational reading collection include the “fun” aspect, making the library less intimidating, helping students develop bibliographic literacy, and bringing students in to the library (Nicholson, 2012). Gladwin and Goulding (2012) suggest collaboration between public and academic libraries can perhaps overcome funding barriers.

2.3.3 Student views on recreational reading collections

Student views on recreational reading and the role of academic libraries in their reading habits are largely unexplored, with a limited number of mainly US and Canadian studies, many of which focus on gaining feedback on an existing or recently implemented recreational reading collection (Banou et al, 2008; Rathe and Blankenship, 2006; Salter and Brook, 2007). The most common method used for these studies is a survey (Banou et al, 2008; Burak, 2004; Rathe and Blankenship, 2006) although some have undertaken other methods, including analysis of circulation statistics (Hallyburton, 2011), diary study (Foasberg, 2013) and small focus groups (Parlette and Howard, 2010).
Studies are generally localised to one particular university library, meaning perhaps the findings are not generalisable to the wider student population (Diers and Simpson, 2012). An additional issue with methods that ask students to self-report behaviour is that it may lead to bias and over-inflated results.

Research reveals contrasting views from students about whether they use the academic library as a place to obtain recreational reading materials. Banou et al (2008) and Bordonaro (2011) report that students use their academic library for this purpose, although not as their only provider. In contrast, Parlette and Howard (2010) report that students do not think of the academic library as a place for recreational reading material. However, most studies of student views conclude that students would use this collection if it was available (Diers and Simpson, 2012). This view is supported by Hallyburton et al’s (2011) review of circulation statistics, which showed one university’s popular collection materials were highly used, particularly among undergraduate students.

2.3.4 Librarian views on recreational reading collections

Librarians appear to recognise the importance of encouraging students to read for pleasure, if only theoretically (Gladwin and Goulding, 2012; Rathe and Blankenship, 2006). However, some research suggests they do not believe students enjoy reading for pleasure (Gilbert and Fister, 2011), although they have observed students reading a wide range of materials and some have been asked for recreational reading materials (Gilbert and Fister, 2011). Gladwin and Goulding (2012: 153) further note that survey responses suggest librarians hold a negative view of leisure reading within the academic library context, with “few believ[ing] it was the university library’s role to facilitate it”.

Butler (in Elkin, 2003) states that librarians can be influencers of attitudes to reading, so this view may be problematic. Elliott (2007: 35) notes a “historical attitude of elitism” to certain books which discourages reader’s advisory in librarians. Smyth and Carlin (2012) state that a failure to acquire desired stock can have a negative impact on student relationships. The OCLC perceptions survey (2006) supports this, finding that the most popular response to a question asking for advice for libraries was that they should update and add to their collections.
Librarians have been surveyed about views on recreational reading collections both in the US and UK. They generally report that they do not have time to maintain such a collection, do not believe it’s the academic library’s role to facilitate it, and are uncomfortable with a reader’s advisory role (Gladwin, 2010, Nicholson, 2012). Budget is another major factor, with another reason described by Gladwin (2010) as “mission drift” – concern that a recreational reading collection would not be supporting core activities of the library. Diers and Simpson (2012) note that the literature is overall supportive of recreational reading collections, but tends to ignore negative opinions of them.

2.4 Conclusion

Overall, the literature suggests that students do read for pleasure, although the amount of time they have to do so is limited by factors such as academic work and preference for alternative leisure activities. Female students appear more likely to read than males, with correlation to subject studied undecided. The picture is less clear on what format they prefer to read in, although some preference appears for print when reading fiction recreationally. Most studies of students and their habits involve a survey, with the survey tool used a self-administered questionnaire.

Whilst the benefits of recreational reading are widely documented, their application to academic libraries has perhaps not been fully recognised, particularly in the UK. Recreational reading collections in academic libraries appear to be becoming more common, both in the US and UK, and students appear to want to use them. British-based academic librarians seem to recognise the benefits of recreational reading for students, but appear reluctant to want to involve themselves in the promotion of this activity within their own library context.
3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the research and analysis methods used for this study. It explores the research approach and techniques chosen, including discussing advantages and disadvantages of user surveys. Methods of analysis of data collected are explored before finally ethical considerations around the research conducted are discussed briefly.

3.2 The literature review

The first stage of research was to conduct an initial literature review, in order to discover and assess the range of literature available around the research topic. This first stage informed the formulation of the research question. The literature review was conducted in stages through a period from March to August 2013; from an initial review when first scoping the topic to detailed database searches using subject-specific databases Emerald and LISA.

Cresswell (2009: 25) identifies several major purposes of the literature review; to share results of similar studies to the one being researched and to relate the study to a “larger ongoing dialogue”. At all stages the literature review informed the research conducted. The initial review helped to shape the research question and identify it as a gap in the literature. Analysis of literature that involved primary research informed the chosen research method and questions used in the survey questionnaire were also derived from the literature. Finally, the literature review informed analysis of data collected.

3.3 Research approach

The initial survey of the literature informed the research approach. A quantitative research approach to this study was taken as it was thought to best fit with the aims and objectives of the research. A qualitative approach allows for more in-depth enquiry, with “richness and detail to the data” (Denscombe, 2003: 280), but studies are usually small-scale in nature. As the aim of the study was to ascertain whether undergraduate students read for pleasure, a quantitative approach that would be able to gather as many responses as possible was thought most appropriate.
In addition, Robson (2011: 18) states that “measurement and quantification is central” in quantitative social research, which suited the aim of determining what percentage of the undergraduate population read for pleasure.

Quantitative data is normally associated with a deductive research approach, where “pre-existing theoretical ideas or concepts are tested” (Robson, 2011: 18). However, as limited studies have been undertaken on student perspectives to recreational reading, it was instead decided to take an inductive approach. The inductive approach allows ideas to emerge from the data collected, rather than “corroborate or falsify a theory” (Gray, 2009: 15). This is supported by Bryman (2004: 444) who notes that survey-based studies are more “exploratory” than a deductive approach implies.

3.4 User surveys

As discussed in 3.3, a quantitative approach was chosen for this research in order to gather data from as many participants as possible. A survey is a typical strategy used in quantitative approaches, and was chosen in order to get a “broad, rather than in-depth” (Moore, 2006: 120) picture of respondents’ attitudes to recreational reading. Surveys allow the researcher to identify general patterns and ask standardised questions to all research participants (Pickard, 2013). In addition, they are “flexible and cheap to administer” (Moore, 2006: 120), for a number of reasons, including that the researcher’s presence is not required at the time of completion.

The choice of method is supported by the literature, with most common method used to research student views a survey, often supported by follow-up interviews or focus groups (Banou et al, 2008; Gallik, 1999; Parlette and Howard, 2010). This is further supported by Curtis and Curtis (2011: 123) who state that “survey research is one of the most important approaches in the social sciences”.

In order to verify the validity of data discovered through the survey, it would be desirable to carry out follow-up interviews with participants (Hart, 2005). This would add detail and depth to quantitative answers. However, due to the timing of the research (in late May 2013), it was not possible to analyse results and formulate interview questions before undergraduates left university for the summer. It was thought unlikely that research participants would be available for interviews during their summer break.
Additionally, interviews with academic librarians on the subject of recreational reading collections were considered. However, very recent research has taken place on this subject (Gladwin, 2010) so results from this research were instead used in the discussion of survey results in order to make recommendations on a recreational reading collection for the University of Sheffield libraries.

3.4.1 Questionnaire

A survey was selected for the reasons detailed in 3.4, with the survey instrument selected a self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire was chosen as it is “best employed to gather generalisable information on large populations” (Buckingham and Saunders, 2004: 56). Moore (2006: 120) notes that the self-completion survey is probably the “most commonly used social research method” due to its flexibility and low cost. Further, it is popular among respondents and no interviewer bias is introduced during questioning.

Disadvantages of surveys include a low response rate, self-selecting bias (meaning only those who are interested in the topic will respond to the survey), and the researcher being unable to clarify or probe issues and answers (Pickard, 2013). Buckingham and Saunders (2004) further identify control of conditions as an issue, stating that respondents may be influenced by others, or not take the questionnaire seriously.

3.4.2 Paper vs online questionnaires

Both paper and online questionnaires were used due to practicalities at each university. At the University of Sheffield it was possible to use the ANNOUCE system, with an email going out to all undergraduate students on a mailing list. All undergraduate students are automatically subscribed to the list; they can choose to unsubscribe but it is a reasonable assumption that most of the undergraduate population can be reached through this system.

Sheffield Hallam University does not have a similar system for email announcements, so a paper questionnaire was used instead. This was placed at a location recommended by the library manager, and promoted to some extent by library staff. It was also possible to post a link to the online survey on the student Virtual Learning Environment, but this yielded no take up.
There is some discussion in the literature over whether there is a difference in responses between online and paper surveys. Denscombe (2006) found that e-questionnaires or surveys generate more complete information and fewer missing responses than paper questionnaires. Denscombe further found that responses are unlikely to be influenced by the mode of delivery, although noting that further research is required on the subject using like-for-like questionnaires.

Bryman (2008: 653) identifies seven advantages to online surveys. These are low cost, faster response, attractive formats, mixed administration, unrestricted compass, fewer unanswered questions and better response to open questions. Additionally, Pickard (2013) notes that respondents have greater anonymity and the freedom to complete a questionnaire in their own time.

Whilst there are advantages to online surveys including the low cost and potential for a better response, there are also disadvantages to this method. Bryman (2008) states that response rates for online surveys are typically lower than for postal questionnaires. They are also only available to those online, although it is a reasonable assumption to make that with the age group targeted and the use of technology required at university, the majority (if not all) of the population is online.

A further disadvantage identified by Pickard (2013) is that of multiple replies, where people may complete the questionnaire more than once. Additionally, as this survey had to be left open (without a university login required) there is the possibility that respondents shared the questionnaire with friends from other universities. Although these are both possibilities, it is considered unlikely that either of these took place.

Survey fatigue must also be considered; Curtis and Curtis (2011) state that the overuse of surveys mean people are less willing to participate in them. This was countered by attempting to write an engaging introduction to the questionnaire and research, and keeping it as short as possible.
3.4.3 Pilot study

The questionnaire was piloted both online using Google Forms and on paper among a small sample. The aim of the pilot study was to eliminate ambiguous or poorly worded questions, and check phrasing (Moore et al, 2010). The respondents were able to directly speak to the researcher after they had completed the questionnaire to provide feedback. Most respondents had no trouble completing the questionnaire and had no feedback on it. However, a minority commented on the pathway of the online questionnaire, which yielded some changes in order to make it easier for respondents to navigate.

3.5 Questionnaire content

The final questionnaire consisted of two pathways; one for respondents who stated they do not read for pleasure, and the other for those who stated they do read for pleasure. If respondents selected the option that they do not read for pleasure, they were presented with two questions. Respondents selecting the option that they do read for pleasure were asked ten questions. Each response route included a free text box for additional comments about the respondents’ attitudes to reading for pleasure.

The questionnaire was designed to be as short as possible, with clear instructions, following best practice guidelines. Moore (2006) notes that the longer a questionnaire is, the less likely people are to complete it. Further best practice guidelines were followed, with the questionnaire designed to look good and ask “unthreatening” questions first (Pickard, 2013: 210) in order to draw respondents into answering all the questions. Additionally, a variety of question types were chosen in order to keep respondents interested.

The majority of questions were closed, with answer options that were sourced from the literature. Closed question responses provide straightforward information with no ambiguity (Moore, 2006). A variety of question types were chosen, giving clear instructions for respondents on how to answer. These included multiple choice, selection from a rating scale and forced response questions, with only option allowed. A further three questions were asked at the end of the survey, in order to collect demographic data for analysis. A copy of the questionnaire is included in Appendix 2.
A short covering email introduced the survey, noting how long the questionnaire would take and the reasons for the research. The covering email was important, with Moore (2006) noting a good one can increase the response rate.

3.5.1 Survey sample

The survey sample was all undergraduates aged 18-24 at both the University of Sheffield and Sheffield Hallam University. Participants were those who responded to the questionnaire, creating a convenience sample. Although non-probability sampling such as convenience sampling produces “a far weaker data set” (Curtis and Curtis, 2011: 127), a different sampling method (for example stratified sampling) was not possible. This was due to the practical constraints of this type of research project, and lack of access to a sampling frame. Bryman (2008: 183) notes that “social research is also frequently based on convenience sampling”.

3.5.2 Timing of survey

The survey announcement was emailed on 8\textsuperscript{th} May 2013. The questionnaire was open for completion for a 3 week period, until 26\textsuperscript{th} May 2013, although the last response was on 21\textsuperscript{st} May. The timing of the survey was not ideal as it was during the end of year exam period for undergraduates. During this time students are under pressure to perform in their exams and are perhaps not as open to new surveys. This time period may also have influenced responses to Q8 in the survey, which asked at what time periods they read most and least.

However, the relatively high number of responses (527) to the survey suggests that perhaps the timing of the survey was effective, perhaps as students were looking for a distraction from revision. The subject matter is another potential reason for the relatively high response rate (3\% from a population of 17,720, University of Sheffield, 2013a); students are often asked about their academic performance and reading, but perhaps not about their leisure reading.
3.5.3 Data from Sheffield Hallam University

Whilst the survey at the University of Sheffield yielded a response rate of 3%, the Sheffield Hallam University survey was less successful, with only 8 paper responses and no online responses. It was therefore decided to discard these responses and focus on data collected from the University of Sheffield.

3.6 Data analysis

3.6.1 Quantitative data

Data was collected in an online Google Forms spreadsheet. Once the survey was closed, this was downloaded to a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. The spreadsheet allowed for quantitative data to be analysed, with charts, tables and graphs made of the results. These were carefully selected to present the results in the clearest way possible. Additionally, analysis of statistical significance was undertaken using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Analysing results using descriptive statistics was necessary due to the type of sampling used. Curtis and Curtis (2011: 128) state that data collected using non-probability sampling cannot be generalised to a whole population, or “not with much rigour”. However, Bryman (2008: 187) notes that whilst there is no broader applicability, data can be generalised “to the population from which the sample was taken”.

3.6.2 Free-text comments

Some coding was required for the free-text comments. Around a third of respondents provided free-text comments, significantly more than was anticipated.

The first three questions on the ‘yes, I read for pleasure’ pathway offered an ‘other’ option, allowing respondents to add their own answer if they felt the options offered were not sufficient. In addition, both pathways had a free text comment box at the end, asking respondents to use it to comment on their attitudes towards reading for pleasure. These comments are described as “descriptive answers” (Pickard, 2013: 219) but qualitative data is not produced from them. They can offer valuable information to supplement quantitative answers as well as provoke ideas (Pickard, 2013).
The comments were therefore coded in order to analyse the data. Buckingham and Saunders (2004: 142) state that coding is “to some extent arbitrary”, noting that categories chosen are very subjective. All text responses were read, which allowed for identification of initial themes. These responses were coded, and then remaining responses read and coded also. Comments that consisted of more than one theme were treated as if the question had been asked multiple times, in accordance with guidance from Buckingham and Saunders (2004).

### 3.7 Ethical issues

Ethics approval was applied for and granted by the Information School Research Ethics Panel (see Appendix 1 for ethics documentation). The study was classified as ‘low risk’, as no sensitive data was asked for and the risk of harm to participants was minimal. Pickard (2013: 93) states that “asking anything that encourages a degree of introspection or analysis could cause a negative reaction”, therefore questions were chosen carefully, keeping in mind that the questionnaire was self-administered so the researcher would not be on hand to answer questions immediately.

All respondents were over 18 and had the option to complete the questionnaire or not. Information sheets were available to all respondents – who were required to indicate they had read this and agreed to participate in the study. None of the respondents indicated they had not read or agreed with this information. Responses to the questionnaire were anonymous and each response associated with a random number. Although some personal data (age, subject studied and student status) was collected, this was not enough to identify participants. No compensation was offered to participants.
4. Results and discussion

This section presents the results of the user survey, as discussed in Chapter 3 – Methodology. Detailed analysis of results follows in the discussion section.

4.1 Study results – general information

The survey received 527 responses, of which 525 were usable. Tables 1-3 show the demographic characteristics of respondents to the survey. All percentages have been rounded to whole numbers.
4.1.1 Sample characteristics

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents – all respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rather not answer</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>525</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
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<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>525</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td>457</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>525</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts and Humanities</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine, Dentistry &amp; Health</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Sciences</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>561</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 2: Demographic characteristics of respondents who do read for pleasure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rather not answer</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>496</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>496</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td>433</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>496</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Faculty</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts and Humanities</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine, Dentistry &amp; Health</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Sciences</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>530</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 3: Demographic characteristics of respondents who do not read for pleasure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rather not answer</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>29</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>29</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>29</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Faculty</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts and Humanities</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine, Dentistry &amp; Health</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Sciences</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>31</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.1.2 Gender distribution

All respondents answered this question (n=525). More than twice as many females (344; 69%) responded to the survey as males (157, 30%). A minority (4; 1%) indicated they would rather not answer this question. The gender of respondents does not reflect the undergraduate population at the University of Sheffield, which is approximately 50/50 (University of Sheffield, 2013c). However, having run the Fisher’s Exact Test, no statistical significance was found for whether males or females prefer to read (p=1.000).

4.1.3 Age distribution

All respondents answered this question (n=525). The majority of respondents (374; 71%) were in the 19-21 age range. A number of ‘mature’ (classed as over 21) students responded, who formed the next largest group of respondents (105; 19%). A small number of 18 year olds also responded (48; 9%). The mean age of respondents was 20. No statistical significance was found with age and preference for reading (p=0.597) using the chi squared test.

4.1.4 Status

All respondents answered this question (n=525). The majority of survey respondents were home students (self-classified) – with 457 (87%), compared to 68 (13%) international students. These percentages do not reflect the undergraduate profile at the University, which is approximately 80% home students (University of Sheffield, 2013a). No statistical significance was found using Fisher’s Exact Test (p=0.407). Neither home nor international students are more likely to read for pleasure.

4.1.5 Faculty distribution

All respondents answered this question (n=525). The survey received responses from students on a wide range of courses. Respondents were asked to choose their main subject area from a list that covered all areas of study at The University of Sheffield. These were then grouped into faculty during analysis. The most responses were received from students in the Faculty of Science (158; 28%). Similar numbers of responses were received from the Faculty of Arts & Humanities (127; 23%) and Social Sciences 119 (21%). The least number of responses were received from the Faculties of Engineering and Medicine, Dentistry and Health, with 72 (13%) of responses each.
A small number of respondents (13; 2%) stated ‘other’ to this question. The total number for this question was more than the number of respondents as some respondents chose more than one area of study. No statistical significance was found by faculty (p=0.735) using the chi squared test.

4.1.6 Q1. Do you read for pleasure?

All respondents (n=525) answered this question. Responses are presented in Figure 1. The majority of students (94%; 496) said they do read for pleasure.

*Figure 1: Percentage of respondents who read for pleasure/do not read for pleasure*

![Percentage of respondents who read for pleasure/do not read for pleasure](image)

**Analysis of responses**

Analysis of the remaining survey responses is split into two sections, as the survey had two pathways. The first (4.2) covers responses from those who stated they do not read for pleasure. The second section (4.3) presents responses from those who stated that they do read for pleasure.
4.2 Results - Respondents who do not read for pleasure

4.2.1 Q2. If you do not read for pleasure, why not?

Of the respondents who answered ‘no’ to Q1 (“do you read for pleasure”), reasons given are shown in Figure 2 – note that the total number of responses is more than the number who do not read for pleasure (29), as respondents could give more than one answer to this question.

The most common reason given for not reading for pleasure was ‘prefer other leisure activities’, with 17 of the 29 respondents choosing this option. This was followed by ‘lack of time’, an option chosen by almost half of the respondents (14). Almost a third (9) of respondents stated they had no interest in reading. Two ticked the ‘lack of money to purchase reading materials’ option. Three respondents chose the ‘other’ option; reasons given as ‘other’ were dyslexia (2 responses) and ‘poor reader’ (1 response).

The majority of respondents selected ‘prefer other leisure activities’, with this response frequently paired with ‘lack of time’ or ‘not interested in reading’.

*Figure 2: Reasons for not reading for pleasure*
4.2.2 Free-text comments

Respondents who do not read for pleasure were also given space to add extra comments about the survey and their attitudes towards reading for pleasure. 13 of the 29 respondents in this category chose to leave a comment. These comments were quite varied (see Appendix 3), with most expressing positive attitudes towards reading for pleasure, but finding time constraints from coursework and other activities and meant they don’t have the time to read. Two respondents stated they find reading ‘hard’, with one noting their disability is a contributing factor in this.

4.3 Results - Respondents who do read for pleasure

4.3.1 Q2. What are your reasons for reading for pleasure?

Respondents were asked to identify their reasons for reading for pleasure, and could select as many options as they wished. All 496 respondents selected at least one option. The majority chose more than one option, with ‘fun’ and ‘escapism’ the most popular reasons. Fun was chosen as an option by 428 (86%) of respondents.

*Figure 3: Reasons for reading for pleasure*
Respondents answering ‘other’ could give a free text reason. These reasons fall in to a number of categories. Responses have been coded and counted by theme (Table 4). All free text comments are shown in Appendix 4.

Table 4: Further reasons for reading for pleasure, ordered by most common response

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.g. “culture”, “interest”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.g. “pass time while travelling”, “pass time”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyment/wellbeing</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.g. “stimulation of imagination”, “relieve boredom”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relaxation</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.g. “to help me sleep”, “reading before bed”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.g. “peer pressure”, “discuss with others”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“one does not love breathing”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many of the free-text reasons given could perhaps be categorised in the given options for Q2. For example, those categorised in the “time” section mainly stated they read to pass the time while travelling, which could be interpreted as “escapism”. It is perhaps instructive that respondents do not view it as this though.

Further free-text comments could be given at the end of the survey; a number of respondents used this space to further comment on why they read for pleasure. These reasons again fell into categories that have already been covered: relaxation and escapism. Fourteen respondents mentioned relaxation in some way – an example quote is “I think that reading for pleasure is one of the greatest forms of relaxation.” A further five comments were around escapism, with an example of “I think it’s important to do for escapism.”
4.3.2 Q3. What type of materials do you read?

Respondents were asked about the type of materials they read, and given 5 options to choose from. They could select more than one option. All respondents (n=496) selected at least one option, with many selecting more than one.

*Figure 4: Types of materials read*

The most popular response to this question was ‘fiction books’, which was described as “e.g. novels, short stories, poetry”. Most respondents selected more than one answer to this question, suggesting that their reading isn’t limited to one genre.
15 respondents selected ‘other’, with 12 of these providing an answer. These answers have been categorised and the frequency noted below:

Table 5: Other types of material read for pleasure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Material</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religious books, Bible</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic texts</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On a particular subject (e.g. philosophy)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manga, comics, graphic novels</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mythology</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Leaflets from the post”</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>12</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These responses could fit in to the other 4 categories given for this question, apart from the “leaflets from the post” response. It would perhaps be instructive to follow up with these participants to check their understanding of the question or whether they selected a response based on all materials they read. This is particularly interesting in the respondents who said they read academic texts for pleasure.

Some respondents also wrote free-text comments about what they read, with “fiction”, or “something with a storyline and good characters”, the most frequent comment. A small number (3) commented on the difficulty of finding suitable books – for example, “I enjoy reading when I find the perfect book, it’s difficult for me to get into a book and keep reading it, as I do not find reading particularly easy”. A further small number (3) noted their use of online materials, particularly in relation to time. An example of this is “Now I read magazines and blogs on my iPad instead because it’s quick and doesn’t require much time.”
4.3.3 Q4. What is the most common way for you to get reading material?

This question asked respondents to select the main, or most common, way in which they get their reading material. All respondents answered this question (n=496). The aim of this question was to discover respondents use of libraries, in particular their university library.

*Figure 5: How respondents acquire reading materials*

The most common way for respondents to get reading material is by buying it, with 70% (346) choosing this option. Only 10% (50) of respondents use a library (public or university) to get materials. This is only slightly more than the number (9%; 45) who borrow materials from friends.

Of those who answered ‘other’ to this question, the most common way of getting material was online – whether this was “torrenting or pirating ebooks”, “download free ebooks” or “Kindle”.

![Pie chart showing how materials are acquired](image-url)
Table 6: Other ways of acquiring reading material

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Means</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Online (through downloading ebooks)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charity shops/independent bookstore</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid for magazine subscription</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borrow from parents</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>22</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3.4 Q5. Do you think your university provides enough reading materials?

This question aimed to discover respondents’ attitudes to their university library and the recreational reading materials it provides. It was not a mandatory question so not all respondents answered this (n=298).

Figure 6: Respondents rating the university library on provision of recreational reading materials

Responses were fairly evenly matched across the scale, except for the ‘very good’ rating. However, 215 (72%) respondents rated the library at average or below for provision of reading materials. Only 26 (9%) rated the library as ‘very good’.

More than half of respondents (60%) answered this question, compared to the 2% in Q4 who stated that they used the university library to get recreational reading materials.
This raises issues about the validity of the data collected; it seems likely that respondents thought about the overall provision of reading materials (both academic and/or recreational) at their university library rather than just the recreational reading materials.

Further, 13 comments were received in the free-text comments section about recreational reading collections in university libraries. The majority of the comments were positive, expressing the wish for the university library to provide recreational reading materials. Two respondents stated that they thought the university library is for academic reading only.

*Table 7: Free text comments about recreational reading in university libraries*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Example comment</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expressing support for recreational reading collection</td>
<td>“I was initially a little disappointed by the reading for pleasure section of the library (there isn’t one). It would be amazing if they could try and inject new books that are purely fiction and for general reading purposes.”</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressing support for extra (non-academic) reading</td>
<td>“There should be a test about the number of books students take out of the library that aren’t core textbooks and then students should be rewarded/punished accordingly.”</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressing lack of awareness of library stock availability</td>
<td>“…I am not aware that Sheffield library actually does books for pleasure reading?? If they did I would certainly use them.”</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressing that the university libraries are for academic reading only</td>
<td>“Personally I think university libraries should be purely for academic reading. I’d rather the uni library have more space for academic books than give up space for non-academic reading.”</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>13</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.3.5 Q6. Are you a member of a library other than a university library?

All respondents answered this question (n=496). Library membership was fairly evenly split between those who are not members (217; 44%) and those who are (279; 56%).

*Figure 7: Respondents reported library membership*
4.3.6 Q7. What's the main format that you read in?

This question attempted to ascertain if there is a preference among undergraduate students aged 18-24 for print or electronic reading material. There was a strong bias towards reading in print format, with 78% (385) respondents stating a preference for this. Almost a quarter (22%; 111) of respondents prefer reading in electronic format.

*Figure 8: Respondents reported format preference*

```
Format used to read

78%  22%

Print    Electronic
```

The results were then broken down by age in order to determine if one particular age showed a strong preference for either print or electronic formats (Figure 9).
All ages showed a preference for print materials, although the youngest (18/19) and oldest (24) respondents showed a slightly stronger preference than other ages. Those aged 21 and 23 were more likely to prefer reading in an electronic format. Respondents who were younger (18 and 19) and older (24) stated they preferred electronic format at a lower rate. The oldest age range (24) were more likely than other ages to state a preference for print format. Given the small sample size for most age ranges, however, definite conclusions cannot be drawn from these numbers.

4.3.7 Q8. At what time(s) of year do you read most?

Respondents could select more than one option for this question. The most frequently chosen option was ‘during holidays’, followed by ‘less during exam time’, reflecting the lack of time students have during the academic year for this leisure activity. Some respondents stated they read more during exam time, perhaps confirming escapism as the response to an earlier question about why they read for pleasure.
Forty of the respondents who left free-text comments mentioned ‘time’ in some way. Five respondents noted that they read at specific times of the year – during holidays rather than term time, reflecting the number of responses found in Q8. The majority (25) of comments were around the theme of not having time to read because of academic commitments. Many of these responses had a qualifier (“I love to read but...”) which in some way expressed the respondents’ love of reading or wish to have more time for this activity.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Example comment</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No time to read because of academic work demands</td>
<td>“I personally have not read as much as I would have liked in recent years, due to increasing Uni work mainly.”</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No time to read because of other commitments (either specific e.g. new girlfriend or unspecified)</td>
<td>“I love reading but often don’t find the time to read for pleasure.”</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading at specific times/quantifying reading</td>
<td>“Reading for pleasure is something I tend to do on holidays and not at all during term time..”</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressing a wish to have more time to read for pleasure</td>
<td>“If I had more time I would read a lot more for pleasure.”</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressing that reading could take up more time than allocated</td>
<td>“I lose sense of time when I am reading.”</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>40</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.3.8 Q9. To what extent do you think that reading for pleasure helps with the reading you have to do for your course?

Respondents were asked to rate on a scale of 1-5 whether they thought reading for pleasure helps them with reading they are required to do as part of their studies. The scale was from 1 (reading for pleasure does not help at all with reading for studies) to 5 (reading for pleasure helps a lot with reading for studies).

Figure 11: Respondents attitudes to reading for pleasure and attainment

The majority of respondents rated this question at 3 or below (357; 72%). 48 (10%) respondents thought it helped them ‘a lot’.

A small number of respondents used the free-text comments box to further expand why they thought reading for pleasure helped with their studies.
Table 9: Free-text comments on reading for pleasure and academic attainment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General intelligence/well-rounded person</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.g. “It widens perspective”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary e.g. “I believe reading can help</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with the vocabulary”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improves written work, grammar e.g.</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Subconsciously it improves your vocabulary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and grammar for writing essays”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imagination</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>38</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3.9 Q10. At what age were you when you read for pleasure the most/least?

Question 10 aimed to discover if respondents had a history of reading. Respondents were asked to check a box for the age at which they thought they read the most, and least.

*Figure 12: History of reading – at what ages participants read the most/least*
The results would appear to support responses to Q8, with many respondents stating they have read the least in their life age 18+, so after they came to university. A pattern of declining reading is suggested, with most respondents reporting they read the most aged 10-14; the numbers reporting reading the most decline at subsequent ages. Respondents were more likely to state they read the least at younger (5-9) and older age brackets (18+).

A number of respondents criticised this question in the free-text comments. The most common criticism was that there was no option to state that they had always read for pleasure.

*Table 10: Comments on history of reading*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Always read for pleasure</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading has dropped off at university</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading dropped off as a teenager</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read more at university</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>54</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.4 Additional comments

Almost a quarter of participants (126, 23%) left additional free-text comments about their attitudes to reading for pleasure. The majority of comments related to specific questions asked, so have been presented in the relevant section above. Additional comments that did not relate to a particular question are described below.

A number of respondents used the free-text comments box to express positive feelings about reading for pleasure. The most frequently used word in these comments was ‘love’, followed by ‘enjoyment’.

*Table 11: Free text comments on reading for pleasure*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Love e.g. “I love reading”</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyment e.g. “I have always enjoyed reading for pleasure”</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important/recommended e.g. “I think reading for pleasure should be encouraged”</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have always read for pleasure e.g. “I have never abandoned my love for reading”</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read daily/a lot e.g. “Not a day goes by that I don’t read something”</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>50</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.5 Discussion of results

In this section, the results of the user survey are discussed and compared to the objectives of the study, with reference to the literature discussed in Chapter 2.

4.5.1 Discussion of objective 1

*Objective 1. To discover if undergraduate students at the University of Sheffield engage in recreational reading and their reasons for and against it.*

The survey results indicate the majority of undergraduate students at the University of Sheffield do engage in recreational reading, with 94% (of 525 respondents) stating that they read for pleasure. This figure is similar to Gilbert and Fister’s study, where 93% (of 717 student respondents) reported enjoying leisure reading. However, the sample was a convenience sample, rather than a non-probability one, so self-selecting bias may have been introduced to sample.

In addition, it is difficult to compare this study to other research undertaken, due to the differing definitions used of recreational reading. The definition used here was “any reading undertaken that is not for your studies”, which included reading done online. Other studies have narrower definitions which do not include this online content.

No statistical significance was found for any of the demographic characteristics of respondents. This is particularly interesting in relation to gender as studies of both students (Burak, 2004; Gallik, 1999) and their peer age group (MLA/DCMS, 2006; Nestle Family Monitor, 2003) have found that females are more likely to read than males. However, it is perhaps significant that more female students (364) responded to the survey request than male students (157) – again this perhaps suggests a self-selecting bias in the sample.

Whilst previous studies (Chen, 2007; Jeffries and Atkins, 1996) have suggested that humanities students read more than other students, again no statistical significance was found in this study. Almost a quarter of overall respondents (127; 23%) indicated they studied in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, but more respondents came from the Faculty of Science (158; 28%). The least number of responses came from the Faculties of Engineering and Medicine, Dentistry and Health, with 72 (13%) respondents each.
Age was similarly found not to be a statistically significant factor, with no one age within the range surveyed found to be more likely to read than others. The literature suggests that the ages of 13/14 are when young people’s interest in reading declines (Gallik, 1999; Nestle Family Monitor, 2003); this perhaps indicates that the decline levels out by the age of 18+ when teenagers are likely to be leaving school and moving to a different stage in their life.

Overall, positive feelings towards recreational reading were revealed both in the survey results and free-text comments, with the word “love” being mentioned numerous times by respondents who do read for pleasure. Those who stated they do not read for pleasure still expressed positive feelings towards doing so, frequently citing lack of time rather than interest as a reason why they do not read for pleasure.

This was also reflected in the responses to why students read for pleasure, with the most common reason reported being “fun” (428 out of 496 respondents chose this option). This was followed by “escapism”, with 338 respondents choosing this option. These reasons reflect general reading research into why people read for pleasure (Elkin, 2003). Another frequently cited factor was stress relief, with 268 respondents choosing this option. With rising tuition fees and cost of living (Ellis, 2013), it could be argued that there is pressure on current students to achieve more whilst at university than previous generations.

Time is a major factor in students’ ability to engage in recreational reading. Both participants who do read for pleasure and those who don’t cited this as a reason. This showed particularly in free-text comments, where respondents expressed the wish to read more but couldn’t because of academic work. This reflects previous studies, including Foasberg’s (2013) small diary study, which found that students spent more time reading for class than other reasons. However, this does not appear to be a new issue affecting current students; a participant in Van Riel and Fowler’s 1996 (113) book stated:

“My reading increased all through childhood and adolescence, decreased at university because social life took more time..."
It also does not appear to be an issue solely affecting students, with the 18-24 age group also reporting that time is a barrier to recreational reading (MLA/DCMS, 2006). This age group is known as “Millennials”, who are said to have less free time than previous generations (Howe and Strauss, 2000).

Social life appears to be another major factor in lack of reading, with the most common reason for not reading for pleasure a preference for other leisure activities. Although there was no space for respondents to state which activities they preferred, it could perhaps be inferred that social activities are a part of this reason. This supports Mokhtari et al’s (2009) statement that college students appear “willing to forego recreational reading for other activities”.

A small number (9) of students also reported “lack of interest” as a reason they do not read for pleasure. This is called “aliteracy”; people who are “able to read but not interested in reading” (Salter and Brook, 2007: 27). The literature suggests this is more widespread than reported in this survey, although as noted previously, a self-selecting bias is possible, with those who already had an interest in reading responding to the survey.

4.5.2 Discussion of objective 2

Objective 2. To investigate undergraduate students reading preferences; what type of materials students read, in what format and where they get reading material from.

Respondents indicated a strong preference for reading fiction books in Q3, with 95% (473) selecting this option. This appears to support the MLA/DCMS (2006: 25) finding that “respondents defined themselves as “readers” by their consumption of fiction books”. This figure appears significantly higher than other studies of students reading, with Parlette and Howard (2010) reporting that 50% of their participants were currently reading fiction and Foasberg (2013) finding 79% read fiction and non-academic articles for pleasure. A direct comparison is not achievable though, due to the different ways this question was asked, with this study in particular asking a more general question than a specific e.g. “what are you currently reading?”

In addition to fiction, it appears that students read fairly widely, with online content (312), magazines/newspapers (304) and non-fiction books (265) also chosen as options by a number of respondents.
Religious books (3) and academic texts (3) were also identified by those who checked the ‘other’ box for this question. The literature suggests that reading online content means reading in less depth, with associated consequences on ability to concentrate. However, an issue with the category of ‘online content’ used in this survey was that it did not differentiate between short articles, social media, and other types of online reading. Paretta and Catalano (2013) found that Facebook/social media use was the third most popular activity in their student observation study, reading that is not in-depth or challenging. Therefore it would be instructive to break down this category further in order to determine what types of online content students are reading.

Students in this survey indicated a preference for print (385 respondents) over electronic (111) format. The literature presents mixed results on this issue, with Foasberg (2013) reporting that students prefer electronic for pleasure reading, whilst others (Diers and Simpson, 2012; Shrimplin et al, 2011) report a preference for print. The preference shown in Q3 for fiction books perhaps suggests a reason for this preference for print, with a number of studies showing that print appears to be preferred for long-form reading, including fiction (Diers and Simpson, 2012; Foasberg, 2013).

The data suggests that younger students (19-21) show a preference for electronic formats, which is supported by research by Caporn et al (2011). This may change in future years, as Foasberg (2013) states that the current students view themselves as belonging to the generation before the digital generation, and Weisberg (2011) suggests that students are more positively inclined towards electronic texts each year. Foasberg (2013: 3) further cautions against definitive conclusions in this area, stating that use of electronic texts “does not indicate that readers are forsaking other formats”.

Cost may also be a factor in why students prefer print. In Q4, a majority of students stated that their most common method of getting reading material was to buy it. Although Millennials are considered to have grown up in a time of wealth (Nicholas and Lewis, 2008), current students have to contend with both a rise in living cost and a rise in tuition fees (Ellis, 2013). Despite the popular idea that e-books should cost less because there are no manufacturing or shipping costs involved in their production, the traditional cost elements of publishing are still included in the price (Bransford, 2012), generally making them cost no less than print books.
In addition there is the cost of purchasing a device to read e-books on (such as a Kindle); the cost of this may be prohibitive for students with limited spare income. Some respondents (14) stated that they “torrent” e-books in order to get hold of them, thus avoiding the cost issue. Finally, e-books can also generally not be borrowed, whereas print materials can. This is an important consideration as in Q4, 9% (45) of respondents indicated that their main source of reading material is borrowing from friends.

The preference for buying reading materials appears to be supported by the literature, including Parlette and Howard’s (2010) findings. However, in that study the library was least likely to be a source of reading material, whereas participants in this study reported more library use, with 50 respondents stating their main source was a public or university library. With cost cited as a factor in not reading by both those who don’t read and those who do, it is perhaps surprising that more do not use their library for recreational reading materials.

This suggested lack of library use is particularly interesting as 279 out of 496 respondents (56%) stated they are members of a library other than their university library. With cost such an issue, the data suggests that perhaps students could make more use of their public library. There are 29 public libraries across Sheffield (Sheffield City Council, 2013), and the Central Library has extended opening hours, indicating that they are accessible to students. However, a recent MLA/DCMS (2006) report stated that the 18-35 year old age group do not use the library as it’s seen as “not for them”; perhaps libraries then need to target this age group and look at student needs, including emphasising the cost (free).

4.5.3 Discussion of objective 3

Objective 3. To discover students’ attitudes towards recreational reading: When they read, whether they have a history of reading and if they believe this helps with their academic work.

Overall, students appear to have a positive attitude towards recreational reading, as discussed in Objective 1. However, as also previously discussed, they lack time in which to read. The majority of respondents (469) to Q8 indicated that most of their reading is done during holiday periods. This was supported by free-text comments which included “roll on the holidays!”.
Just over one third of respondents (189) said they read most during term time. This finding is similar to both Gilbert and Fister (2011) and Foasberg’s (2013) results, which found that most students don’t have time for reading during the school year.

A number of respondents included comments that conveyed their disappointment in not being able to read more for leisure during semester. This reflects findings by Foasberg (2013, Student reading: purpose and genre section, para. 5), who states that “A few expressed frustration at their inability to fit recreational reading into their schedule”. The majority of students further stated they read less during exam time. This appears to make them similar to the rest of the adult reading population, with Williams (2013) stating that a YouGov poll found 29% of those surveyed who read once every six months or less citing time pressures as the reason.

The pressure of exams on reading is also reflected in responses to Q10, which aimed to discover if respondents had a history of reading. Apart from the 5-9 age group, respondents stated they read the least between the ages of 16-18, a time when they were entering final years at school, facing final exams and decisions about the future. They further indicated that 18+ was a time of reading the least, indicating the increased work load and other leisure activities as reasons for this.

Many respondents also stated they have always read for pleasure, so found Q10 difficult to answer. A history of reading is a good indicator as to current reading habits, with Maynard (2011: 219) stating:

“The importance of reading undertaken in childhood cannot be overestimated; it provides a foundation for the acquisition of knowledge as well as for a love of reading for pleasure.”

This suggests that while the frequency of their reading currently may have decreased because of other pressures, students will continue to read for pleasure throughout their lives.

Students in this survey did not seem to believe that their recreational reading helped with their studies. In retrospect the question could be more clear and specific – respondents had already indicated that a lack of time was a major reason why they couldn’t read for pleasure so perhaps they see reading for pleasure as a hindrance to the reading they have to do for their course.
This is perhaps indicated in free-text comments such as “my eyes are too tired from studying to want to read” and “I feel guilty reading when I know I have other work to do”. As this study was self-reporting behaviour however, students may not have seen the link explicitly.

Just over a quarter of respondents (139; 26%) stated that they did think reading for pleasure helps the reading they do for their course. Respondents also included free-text comments on this issue, as shown in Table 9. The most common theme/belief stated by 16 participants was that reading for pleasure helps with general intelligence and making a person more “well-rounded”. This fits with general views of reading.

Another common belief was that reading helps with vocabulary, grammar and improves written work. Twenty respondents’ comments fit these two themes, with most comments coming from home students. Almost 150 people in Q2 said that one of the reasons they read was to improve their vocabulary. This corresponds with evidence in the literature that reading develops critical thinking and writing skills (Nicholson, 2012).

4.5.4 Discussion of objective 4

Objective 4. To use reported student experiences to make recommendations on a recreational reading collection for the University of Sheffield libraries.

Whilst previous research suggests that librarians do not believe that students read for pleasure (Gilbert and Fister, 2011), both this study and others (Foasberg, 2013; Gallik, 1999) indicate that students do undertake leisure reading and have positive attitudes towards it. However, it appears they largely do not use their university library to get recreational reading materials.

The majority of respondents to Q5 stated that they do not think their university library provides enough reading materials, with 149 (50%) rating it ‘very poor’ or ‘poor’. Only 26 (9%) people rated it ‘very good’. It is unclear however whether these respondents were all referring to the reading materials they use for leisure reading; it is possible that some thought of academic reading materials when answering this question. Taking in to consideration responses to other questions, along with some comments, it seems likely that this is the case.
This is also perhaps linked to the trend for academic libraries to become open spaces (Salter and Brook, 2007). The main campus library, the Information Commons, can be seen as part of this trend, with large amounts of space for study, computer use and group work, with the books perhaps being secondary. A recreational reading collection could help improve the library’s image for students, particularly if good-quality stock is selected (Nicholson, 2012).

Previous studies of established recreational reading collections have directly asked different groups of library users, including students, whether they would be, or are interested in a recreational reading collection in their university library (Diers and Simpson, 2012; Rathe and Blankenship, 2006). The response to these surveys has been largely positive, with overall findings showing that students think leisure reading is an important activity.

Despite a question about recreational reading collections not being asked directly in this survey, a few respondents (8) stated in free-text comments that they would like to see, or would use, recreational reading materials in the university’s libraries. A typical comment:

“It would be amazing if they could try and inject new books that are purely fiction and for general reading purposes.”

Respondents also commented that this type of collection would be convenient for them as they are already at the library. This correlates with findings from previous studies including Dewan (2010), which found that students are reluctant to leave campus to go to the local public library.

Two respondents had negative attitudes towards recreational reading collections, stating that they thought the library should be solely for academic reading:

“Personally I think university libraries should be purely for academic reading. I’d rather the uni library have more space for academic books than give up space for non-academic reading.”
Diers and Simpson (2012) point out that negative attitudes and opinions should not be ignored. In the context of this study, a small minority stated that they do not read for pleasure, and an even smaller number expressed a negative view towards a recreational reading collection. If a recreational reading collection were to be piloted, the views of those who oppose it should also be taken in to consideration.

The overall results suggest that undergraduate students would perhaps be receptive to a recreational reading collection at the University of Sheffield libraries. However, further investigation in to this would have to be undertaken, including surveying a wider user group that included postgraduate students.
5. Conclusion

Conclusions are based on findings from the user survey, discussed in the previous chapter.

5.1 Objective 1

To discover if undergraduate students at the University of Sheffield engage in recreational reading and their reasons for and against it.

Despite the limitations of the study, as discussed in 5.6, the results indicate that undergraduate students at the University of Sheffield do read for pleasure, and seem enthusiastic about doing so. No statistical significance was found relating a number of characteristics, including age, gender and course studied, to preference for reading for pleasure.

Students read for a range of reasons, with the most common being ‘fun’ and ‘escapism’. In this sense they are similar to readers from the wider population. The major barrier to reading for students appears to be time, with most respondents who do not read for pleasure stating this as a reason, and respondents who do read for pleasure also citing it as an issue. Academic work, social life and other leisure activities were frequently cited as factors in not having enough time to read.

Many of the respondents who reported that they do read for pleasure also indicated that they have a history of reading. A history of reading is an important indicator of future reading habits. Whilst reading for pleasure may fall behind other leisure activities currently, it does not mean that students will not resume the habit in later life.

5.2 Objective 2

To investigate undergraduate students reading preferences; what type of materials they read, in what format and where they get reading material from.

The students in this survey indicated that they read a wide range of materials, although fiction was the most commonly cited preference. Online content is also widely read, although this option needs to be investigated further in order to determine what types of content students read.
Respondents showed a preference for print materials when reading for pleasure. This did not vary too much within the small age range, although 18/19 and 24 year olds show a slightly stronger preference for print than other ages. Reading online and using electronic devices is also popular among all ages, with 21 and 23 year olds more likely to state that they prefer to read for pleasure in this format. Both the Kindle and iPad were mentioned as being used for recreational reading in free-text comments.

Students mainly buy their leisure reading material, although cost was cited as a factor both for those who read for pleasure and those who don’t. Slightly more students were members of libraries than were not – further investigation is perhaps required into why they are buying books rather than using their free library membership. Convenience could be a factor in this, particularly as students reported time as a major factor in why they don’t read.

5.3 Objective 3

Objective 3. To discover students’ attitudes towards recreational reading: When they read, whether they have a history of reading and if they believe this helps with their academic work.

Students read more during holiday periods than in term time, which is perhaps correlated with their reported lack of time to read. The majority also read less during exam time, although those who read more during exam time perhaps use it as a means of escapism.

Many respondents appear to have a history of reading, with the amount of reading they do likely having declined because of time pressures whilst studying for A Levels/final school exams. A number further expressed their love for reading, suggesting a habit that has been ingrained in them for life.

Finally, students generally appear unconvinced that recreational reading helps with the reading they do for their studies. Some believe reading helps them improve areas such as vocabulary and written skills, but overall respondents indicated a negative view of this.
5.4 Objective 4

To use reported student experiences to make recommendations on a recreational reading collection for the University of Sheffield libraries.

The following recommendations for the University of Sheffield libraries have been made as a result of this research:

5.4.1 Consider establishing a small recreational reading collection

It is recommended that the University of Sheffield library establishes a small recreational reading collection, as there appears to be enthusiasm amongst undergraduate students for this facility. This could potentially be located at the Information Commons, as this library site is well-used, particularly by undergraduates, centrally located and open 24/7. The collection could include fiction titles, particularly new books, some non-fiction and magazines/newspapers. It could be located next to an area where there are comfy sofas to sit on, and should be browsable and easily distinguished from the other collections. The effectiveness of the collection could be reviewed through both examination of circulation statistics and a user survey, taking in to account both positive and negative responses to the collection.

5.4.2 Consider establishing and/or promoting links to the local public library system

With budget issues frequently cited by librarians as a factor in not having a recreational reading collection, an alternative could be to establish links or promote the public libraries in Sheffield. This could be beneficial for both libraries, with the university able to refer students to services and the public library benefiting from increased membership. Working in partnership could also perhaps assist students to better integrate into their local communities whilst in Sheffield. As cost of buying books is a factor in lack of recreational reading, emphasis should perhaps be put on the fact that borrowing from the public library is free.
5.5 Limitations of research

The study’s limitations include the relatively small size of the convenience sample, prohibiting generalisation to the wider undergraduate population. The survey gathered responses from a limited number of undergraduates from one particular university, meaning the results are not generalisable to all undergraduates.

A second research method, such as follow up interviews or focus groups, would have strengthened the results. One-on-one interviews with respondents would perhaps have drawn out further nuances in the data collected. However, this was not possible because of time constraints – undergraduates generally leave for the summer break in early June.

As mentioned previously, the nature of the question may have introduced bias into the sample, with only those who were interested in reading responding. Although it was emphasised that the research was interested in both those who don’t read and those who do, respondents may have been put off by the mention of reading.

5.6 Suggestions for further research

This study was limited in both numbers and range of participants. It would therefore be informative to conduct a larger study with a rigorous sampling procedure in order to ensure the views expressed by respondents are representative. The methodology for this could be further strengthened by using a second research technique, for example focus groups or interview with respondents. In addition, views of librarians could be included.

In view of the current focus in universities on both academic attainment and employability, a study to explore if there is a correlation between academic achievement, library use and recreational reading could also be timely.
Bibliography


Xue, J. (2004). To investigate the gender differences in reading attitudes of university students. (MA dissertation, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, United Kingdom).

**Appendix 1 – Ethics documentation**

**The University of Sheffield.**

**Information School**

**Proposal for Research Ethics Review**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Staff</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>This proposal submitted by:</strong></td>
<td><strong>This proposal is for:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>Specific research project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X Postgraduate (Taught) – PGT</td>
<td>Generic research project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate (Research) – PGR</td>
<td>This project is funded by:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Project Title:** An investigation into the recreational reading habits of undergraduate students in Sheffield |
| **Start Date:** April 2013 | **End Date:** 2nd September 2013 |

| **Principal Investigator (PI):** (student for supervised UG/PGT/PGR research) | Michelle Bond |
| **Email:** | Mabond1@sheffield.ac.uk |

| **Supervisor:** (if PI is a student) | Val Gillet |
| **Email:** | v.gillet@sheffield.ac.uk |

| **Indicate if the research:** (put an X in front of all that apply) |
| Involves adults with mental incapacity or mental illness, or those unable to make a personal decision |
| Involves prisoners or others in custodial care (e.g. young offenders) |
| Involves children or young people aged under 18 years of age |
| Involves highly sensitive topics such as ‘race’ or ethnicity; political opinion; religious, spiritual or other beliefs; physical or mental health conditions; sexuality; abuse (child, adult); nudity and the body; criminal activities; political asylum; conflict situations; and personal violence. |

Please indicate by inserting an “X” in the left hand box that you are conversant with the University’s policy on the handling of human participants and their data.

| X | We confirm that we have read the current version of the University of Sheffield Ethics Policy Governing Research Involving Human Participants, Personal Data and Human Tissue, as shown on the University’s research ethics website at: www.sheffield.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/ethicspolicy |
**Part B. Summary of the Research**

**B1. Briefly summarise the project’s aims and objectives:**
(This must be in language comprehensible to a layperson and should take no more than one-half page. Provide enough information so that the reviewer can understand the intent of the research)

**Summary:**
The main aim of this project is to determine whether undergraduate students in Sheffield read recreationally. “Recreational reading” is defined for this project as any non-academic reading, whether that is books, magazines, online content, etc.

Further it will investigate students’ attitudes to recreational reading, including whether they think their academic library should provide materials for them to engage in this activity.

The research will also look at academic librarians attitudes towards recreational reading collections in their libraries. This will include asking if they have a recreational reading collection in their library, and their role (if any) in collecting and promoting it.

**B2. Methodology:**
Provide a broad overview of the methodology in no more than one-half page.

**Overview of Methods:**
This project will use 2 methods; a survey of undergraduate students and interviews with librarians.

This study will involve a web-based survey created using Google Forms. All undergraduates at the University of Sheffield will be invited to complete the survey.

It will also involve a paper-based questionnaire. Undergraduates using the libraries at Sheffield Hallam University will be invited to complete the survey.

Interviews with librarians from both universities will be undertaken to ascertain their views on recreational reading collections in their libraries. The interviews will be semi-structured and audio recorded.

If more than one method, e.g., survey, interview, etc. is used, please respond to the questions in Section C for each method. That is, if you are using both a survey and interviews, duplicate the page and answer the questions for each method; you need not duplicate the information, and may simply indicate, “see previous section.”
C1. Briefly describe how each method will be applied

Method (e.g., survey, interview, observation, experiment):

The methods used are surveys and interviews. Step one will be to undertake the survey.

Description – how will you apply the method?

Via questionnaire. This will be a paper questionnaire left at both library locations at Sheffield Hallam University and an e-questionnaire sent to all undergraduates on the ANNOUNCE distribution list at University of Sheffield.

The survey will be undertaken using a questionnaire that includes both closed and open-ended questions. This will be sent out as an e-questionnaire to students at the University of Sheffield, and a paper questionnaire at Sheffield Hallam University. Although it is desirable to implement an e-questionnaire at both locations, this is not possible due to Sheffield Hallam University lacking this facility.

Prior to undertaking the full survey, a pilot study will be undertaken. This will involve asking friends of the researcher (preferably who are in the target age range and not librarianship students) to complete the questionnaire. The friends are unlikely to be students of either university. The pilot study aims to as far as possible eliminate ambiguous wording of questions and check phrasing and understanding of the definition of “recreational reading”.

About your Participants

C2. Who will be potential participants?

Any undergraduate student at either University of Sheffield or Sheffield Hallam University, who is aged between 18-24.

For the pilot study, friends of the researcher, preferably in the age range 18-24. The friends are unlikely to be students of either university.

C3. How will the potential participants be identified and recruited?

Potential participants at the University of Sheffield will be sent an email inviting them to complete the e-questionnaire. They will have the option to opt-in to the questionnaire.

Potential participants at Sheffield Hallam University will also be self-selecting, as the paper questionnaire will be left at both library locations.

Potential participants of the pilot study will be identified through friends of the researcher.

C4. What is the potential for physical and/or psychological harm / distress to participants?

The potential for harm or distress is no greater than what might be experienced in everyday life.
C5. Will informed consent be obtained from the participants?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

If Yes, please explain how informed consent will be obtained?

Participants in the e-questionnaire will read the covering email which will include information on informed consent. The questionnaire will start with a question asking participants to agree that they have read this information and agree to participate in the survey.

Participants using a paper questionnaire will be asked to read an informed consent form before completing the questionnaire, and indicate they agree to be a participant in the survey.

An email address will be supplied for both sets of participants if they have further questions not included on the information sheets. The pilot study will be undertaken using both the e-questionnaire and paper questionnaire; informed consent will be obtained prior using the methods detailed above.

If No, please explain why you need to do this, and how the participants will be de-briefed?

C6. Will financial / in kind payments (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants? (Indicate how much and on what basis this has been decided)

No compensation will be offered.

About the Data

C7. What data will be collected? (Tick all that apply)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Print</th>
<th>Digital</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant observation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Audio recording</td>
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<td>Video recording</td>
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<td>Computer logs</td>
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<td>Questionnaires/Surveys</td>
<td>X</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other:</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other:</td>
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</table>

C8. What measures will be put in place to ensure confidentiality of personal data, where appropriate?

Each survey response will be associated with an arbitrary number; all responses will be anonymous.

Limited personal data will be collected - age, subject area and whether a home or international student.
C9. How/Where will the data be stored?

E-questionnaire data will be stored in the cloud, as a Google Survey associated with the researchers University e-mail address will be used. This will likely be downloaded to an Excel spreadsheet to combine with data from the paper questionnaire. This spreadsheet will be stored locally on the researchers laptop, and backed up on a hard drive, both of which only the researcher will have access to.

C10. Will the data be stored for future re-use? If so, please explain

No. After the project is complete the data will be destroyed.

About the Procedure

C11. Does your research raise any issues of personal safety for you or other researchers involved in the project (especially if taking place outside working hours or off University premises)? If so, please explain how it will be managed.

There are no personal safety issues associated with this survey.
C1. Briefly describe how each method will be applied

Method (e.g., survey, interview, observation, experiment):

Interview

Description – how will you apply the method?

Interviews with librarians will take place in person and be recorded, with notes taken at the time. The interview will be transcribed and sent to the librarians for approval.

After the survey data has been analysed, interviews will be undertaken with librarians from both universities. The interviews will focus on librarians’ perceptions of whether they provide materials for recreational reading and if they feel it has a place in their library and role.

About your Participants

C2. Who will be potential participants?

Librarians from the University of Sheffield and Sheffield Hallam University libraries.

C3. How will the potential participants be identified and recruited?

An initial approach will be made to Deborah Harrop, Information Adviser at Sheffield Hallam University Library and Denise Harrison, Manager of Learning and Research Services at University of Sheffield Libraries, who will be able to suggest potential participants.

C4. What is the potential for physical and/or psychological harm / distress to participants?

The potential for harm and distress is no greater than that in everyday life. The interview will take place in a public location to ensure the safety of both participant and researcher.

C5. Will informed consent be obtained from the participants?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>X</th>
<th>Yes</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
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</table>

If Yes, please explain how informed consent will be obtained?

The Information Sheet/Consent Form will be emailed to participants before the interview, and reviewed with them in person before the interview commences. At this time any unanswered questions can be answered. Participants will be made aware that their anonymised responses will be publicly available in my final master’s dissertation.

If No, please explain why you need to do this, and how the participants will be de-briefed?

C6. Will financial / in kind payments (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants? (Indicate how much and on what basis this has been decided)

No compensation will be provided.
About the Data

C7. What data will be collected? (Tick all that apply)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Type</th>
<th>Print</th>
<th>Digital</th>
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<td>Video recording</td>
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<td>Computer logs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Questionnaires/Surveys</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Other: Transcription of audio</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

C8. What measures will be put in place to ensure confidentiality of personal data, where appropriate?

Transcript data will be anonymised by assigning a code to each participant. Audio recordings will be destroyed after transcription.

C9. How/Where will the data be stored?

Audio recordings will be stored on the researcher’s laptop until transcripts have been made, after which point the audio will be destroyed. Transcript and analysis data will be stored locally on the researcher’s laptop, and backed up on a hard drive, both of which only the researcher will have access to.

C10. Will the data be stored for future re-use? If so, please explain

No. After the project is complete all data will be destroyed.

About the Procedure

C11. Does your research raise any issues of personal safety for you or other researchers involved in the project (especially if taking place outside working hours or off University premises)? If so, please explain how it will be managed.

There is a minor risk to the researcher’s safety in meeting new people to be interviewed. This will be managed by meeting them in working hours, on University premises, and in a public space. Additionally the researcher will ensure their location is known to a third party.
Title of Research Project: An investigation into the recreational reading habits of undergraduate students in Sheffield.

We confirm our responsibility to deliver the research project in accordance with the University of Sheffield’s policies and procedures, which include the University’s ‘Financial Regulations’, ‘Good Research Practice Standards’ and the ‘Ethics Policy Governing Research Involving Human Participants, Personal Data and Human Tissue’ (Ethics Policy) and, where externally funded, with the terms and conditions of the research funder.

In submitting this research ethics application form I am also confirming that:

- The form is accurate to the best of our knowledge and belief.
- The project will abide by the University’s Ethics Policy.
- There is no potential material interest that may, or may appear to, impair the independence and objectivity of researchers conducting this project.
- Subject to the research being approved, we undertake to adhere to the project protocol without unagreed deviation and to comply with any conditions set out in the letter from the University ethics reviewers notifying me of this.
- We undertake to inform the ethics reviewers of significant changes to the protocol (by contacting our academic department’s Ethics Coordinator in the first instance).
- We are aware of our responsibility to be up to date and comply with the requirements of the law and relevant guidelines relating to security and confidentiality of personal data, including the need to register when necessary with the appropriate Data Protection Officer (within the University the Data Protection Officer is based in CiCS).
- We understand that the project, including research records and data, may be subject to inspection for audit purposes, if required in future.
- We understand that personal data about us as researchers in this form will be held by those involved in the ethics review procedure (e.g. the Ethics Administrator and/or ethics reviewers) and that this will be managed according to Data Protection Act principles.
- If this is an application for a ‘generic’ project all the individual projects that fit under the generic project are compatible with this application.
- We understand that this project cannot be submitted for ethics approval in more than one department, and that if I wish to appeal against the decision made, this must be done through the original department.

Name of the Student (if applicable):
Michelle Bond

Name of Principal Investigator (or the Supervisor):
[insert name]

Date: [insert date]
An investigation into the recreational reading habits of undergraduate students in Sheffield.

Researchers
Principal Investigator: Michelle Bond – mabond1@sheffield.ac.uk
Supervisor: Val Gillet – v.gillet@sheffield.ac.uk

Purpose of the research
The objective of the research is to determine whether undergraduate students in Sheffield read as a recreational activity – i.e. non-academic reading. A further aim is to investigate whether they want the academic library to provide recreational reading material for them. Librarians attitudes to this will be investigated also.

Who will be participating?
We are inviting undergraduate students aged 18-24 at the universities of Sheffield and Sheffield Hallam to participate in this research.

What will you be asked to do?
We will ask you to complete a questionnaire that will include some brief demographic information, as well as your personal experiences of recreational reading. This will take no longer than 10 minutes.

What are the potential risks of participating?
The risks of participating are the same as those experienced in everyday life.

What data will we collect?
We are only collecting your responses to the survey questions. No other data will be recorded. No personal data will be collected.

What will we do with the data?
We will be analyzing the data for inclusion in my master’s dissertation. After this has been completed, the data will be destroyed.

Will my participation be confidential?
The data will be collected with no identifying information attached.

What will happen to the results of the research project?
The results of the study will be included in master’s dissertation which will be publicly available.
I confirm that I have read and understand the description of the research project, and that I have had an opportunity to ask questions about the project.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without any negative consequences.

I understand that I may decline to answer any particular question or questions, or to do any of the activities. If I stop participating at all time, all of my data will be purged.

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

I give permission for the research team members to have access to my anonymised responses.

I give permission for the research team to re-use my data for future research as specified above.

I agree to take part in the research project as described above.

Participant Name (Please print)  Participant Signature

Researcher Name (Please print)  Researcher Signature

Date

Note: If you have any difficulties with, or wish to voice concern about, any aspect of your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Angela Lin, Research Ethics Coordinator, Information School, The University of Sheffield (ischool_ethics@sheffield.ac.uk), or to the University Registrar and Secretary.
Information School Research Ethics Panel

Letter of Approval

Date: 22nd April 2013

TO: Michelle Bond

The Information School Research Ethics Panel has examined the following application:

Title: An investigation into the recreational reading habits of undergraduate students in Sheffield

Submitted by: Michelle Bond

And found the proposed research involving human participants to be in accordance with the University of Sheffield's policies and procedures, which include the University's 'Financial Regulations', 'Good Research Practice Standards' and the 'Ethics Policy Governing Research Involving Human Participants, Personal Data and Human Tissue' (Ethics Policy).

This letter is the official record of ethics approval by the School, and should accompany any formal requests for evidence of research ethics approval.

Effective Date: 22nd April 2013

Dr Angela Lin
Research Ethics Coordinator
Appendix 2 – Copy of questionnaire

Note this is the paper version of the questionnaire; the presentation was slightly different in the online version.

Survey: Do you read for pleasure?

This questionnaire aims to discover your attitudes towards reading for pleasure.

By “reading for pleasure” we mean reading that you may do outside of your studies – whether this is reading novels, non-fiction (e.g. biographies), magazines, blogs, etc. It’s reading you do because you want to, rather than being assigned to do.

☐ I have read the informed consent sheet attached and agree to participate in this survey.
   (Please tick box).

What age are you? This survey is for undergraduates aged 18-24.

☐ 18
☐ 19
☐ 20
☐ 21
☐ 22
☐ 23
☐ 24
Q1. Do you read for pleasure?

- Yes, I read (Go to Question 3)
- No, I don’t read for pleasure, only for my course/studies (Go to Question 2)

Q2. If you do not read for pleasure, why not? You may choose more than one option.

Once you have completed this question you do not need to fill in the rest of the survey. Thank you for your time.

- Lack of time
- Lack of money to purchase reading materials
- Not interested in reading
- Prefer other leisure activities
- Other (please specify)

Q3. If you do read for pleasure, why? You may choose more than one option.

- Escapism
- Stress relief
- Change from studying
- Fun
- Learn something new
- Improve vocabulary
- Other (please specify)

Q4. What type of materials do you read? You may choose more than one option.

- Fiction books (e.g. novels, short stories, poetry)
- Non-fiction books (e.g. biographies, cookery books, travel books)
- Blogs, websites, other online content
- Magazines/newspapers
- Other (please specify)

Q5. What is the most common way for you to get reading material?

Please note this only applies to material you read for pleasure

- Public library
- Buy (online or from physical shop)
- Borrow from friends
- Get given/gifts
- University library
- Other (please specify)
Q6. If you use your university library for reading material, do you think it provides enough materials?

Note this question refers only to materials you use to read for pleasure. Please circle the number that best corresponds to your feelings.

1 2 3 4 5
Very poor Very good

Q7. Are you a member of a library other than the university library?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Q8. What’s the main format that you read in?

☐ Print
☐ Electronic (e.g. Kindle, iPad, other eReader)

Q9. At what time(s) of the year do you read most?

Please tick as many options as are applicable.

☐ During term time
☐ During holidays
☐ More during term time
☐ More during holidays

Q10. To what extent do you think that reading for pleasure helps with the reading you have to do for your course?

Please circle the number that best corresponds with your feelings.

1 2 3 4 5
Not at all A lot

Q11. What age were you when you read for pleasure the most and the least?

Please tick one box for each statement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Age 5-9</th>
<th>Age 10-14</th>
<th>Age 14-16</th>
<th>Age 16-18</th>
<th>Age 18+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lots of reading</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for pleasure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not a lot of</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>reading for</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>pleasure</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Please use this box to comment on your attitudes to reading for pleasure.
Demographic information

I ask for this information to allow analysis of your responses. You cannot be identified using the responses you provide here.

What is your gender?

☐ Female
☐ Male
☐ Rather not say

Are you a home or international student?

☐ Home
☐ International

Please choose your main subject area from the list below:

☐ Communications (e.g. media, PR, journalism)
☐ Social studies (e.g. librarianship, sociology, politics, economics)
☐ Biological sciences (e.g. sports science, biology, psychology)
☐ Medicine and dentistry
☐ Health-related areas (e.g. nursing, nutrition, physiotherapy)
☐ Business and management (e.g. accounting, business studies, marketing, tourism)
☐ Engineering (e.g. aerospace engineering, civil engineering, electronic engineering)
☐ Physical sciences (e.g. chemistry, physics, astronomy, geology)
☐ Mathematical sciences
☐ Computer science
☐ Architecture, building and planning (e.g. built environment, architecture, planning)
☐ Law and criminology
☐ Creative arts and design (e.g. fine art, game design, drama)
☐ Languages and literature (e.g. English, Chinese Studies, modern languages)
☐ Historical and philosophical studies (e.g. history, biblical studies, philosophy)
☐ Education
☐ Geographical studies (e.g. geography, human geography, environmental science)
☐ Other (please specify)

Thank you for completing my survey!
## Appendix 3 – Free-text comments from respondents who do not read for pleasure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am for reading for pleasure as it can temporarily make you forget about worries in your life due to transporting you into another life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I personally find it difficult to get into reading for pleasure. I have absolutely no interest in works of non-fiction. In terms of fictional works, I have to be either presented with a book series that is not heavily time consuming to begin reading, be introduced to a series through another medium i.e. movies or television shows, or the book has to be something a bit different from the standard format of page upon page of text, such as graphic novels or manga.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I really want to but I feel guilty reading something not related to my course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used to read a lot when I was younger - about a book a week aged 11-14. I think when I started reading more adult texts I found them less interesting and more of an effort to read, and spent more time doing work and talking to friends on social media instead.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I had the time, I would read for pleasure. Because I think it is very important as a source of entertainment as well as general knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only read when on holiday abroad.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading is hard for me so after reading for university work I don't feel like doing it again. There is too much uni work to be getting on with than reading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I always start books but never finish them. Always end up on the laptop instead of reading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Due to a disability I find it challenging to keep track when I'm reading, which is a contributing factor to why I don't like reading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wish I had time to read for pleasure. During the summer, when I have no uni reading, it's an activity which I enjoy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy it but rarely make time for it during 'normal life' I read a lot when I'm on holiday, and enjoy reading for my course, English, as we often get to read interesting/exciting texts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like to read for pleasure in theory but I find it so hard I don't bother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have so much reading to do for my course that when I have time to do leisure activities I would rather go to the gym or go for a walk or socialise with friends.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix 4 – Free-text comments from respondents who do read for pleasure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comment</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- reading needs to be encouraged more</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A key reason I read critically acclaimed fiction for pleasure is that</td>
<td>A wider range of options could be included for type of reading. Eg. I like non-fiction, but would never find myself reading a biography, travel book or cookery book - more opportunity to clarify needed. Also, I am doing MBB as a course. I object to the grouping of this with 'soft' biological sciences such as sport science and biology. There is a difference.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always like to have a book to read before going to sleep at night.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As an extension to q5, most of the books I take out from the University</td>
<td>As the pressure of university work has increased I've become aware that my taste in the books I read for leisure has changed. Although I still read the occasional leisure book that is intellectually demanding, such as Hilary Mantel's 'Wolf Hall' I find myself reading more and more simpler books, like Terry Pratchett's series.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>library are in a truly awful condition.</td>
<td>Books are expensive to buy. I don't have enough time to read them quickly, so I can't borrow from the library.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As the pressure of university work has increased I've become aware that</td>
<td>Could maybe ask how many books or how often people read, as people who read more my start from a younger age. I enjoy reading when I find the perfect book, it's difficult for me to get into a book and keep reading it, as I do not find reading particularly easy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>my taste in the books I read for leisure has changed. Although I still</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>read the occasional leisure book that is intellectually demanding, such</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as Hilary Mantel's 'Wolf Hall' I find myself reading more and more</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>simpler books, like Terry Pratchett's series.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't have enough time to do it at uni</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know where fiction is kept in uni libraries so have never really</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>looked.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find it odd when people don't, relaxes me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I absolutely love to read, not a day goes by that I don't read something.</td>
<td>I was initially a little disappointed by the reading for pleasure section of the library (there isn't one). It would be amazing if they could try and inject new books that are purely fiction and for general reading purposes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am afraid that I cannot answer question 10 part 1 accurately, as I have</td>
<td>I am afraid that I cannot answer question 10 part 1 accurately, as I have never abandoned my love for reading and still consume books as avidly now as I did when I was 4. I marked 18+ purely because I could not submit this survey without a response to that question. The only reason that I marked 18+ on the 2nd part is because I have less time now that I am at University, certainly not through a lack of desire or interest.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

86
I believe that books should be more readily available and there shouldn't be the same stigma attached to having a kindle as there is, as if it isn't as good as reading a book. As long as people are reading it is good, since reading has really helped me improve my written skills and vocabulary. I also think that English Literature at GCSE should have more books to read and have some more accessible ones which may get more into reading (I enjoyed what we read at GCSE but a lot of my classmates hated the books and I think that might have put them off reading).

I do not believe that there are nearly enough people who read for pleasure. At school, and even now, there were people who thought reading was boring and time-consuming, but none of them took the time to give it a go.

While I am not a great fan of e-books- I still think there are fewer things nicer than walking around a bookshop for hours- I appreciate that people are at least reading something, rather than doing nothing.

If more people actually read, then maybe the frankly appalling standards of English that seem to be acceptable nowadays would start to rise.

I personally have not read as much as I would have liked in recent years, due to increasing Uni work mainly, but I still find a lot of pleasure in picking up a book and quietly reading.

I do want to read for pleasure it's just finding the suitable book is not always easy

I don't get to read due to university work as much as I would like to - equally I sometimes find myself reading when I should be doing work, I can't win!

Also, I read a lot for pleasure from the age of about five upwards, it's only recently it's begun to drop off - there isn't an option for that.

I don't just get books from one source in one format! I read print & ebooks & borrow & buy them equally.

I don't really understand the purpose of question 10. Putting 'age 5-9' in there is kind of pointless...

I feel reading for pleasure is important but I do not have as much time to do it as I did when I was younger. It really helped me expand my vocabulary and learn new things, but I do not have as much time anymore to do it, especially in term time.

I found I was getting headaches from spending too much time looking at screens so I recently set myself the challenge of reading one book per week

I have always enjoyed reading for pleasure, but unfortunately at the university I don't have that much time, or if I do, I prefer spending it chatting with my friends (either online or face-to-face), as I realised it is more important to spend your time with others than alone, reading...

I have always enjoyed reading, but more when I was young than now as I have read most of the really good books (worked through all the modern classics and can't abide old (pre-1900) books).

I have always read for pleasure so I found that last question difficult to answer! I think I probably read more now just because I am a more fluent reader and have become used to using it as a relaxation tool, but my pleasure for reading was one of the reasons I took my course (English language and literature), although reading for my course is very different to reading for pleasure.
I have always read for pleasure, even when I was 5. Maybe include an option that allows us to tick that?

I have always read for pleasure, however since starting university I find I only have time to read what I like during the holidays, despite the fact I do an English Literature Course!

I have always very much enjoyed reading for pleasure and I think it has vastly contributed to my writing abilities which has been helpful at University.

I have put 5-9 for above as it would not let me leave one blank. I have enjoyed reading for pleasure throughout my life.

I have read less since coming to University, and bought fewer books. I also read fanfiction.

I didn't actually enjoy reading until I was about 7, but from then on I read a lot. I don't think the last question really covers that, because 5-9 is a huge range - I think a 5 year-old is more different to a 9-year-old than a 16 and 18-year-olds are different.

I have to stop myself from doing it because otherwise I would never get any work done, I lose sense of time when I am reading.

I like reading for pleasure but my reading this year the amount of times spent reading has steadily declined as I've spent more and more time with my girlfriend. I do however read a lot of times when she's not around mainly when I'm at home over the summer and I read late into the night to supposedly help me get to sleep but end up staying up reading.

I like reading for pleasure but my studies leave me with almost no time to do this.

I like to read less dense and academic things, to prevent reading from becoming a core. It's something I've always liked a lot.

I love books and think it's important for parents to nurture this love for it into children starting from when they were young instead of just playing along with their ipads and such.

I love having a good storyline to get into and that can range from works of this era and historically famous ones. I believe reading can help with the vocabulary which can become of use in assignments. I also use my public library (of my hometown) as I do generally prefer reading a hard copy. But in Sheffield I find my kindle the most useful as I am not aware that Sheffield library actually does books for pleasure reading?? If they did I would certainly use them.

I love me some books. I once used a book as a bookmark in a larger book that I was also reading.

I love reading and I really wish the university library would provide more fiction. A convenient place to get books from, especially during exams when we don't leave the library area much, would be incredibly useful.

I love reading but often don't find the time to read for pleasure.
I love reading for pleasure but since A-levels and even more since starting my degree I have very little time for it. It's hard to use it for escapism now as I feel guilty reading when I know I have other work to do. The only time I really get to relax and read is when on holiday even though I wish I had more time for it.

I love reading for pleasure it is a very enjoyable passtime. Perhaps an improvement would be to question 10 as there has never been a time when I didn't do a lot of reading for pleasure but there was no option for this.

I love reading for pleasure, but since coming to university have found that there isn't as much time. However the fact that there isn't availability of books for pleasure reading nearby is the major reason for not reading so much.

I love reading for pleasure, I just wish the reading I had to do for my course was more pleasurable.

I love reading for pleasure, if I could afford more books.

I love reading for pleasure. I really enjoy being lost in a great story and becoming involved with the characters. However, since being at university, I have found that I have less time for reading or my eyes are too tired from studying to want to read.

I love reading, although it was limited in my teenage years. I have it is an excellent way of escaping from your own troubles.

I love to read for pleasure, but find myself reading less so during term time. It sucks, because the time I spend on my computer procrastinating would be much better spent if I was reading a book!

I often struggle to stop reading and have to be very careful not to allow it to take up too much time.

I read a lot as a young child (4-11) but read less and less during secondary school, maybe only 1 or 2 books per year. Since going to university I started to read a lot more again and now read on average a book a month.

I read a lot, but not when i have exams,

I read fiction all the time, there's rarely a time when I'm not reading for pleasure. I usually read at night before bed but sometimes read on public transport. Some questions don't apply to me such as Q10 as I've always been reading for pleasure. Even if I'm not reading fiction, I'm reading blogs or websites.

I read less for pleasure during my A-Levels as I found it difficult to study so many subjects as well as reading. However, at university I have got back into it as I really do enjoy reading and have been brought up in a reading family.

I read mostly from electronic sources although I still prefer print. My sources for reading material are close to equally split between purchasing books (and e-books), reading blogs/websites for free online and borrowing from the library or friends.
I really enjoy reading as it is a different fun activity from watching TV/playing video games. It's also portable!

I tend to read in shifts. I'll find a book I like or a series that keeps me hooked for a while but then I'll have periods where I don't read all that much.

It also might be worth mentioning, I read because I love falling into a different world and it also the same reason I tend to play video games quite a bit as well.

I think it improves intelligence, vocabulary, cultural knowledge and creativity and is something that should be encouraged from an early age.

I think I've always read for pleasure about the same amount.

I think now that a lot of hit TV programs and films are based on books, such as Game of Thrones, Twilight series, Harry Potter etc more people have turned to reading and it has put these people in touch with reading for pleasure and shown them that books are not all boring.

I think question 10 needs to be expanded on. I feel that I have always read a lot for pleasure so the question was not applicable to me.

I think reading for pleasure should be as common as drinking coffee and should be encouraged at all ages. It widens perspective, encourages a wider vocabulary and aids imagination.

I think reading for pleasure should be encourages. The library should have a wide selection or the university should work with a public library in Sheffield to encourage this. It is a great way to relax as well as improve your spelling, grammar and vocabulary.

I think that reading for pleasure is a great way to relax and take your mind off of things that stress you like exams. I also think that subconsciously it improves your vocabulary and grammar for writing essays.

I think that reading for pleasure is one of the greatest forms of relaxation and provides you with specific and general knowledge on a wide range of subjects. I have also found that it means that you are a more well-rounded person in general.

I used to love reading chick-lit for pleasure but now I'm at uni I hardly read. I find that when I've done my uni work and reading, I don't want to sit and read more and do something that requires less concentration, like watching tv. I am looking forward to reading more over the summer holidays.

I usually read something that are fun and informative Most of it are not books or magazine. It can help increase my general knowledge and sometimes generate new idea.

I very much enjoy reading for pleasure but often don't find the time to do so.

I very much enjoy reading for pleasure, though my reading has decreased significantly while at university. If it were not for the amount of assignments I currently have I would read significantly more. Roll on the holidays where reading can properly recommence beyond a book every month or two!
I was very into reading from a young age. I used to borrow 14 books at a time from the library and I would have read them by the following weekend, where I would then take out a new set. It was difficult to read between 16-18 because exams kept getting in the way. I also didn't have time to read other novels because I was focusing on books for both GCSE and A-Levels. I enjoyed the exam novels but they did take up a lot of time when analysing them.

I would very much like to read for pleasure, just like in the past. It is not only refreshing, but adds to my general knowledge and helps with my languages. Unfortunately, a lot of time now has to be invested in my studies. I think it would be nice if the school could set up a library just for recreational reading (ie. fiction books etc).

I would like to read for pleasure more; it is one of my favourite past-times however I do not have enough time. Especially since I have to read a lot for my course I am less inclined to read recreationally when I do have free-time because I am tired.

I would love to read more, but don't seem to be able to find time for it these days with so much work to do.

If I become a fan of a series, release dates for the next installment become 'Happy New Book Day' and I tend to spend most of my time reading that book, even if I have more important things to do.

If I discover a series, I also tend to read the collection quite quick, so I have periods of reading a lot, and other times of not reading so much.

Another point is that if I enjoy a book or series a lot that I borrowed from someone, I will go out and buy a copy for myself.

Also, reading for pleasure helps find new friends, and once you've made them read a book you like, it's something nice to talk about.

If I had more time I would read a lot more for pleasure. the only chance I get is going on train journeys home, the rest of the week all my time goes into uni and my part time job.

I'm a journalism student and involved with student media so I read a lot of articles online to broaden my knowledge about current affairs. I've had less time since I've been at university to read printed books for pleasure.

Improvements - I wanted to be able to select options for each age group on the question above but could only select one age group.

Comments - I read for fun much more now that I have a kindle. It is easy to carry with you and it is easy to search for new books. I don't like that you have to pay for them when you want to read them though and always read free books before I will consider paying for a book.

In response to Q10, I have always read as much as possible for pleasure as it has always been encouraged at home.

It helps me unwind before bed.

It is always nice to read something non-course related whilst expanding one's knowledge at the same time. Reading classical literature can also improve conversational/debating/intellectual capabilities and makes one feel more 'well read'.

It remains a wholly underrepresented means of expanding intellectual sophistication and improving command of the English language. Insufficient insight exists, to my mind, as to why people find reading boring.
It's a wonderful if slightly antisocial thing to do.

It's hard to define when I read most/least for pleasure - Q10 would be better with options for each age. For example I read for pleasure most years until I got to sixth form and was a bit too busy.

I love reading for pleasure, sadly don't have much time around course study

I love to have more time to do it, small popular fiction section in the university library or associated with the students union would be nice

Maybe a question as to how often (e.g. per week) someone reads for pleasure.

More gender options needed (ie. trans* or 'non-binary').

More people should read for pleasure!

Improvement: More variety for some of the answers, such as Q10. I read for pleasure quite substantially in more than just one age group! Also, it can be difficult to remember more than 10 years back and whether I read a lot.

No improvements

Not enough people do it early enough. Their vocabulary and outlook suffer.

Personally I think university libraries should be purely for academic reading. I'd rather the uni library have more space for academic books than give up space for non-academic reading (books, magazines etc.)

Possibly wider age parameters for question 10, for example it could be 'between the ages of 5-10' and then '10-18'

Q10 doesn't allow a good answer for me, I've been reading for pleasure more-or-less consistently since I learnt how to, so a most and least question isn't really applicable to me.

Reading for pleasure is very important, I find that I can form and express ideas more quickly if I have been reading engaging material, plus it's fun!

Q10 pt 1 age range

Q10 suggests fluctuations in your reading- what if you read a lot all your life (like me) or not at all never ever (which sadly might be the case for some)? Plus, please add option EU student in the demographics part, as it's confusing what we count as -I chose international, but not sure, and checking whether we read more/less in Europe than elsewhere would be interesting, wouldn't it?
Q10 suggests there was a time I didn't read for pleasure or at least significantly less than other times (which isn't true)

Q10. - I've always read a lot for pleasure, so answer for this question was a guess. Maybe have a 'constant' option?

Q8 doesn't specify if it just means 'total reading' or 'reading for pleasure'

Q8. At what time(s) of year do you read most? Does this mean for pleasure or for study?

Question 10 - I have always read for pleasure and there's not really a period of my life when I have not, so it was quite difficult to select a time for "not a lot of reading for pleasure" as there has never really been a time when this is the case.

I have always preferred reading to watching films/television.

reading depends upon time given/allotted and is often subject to external factors beyond your control such as family/friends/job commitments, so called 'life balance' et cetera

Reading for pleasure is fun and is great way to improve your knowledge on a topic or find out more about a certain issue, as well as enrich your vocabulary and practicing good grammar. I highly recommend for people to read outside of required reading, as it isn't always something of interest to them, but if they picked up a book of their own choice it would make them appreciate reading for pleasure a lot more.

Reading for pleasure is fun and is great way to improve your knowledge on a topic or find out more about a certain issue, as well as enrich your vocabulary and practicing good grammar. I highly recommend for people to read outside of required reading, as it isn't always something of interest to them, but if they picked up a book of their own choice it would make them appreciate reading for pleasure a lot more.

Reading for pleasure is not only enjoyable but extends vocabulary by introducing new words and terms. It will hopefully introduce readers to concepts and ideals which they may not have come across before in other forms of media such as film and TV.

Reading for pleasure is one of the most enjoyable experiences. But I would not think to go to the University for pleasure reading because I associate it with study and I have not seen a large reading for pleasure section advertised anywhere.

Reading for pleasure is something I tend to do on holidays and not at all during term time, where reading becomes a chore or something just to be checked off a list.

Reading for pleasure is something that I have for as long as I can remember. This was knocked out of me during middle school (yr5-7) due to the teachers making it chore through reading records which continued on into secondary school. I still read during this time, but not much as I wish I had done looking back and certainly not as much as I have since coming to uni. I think it's important to do for escapism and it is a subtle way to improve your knowledge and vocabulary and I know it's helped improve my academic work.

Reading for pleasure is very important and I feel has helped me with my academic life.
Reading for pleasure sure is more fun than reading course material because I didn't do it to pass the exams. Thus, I enjoy more and remember it by heart. I couldn't finish the same amount of reading course material in the same amount of time reading for pleasure materials.

self-motivated reading is the best pastime

Since coming to uni the amount of reading I have done for pleasure has steadily decreased. In third year I have yet to read any classics, where as in first year I was reading modern classics (Oranges are not the only fruits, The Handmaids Tale etc) very regularly.

Since getting a laptop, I feel that I have read for pleasure less often due to how engrossing it is to be on the internet- therefore there is less time to read before bed etc.

I also used to read a lot to pass time during breaks at school or on bus journeys, but at university I have fewer gaps in which I cannot come home, and only travel short distances during term time.

Since university I haven't had the time to read as much fiction as I would have liked because I am a language and literature student and reading set texts takes priority. I read for pleasure more during the holidays.

Some questions don't factor in someone who reads a lot all the time

The amount of recreational reading I do fluctuates wildly - I often go through periods during which I read a lot, and then other periods where I read little more than the material for my course.

The one improvement in this survey could be to change the instructions for this box! You could have just had two boxes one on each or at least. Besides, why would a survey ask for suggestions how to improve itself, it's like on the census having an option 'What information about yourself would you like to give away next year?'

The options to answer the questions are not broad enough, or don't provide an alternative answer. I have always read for pleasure, there wasn't really a time when I didn't.

There are too many moronic people who don't read despite being at University to gain greater knowledge and understanding. There should be a test about the number of books students take out of the library that aren't core textbooks and then students should be rewarded/punished accordingly.

There is no option for reading all year round on question 8.

There should be more popular science books in the university library, especially those published recently. The library is only as good as it's more recent purchase.

Btw, I read LOTS for pleasure, at least 5 hours a week (excluding online content)

To me, currently, "reading for pleasure" almost entirely consists of information material from the web. I would consider it as study, but outside of my course.

Also, Q10 is not a good idea and you are unlikely to get accurate results from that sort of question.

To quote George R. R. Martin: "A reader lives a thousand lives before he dies, the man who never reads lives only once".
Uni libraries are great for recreational reading of non-fiction. They don't have fiction which is disappointing. I wish I had more time for reading for pleasure, I find I can't afford to read books not directly related to my studies at the moment timewise. I read a lot all the way from aged 4-18, so the question above where I had to choose only one age range is less helpful.

When I start reading a book I find it very easy to read it all the way through and I usually quite enjoy it but it's just actually being bothered to read the it the first time that is the problem. Most of the time I would rather do something else than start reading a new book.

When I was younger I would read everything I could get my hands on, and I have fond memories of going to the public library once a week with my mum and checking out as many books as I can (and then complaining when I hit the limit!). I used to stay up way past my bedtime with a torch to read, and I had stacks and stacks of books that people used to buy me for Christmas and for birthdays. Since coming to university aged 19, my reading has slowed down incredibly. I brought all my (many) much loved books to university with me but I've been too busy with studying and reading for my course to read for pleasure. Now I read magazines and blogs on my iPad instead because it's quick and doesn't require much time. When I graduate I hope I'll be able to get back into the habit of reading for pleasure.

Where it states age when you read for pleasure most and least there is not option to opt out, however for me I have read for pleasure all my life.

Whilst I absolutely love reading I have significantly less time since I came to University, I am looking forward to reading book after book on holiday!

Books I have read recently include: The Great Gatsby and Married by Midnight

Would do it more if I had the time.
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