AN INVESTIGATION INTO HOW PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN THE UK ARE USING NARRATIVE-BASED PRACTICE TO DEMONSTRATE SOCIAL IMPACT

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

at

THE UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD

by

PAMELA MCLEAN

September 2013
Abstract

Background

A review of the literature reveals an agreement on the need for a combined quantitative and qualitative approach to gathering evidence which demonstrates the social impact of public libraries. Narrative-based evidence (NBE) has recently emerged as a potentially powerful way to demonstrate social impact, but there are gaps in the literature concerning the practicalities and effectiveness of its use.

Aims

This dissertation aims to identify how different public library authorities in the UK are using narrative-based practice (NBP) as a way of gathering qualitative evidence to demonstrate social impact.

Methods

A qualitative approach was taken, and semi-structured telephone interviews were held with public librarians from across the UK. Two postings were made to the email discussion list LIS-PUB-LIBS, and potential participants were also contacted by telephone: there were nine respondents in total. Transcripts of each interview were made and then subjected to an in-depth thematic analysis, using a descriptive and values coding approach.

Results

Librarians are using narrative-based evidence to demonstrate social impact in response to a trend in stakeholders asking to see more qualitative evidence in addition to the quantitative data they already have. Those who collected and used NBE on an ongoing basis and within a framework found it to be more effective in demonstrating impact. The results also showed that not enough library authorities are seeking out and sharing best practice in the use of NBE.
Conclusions

Based on these findings, a series of recommendations for the future use of NBE are proposed. These include establishing a framework for collecting and using NBE (including creating a central bank of evidence), focusing on demonstrating the reach of low-key social impact narratives, and using NBE to demonstrate the alignment of library authority and local council objectives. Further research could look at the comparing the difference in impact between first and third person narratives, and in exploring the role NBE can play in demonstrating the prevention of acute social need.
Acknowledgements

To the public librarians who gave up their time to tell me their stories: thank you.

Thanks are also due to my supervisor, Barbara Sen, who consistently went above and beyond the call of duty to offer advice and feedback.

To the friends, old and new, who supported me during my time in Sheffield: every visit, every phone call, and every letter was appreciated.

To my parents, Richard and Barbara, and my brother Ralph, for their unfailing support and encouragement.

And finally to my twin sister, Barbara. There are no words to thank you for everything you’ve done to help me get this far. This dissertation is dedicated to you.
## Table of Contents

Abstract .......................................................................................................................... 2
Acknowledgements ......................................................................................................... 4
Table of Contents ............................................................................................................ 5
List of tables .................................................................................................................... 7
Chapter One: Introduction .............................................................................................. 8
  1.1 Research aim and objectives ................................................................................. 9
Chapter Two: Literature review ....................................................................................... 11
  2.1 Introduction ............................................................................................................ 11
  2.2 Quantitative evidence and impact ........................................................................ 11
  2.3 Qualitative evidence and impact .......................................................................... 11
  2.4 Importance of demonstrating impact .................................................................... 12
  2.5 Inconsistent terminology ...................................................................................... 13
  2.6 Assessing social impact: problems and methodologies ......................................... 14
  2.7 Qualitative and quantitative evidence: a combined approach .............................. 15
  2.8 Narrative-based practice: a definition .................................................................. 16
  2.9 Narrative-based evidence: a discussion ................................................................. 16
  2.10 Narrative-based evidence: uses .......................................................................... 18
  2.11 Collection of narrative-based evidence ................................................................. 19
  2.12 Examples of narrative-based evidence ................................................................. 19
  2.13 Summary .............................................................................................................. 20
Chapter Three: Methodology ......................................................................................... 21
  3.1 Introduction ............................................................................................................ 21
  3.2 Research ethics ....................................................................................................... 21
  3.3 Data collection ........................................................................................................ 22
  3.4 Limitations .............................................................................................................. 24
  3.5 Thematic analysis ................................................................................................... 28
  3.6 Summary ................................................................................................................. 29
Chapter Four: Results ...................................................................................................... 31
  4.1 NBE: a discussion ................................................................................................. 31
    4.1.1 Qualitative and quantitative methodologies: a combined approach .............. 31
    4.1.2 Drawbacks of using NBE ................................................................. 32
    4.1.3 Benefits of using NBE .............................................................................. 34
6.2 Recommendations for using NBE to demonstrate social impact: .................... 62
6.3 Recommendations for future research: .......................................................... 63
6.4 Concluding remarks .................................................................................... 63
References ........................................................................................................ 64
Appendices ........................................................................................................ 69
   Appendix 1 – Research ethics proposal ............................................................... 69
   Appendix 2 – Research ethics: letter of approval .............................................. 75
   Appendix 3 – Information sheet and consent form ............................................ 76
   Appendix 4(a) – Original LIS-PUB-LIBS posting ............................................ 79
   Appendix 4(b) – Amended LIS-PUB-LIBS posting ........................................... 80
   Appendix 5 – Interview guide ......................................................................... 81
   Appendix 6 – Final codebook (extract covering codes used for Librarian A’s interview) .................................................................................. 82

List of tables

Table 1: Drawbacks of using NBE........................................................................ 32
Table 2: Benefits of using NBE............................................................................ 34
Table 3: Collecting written and verbal narratives.................................................. 40
Table 4: Benefits of sharing best practice.............................................................. 47
Table 5: Drawbacks of NBE referenced in the literature review............................ 50
Table 6: Benefits of NBE referenced in the literature review................................. 51
Chapter One: Introduction

‘We [librarians] are lovers of stories, but often we overlook the stories that are closest to us – our own stories, the stories of those with whom we work, and the stories of those we serve’ (Marek, 2011: xi).

At a time when libraries are being shut and services reduced, it is more important than ever for public libraries to prove the value of what they do to stakeholders who have a say in their future. Researchers and practitioners alike believe that only gathering quantitative evidence is no longer adequate to convey the impact that public libraries have on the communities they serve (Walker, Halpin, Rankin and Chapman, 2013). As a result, libraries are increasingly looking to qualitative methods of evidence-gathering as a way to demonstrate impact.

Traditionally the focus has been on gathering quantitative evidence as a way of measuring performance. Counting book issues and visitor numbers has become a standard way of doing this. But there are real concerns that the falling number of book issues is being used as a justification for reducing services, or closing libraries altogether (McMenemy, 2007). This highlights the assumption that the purpose of a library is only to lend books; it fails to consider the positive work that libraries are doing in areas such as personal development, social cohesion, and health and well-being (Matarasso, 1998).

Numbers tell part of a library’s story, and are extremely useful in certain contexts (for example, in informing administrative decisions), but they cannot tell the whole story. Politicians and policy makers have a tendency to view the value of libraries in terms of value for money, but libraries do not exist to make a profit. They were established to bring about positive social change and numbers alone cannot prove that libraries are fulfilling this aim (Matarasso, 1998). But if libraries only use

---

3 Public Libraries News puts the figure at 337 libraries (295 buildings and 42 mobiles) currently under threat or which have been closed/left council control, out of c.4265 in the UK. Statistics obtained from [http://www.publiclibrariesnews.com/about-public-libraries-news/information](http://www.publiclibrariesnews.com/about-public-libraries-news/information) (accessed 1 September 2013).
quantitative evidence to measure performance then they are failing to demonstrate their social impact. This could have catastrophic consequences for the future of a library; as Matarasso (1998: 49) asserts: ‘what is not measured is very quickly deemed not to exist’.

To avoid this, library authorities are increasingly looking to supplement their statistics with qualitative evidence. There are different ways of capturing evidence to measure social impact – focus groups and surveys are two of the most common – but a recent trend has emerged from this drive to look beyond statistics: narrative-based practice (NBP). Defined by Peter Brophy (2007b), it encompasses storytelling and the gathering of narrative-based evidence (NBE) from the people who use public libraries and is being used by some library authorities as a way of proving the value of what they do. While there are drawbacks to this approach, it has been identified as having the potential to be a powerful tool to demonstrate social impact.

However, the novelty of this approach means that comparatively little has been written about the practicalities and effectiveness of gathering qualitative evidence using narrative-based techniques. This dissertation seeks to address this gap in the literature by investigating how NBP is currently being used by public libraries in the UK. Chapter Two comprises a literature review which outlines the current discussion regarding qualitative and quantitative forms of evidence-gathering, and introduces the concept of NBP. Chapter Three outlines and justifies the use of a qualitative research methodology, and describes in detail the process of capturing and analysing the data. Chapter Four presents the results of the research, which are then discussed in Chapter Five with reference to the literature review. Final conclusions concerning the use of NBE in demonstrating social impact are summarised in Chapter Six, and recommendations for future research are made.

1.1 Research aim and objectives

The main research aim is to identify how different public library authorities in the UK are using NBP as a way of gathering qualitative evidence to demonstrate social
impact. In order to meet this research aim, the following five objectives have been identified:

- To identify public libraries which are currently using NBP as a way of gathering qualitative evidence
- To investigate why these public library authorities started using NBP
- To investigate how these public library authorities are capturing and using the narrative-based evidence (NBE) they gather
- To investigate how effective this kind of evidence is in demonstrating impact to stakeholders
- To gather examples and good practice of libraries using NBE.

These objectives were used to inform the structure of the research, including the review of the literature. The following chapter outlines the findings from this review.
Chapter Two: Literature review

2.1 Introduction

A review of the literature was carried out in order to survey the research which has been done to date in the areas of performance assessment, impact evaluation and the use of narrative as a form of qualitative evidence.

2.2 Quantitative evidence and impact

In the world of librarianship, performance measurement has traditionally been concerned with the gathering of quantitative evidence, namely ‘book issues and footfall’ (Walker, Halpin, Rankin and Chapman, 2012: 3). This kind of evidence is relatively easy to collect and understand (Macnaught, 2004; Urquhart, 2004 and Walker, Halpin, Rankin and Chapman, 2013), but while it is useful in making administrative and management decisions within a library service (Matarasso, 1998), it fails to demonstrate the social impact that a library has on the community it serves. Numbers alone cannot answer every question asked of a library service; they only tell part of the story (Boyle, 2000 and Markless and Streatfield, 2006). Book lending is only one of many services which libraries offer, and some have argued that there should be more focus on the benefits libraries can bring to individuals in the areas of personal development, social cohesion, community empowerment, creativity, and health and well-being (Matarasso, 1998; Markless and Streatfield, 2006 and Poll, 2012). Issue statistics cannot answer the question of how much good a library is doing, because quantitative evidence is the wrong tool to measure social impact (Usherwood, 2002; McMenemy, 2007 and Walker, Halpin, Rankin and Chapman, 2013).

2.3 Qualitative evidence and impact

Qualitative evidence is seen as the ideal way of demonstrating social impact. It underlies the reason why libraries were established in the UK, as a force for social change (Matarasso, 1998); it puts the individual at the centre of the evidence
gathering process (Dixon, Pickard and Robson, 2002 and Booth and Brice, 2004) and it can also reveal tacit knowledge that other forms of evidence gathering fail to pick up (Dixon, Pickard and Robson, 2002 and Hart and Schenk, 2010). Qualitative evidence also provides an evidence base which the profession as a whole can rely on to justify the work that libraries do (PriceWaterhouseCoopers LLP, 2005; Poll, 2012 and Walker, Halpin, Rankin and Chapman, 2012). Stanziola (2010) claims there is already a strong evidence base in the library and information profession in the form of case studies, but most commentators agree with Rankin’s (2010) assertion that the evidence base is weak. Emphasis has also been placed on this evidence being ‘usable at a political level’ (Walker, Halpin, Rankin and Chapman, 2013). Additionally, it represents the richness of detail that quantitative data fails to reflect (Boyle, 2000).

2.4 Importance of demonstrating impact

There has been much discussion in the literature on the importance of demonstrating impact. Matarasso (1998: 55) has argued that, at best, libraries are seen by local and national government as ‘a worthy drain on resources’, while Macnaught (2004) has highlighted that libraries are in competition for funding with other departments. Decision-makers are looking for evidence that libraries are contributing to the government’s priorities, but although libraries have the potential to do this, there’s an almost overwhelming consensus in the literature that they are not currently doing so (Curtis and Dean, 2004; Macnaught, 2004; PriceWaterhouseCoopers LLP, 2005; Markless and Streatfield, 2006; Brophy, 2008; Rankin, 2010; Stanziola, 2010 and Walker, Halpin, Rankin and Chapman, 2012). Researchers and library users have both voiced concerns that public library services are at risk if decisions regarding those services are based solely on what can be measured, instead of assessing the impact those services have on local communities (McMenemy, 2007; Usherwood, 2007 and Clarke, 2013). Evaluating social impact in preparation for a future threat to the library budget and library services is also seen as key (Markless and Streatfield, 2006).
There are a number of other reasons why it is important for library services to demonstrate impact. External factors include the danger that failing to demonstrate impact will mean the achievements of a library service are ignored, and not shared with other library authorities (Markless and Streatfield, 2006). Markless and Streatfield (2006) suggest that evaluating impact can improve staff motivation since staff can see the difference their service is making to the lives of the public they serve. Sharing this information with other library authorities is also a way to allay concerns about the effectiveness of using qualitative evidence. There is additional evidence that this kind of data collection is becoming more important in securing funding, both internally and externally (Markless and Streatfield, 2006).

2.5 Inconsistent terminology

In general terms, matters have been complicated by the fact that there has been no serious attempt to standardise the terminology used in the area of performance assessment (Markless and Streatfield, 2006 and Poll, 2012). The terms ‘output’, ‘outcome’, ‘impact’, ‘benefit’ and ‘value’ have been highlighted as being particularly problematic as they can either be used to mean different things (Booth and Brice, 2004; Rooney-Browne, 2011 and Poll, 2012) or, conversely, are used interchangeably (Dixon, Pickard and Robson, 2002 and Poll, 2012). The term ‘value’ in particular is ambiguous because it can refer to both social and monetary value. There is a problem in assessing libraries in terms of their value for money, given that their purpose is to drive social change, not to make a profit (Usherwood, 2007; Chowdhury, Burton, McMenemy and Poulter, 2008).

In discussing the value of library services, Orr’s (1973) distinction is often cited (Brophy, 2007a and Brophy, 2008), namely the difference between asking how good a library is (with its implications of economic impact) and asking how much good a particular library does (with its implications of social impact). It has been argued that confusing these, and using inappropriate methodologies to assess social impact, can actually change the emphasis of a library service: focusing on economic impact and the collection of statistics can mean the service focuses on profit and value for money (Usherwood, 2007).
2.6 Assessing social impact: problems and methodologies

Several drawbacks have also been identified in trying to measure social impact in particular, despite the consensus on its importance. Firstly, there are different types of impact: as well as social impact there is also economic and educational impact (Walker, Halpin, Rankin and Chapman, 2012). Much of the literature fails to define what it means by the term ‘impact’, which has an adverse effect on discussion. For the purposes of this research, the term ‘impact’ refers specifically to social impact. Secondly, social impact can be difficult to assess given that so much of it goes unrecorded (Matarasso, 1998; Markless and Streatfield, 2006 and Poll, 2012). Even where data is collected, it can be very difficult to establish causality between the work a library is doing and the perceived positive impact on the user (Matarasso, 1998; Usherwood, 2002; Markless and Streatfield, 2006 and Poll, 2012). It has also been noted that many library staff simply do not have the training to carry out social impact assessment (Poll, 2012 and Walker, Halpin, Rankin and Chapman, 2013).

Finally – and perhaps most crucially – many commentators (Matarasso, 1998; Boyle, 2000 and Markless and Streatfield, 2006) believe that social impact is immeasurable, because it cannot be quantified: there is no agreement on a scale which can be successfully used to measure impact. Markless and Streatfield (2006) propose shifting the emphasis from attempting to measure impact, to attempting to evaluate impact: this method entails choosing success criteria before a programme, event or service is delivered, so that its effectiveness can be evaluated when it is over. Chowdhury, Burton, McMenemy and Poulter (2008) suggest that one way of evaluating the impact of a library is to assess its value to that community, but they acknowledge the subjectivity of the term ‘value’. The Council for Museums, Libraries and Archives created an improvement framework for libraries: Generic Learning Outcomes and Generic Social Outcomes are used by some authorities as a way of demonstrating impact. Social impact audits are another method (Boyle, 2000 and Bryson, Usherwood and Streatfield, 2002). Rooney-Browne (2011) summarises these

---

approaches in the qualitative methodologies section of her literature review on methods for demonstrating the value of public libraries in the UK.³

As previously mentioned, there is a consensus that qualitative evidence is suited to assessing social impact, but there have been drawbacks identified with this approach. It is not an easy undertaking for a library service: data is time-consuming to collect, analyse and present (Markless and Streatfield, 2006 and Walker, Halpin, Rankin and Chapman, 2013), and to be truly effective, it must be long-term and embedded in the processes of the library (Dixon, Pickard and Robson, 2002; Usherwood, 2002; Curtis and Dean, 2004 and Stanziola, 2010). It is also very hard to use qualitative evidence to justify a library’s work if the stakeholders who have a say in its future only value quantitative evidence (Urquhart, 2004 and Markless and Streatfield, 2006). The subjective and potentially biased nature of the evidence gathered has been challenged: some believe there is a danger that only evidence which supports a particular agenda will be used (Dixon, Pickard and Robson, 2002; Markless and Streatfield, 2006 and Poll, 2012). However, the same criticism has also been levelled at quantitative scales of measurement (Boyle, 2000). Some have commented on the impression that anecdotal evidence is not trustworthy (Dixon, Pickard and Robson, 2002), although Poll (2012: 128) makes the observation that this kind of evidence can lend statistics ‘plausibility’.

2.7 Qualitative and quantitative evidence: a combined approach

There is no suggestion in the literature that qualitative evidence should replace quantitative: on the contrary, commentators seem to be in agreement that they should be used together (Dixon, Pickard and Robson, 2002; Usherwood, 2002; Urquhart, 2004; PriceWaterhouseCoopers LLP, 2005; Markless and Streatfield, 2006 and Hart and Schenk, 2010). Brophy (2007b: 156) terms this combination of methods as ‘more meaningful and memorable’ in his introduction to narrative-

³ Rooney-Browne has recently been appointed as an associate by the Carnegie UK Trust to ‘pull together the evidence on the social impact of libraries to produce a simple advocacy tool’. For more information, see http://us1.campaign-archive2.com/?u=fdd1f72ce158fc0034d5c1e40&id=96f56e3fec&e=d9d71f85c9 [Accessed 11 August 2013].
based practice (NBP), and claims it is ‘the coincidence of story and hard data’ which leads to action (Brophy, 2009: x).

2.8 Narrative-based practice: a definition

Narrative-based practice is a relatively new concept introduced by Brophy (2007b, 2009) which can be used to address the shortfalls of traditional measures of performance measurement, and to complement other forms of qualitative evidence gathering (Hart and Schenk, 2010). Brophy (2007b: 156) defines NBP as ‘ways of capturing, sharing and using narrative as a systematic part of service delivery and management’, although he chooses to make a distinction between the term ‘story’ and ‘narrative’. Whether a story is true or not is irrelevant (Gabriel, 2000), but if narrative is to be used as evidence then its truthfulness is crucial (Brophy, 2009). There are no strict criteria on what form the narrative must take – case studies, interviews, anecdotes and success stories are some of the most used forms, but they are by no means the only ones.

Despite referencing Brophy’s (2007b) article on NBP in her literature review on ways to prove the value of libraries, Rooney-Browne (2011) only includes it in her sub-section on ethnography, and does not discuss it as a separate qualitative methodology. This shows that NBP is not a recognised qualitative methodology in its own right, although it has the potential to be. In addition (and perhaps because it is so new) ‘narrative-based practice’ may not be a term which is instantly recognisable to library practitioners, even though they may already be using it. Practitioners will be familiar with the forms of narrative-based evidence (NBE) – case studies, anecdotes, interviews, success stories – and be aware of their use as a form of qualitative evidence: a term which is far more established in the literature.

2.9 Narrative-based evidence: a discussion

Narrative-based evidence draws on a lot of the general assumptions made about the value of using qualitative data, which have already been discussed: that it demonstrates impact (although Brophy does not refer solely to social impact); that it can illustrate more fully the range of services which libraries offer; that it can be
used as evidence to demonstrate that libraries are contributing to government priorities at a local level; that the focus on the individual can be more powerful than a focus on numbers of individuals; that it can lead to new discoveries when tacit knowledge is made explicit, and that it can contribute to an evidence base for professional use.

The perceived drawbacks of using qualitative evidence are also addressed: that it is a time-consuming process; that it must be embedded in library procedures; that stakeholders must value, or be convinced by, this kind of evidence for its use to succeed; and that the evidence itself is often considered to be subjective. Brophy (2009: 131-132) formalises these in his outline of the five key aspects of NBP:

1. **The use of a broad evidence base**

   A broad evidence base is one where the importance of both quantitative and qualitative evidence is acknowledged.

2. **Acknowledgement of the complexity of decision making**

   This touches on the necessity to engage more than one approach in gathering evidence to influence decision making, and draws on Boyle’s (2000: 45) assertion that ‘figures reduce ... complexity, but the truth is complicated’.

3. **Recognition that all actions are socially situated**

   This highlights the need to appreciate and understand the different points of view which are held by members of a society (or a local community).

4. **Awareness of the need to learn continuously, actively and reflectively**

   Brophy (2009) cites this as a key professional skill in improving performance.
5. A commitment to ethical conduct

Where the gathering of NBE is rigorous and unbiased.

2.10 Narrative-based evidence: uses

NBP is an approach which has multiple applications. It has been used mainly as a tool for management within an organisation (Marek, 2011) but Brophy (2007b: 157) highlights the potential use of NBP as a tool in demonstrating social impact when he describes the approach as ‘a powerful addition to the evidence base upon which professionals rely’ to make decisions, to advocate on behalf of libraries (and by extension develop others’ understanding of what libraries actually do) and for internal and external communications (which includes library staff within a single authority, other library authorities, and partners on a local and national level).

The purpose in using NBE is key, as previous commentators (Markless and Streatfield, 2006: 11) have highlighted. Brophy (2007b: 134) makes an implicit reference to social impact when he states that the main purpose of gathering NBE is to understand ‘how individuals and social groups interpret experiences and events’. If a library service is looking to evaluate impact they are looking at how something has changed, and that means collecting baseline information before a project or service begins (Markless and Streatfield, 2006). Commentators have made the related point that the purpose of collecting qualitative evidence actually informs whether it is considered to be ‘useful’ or not (Markless and Streatfield, 2006: 17).

Yet the potential of narrative to demonstrate the social impact of public libraries is still to be realised (Usherwood, 2002; Brophy, 2007b; Hart and Schenk, 2010 and Walker, Halpin, Rankin and Chapman, 2012). Most consider it a potentially powerful tool in demonstrating impact (Brophy, 2007b; Marek, 2011 and Walker, Halpin, Rankin and Chapman, 2012). However Rankin (2010: 34) doubts its usefulness as evidence for ‘advocacy and political decision making’. Brophy (2008) and Marek (2011) both highlight the need for training in the use of storytelling as a professional tool, although they disagree about the ease with which individuals are able to tell stories.
2.11 Collection of narrative-based evidence

Very little research has been done into how to carry out NBE gathering (the anecdotes of service users in particular), or in outlining the practicalities for those wishing to learn from best practice (Rankin, 2010). Brophy (2009) lists very broadly the ways of collecting narrative evidence, emphasising the need to listen to the stories that people tell, and use them when it is appropriate. Techniques and tools such as ‘anecdote circles’ (Hart and Schenk, 2010), comments cards and social media (Marek, 2011) are mentioned but not explained in detail, and even commentators who recognise the potential of the narrative-based approach in demonstrating impact do not engage with what this means in practice, or examine how to evaluate its effectiveness as a tool to measure social impact (Walker, Halpin, Rankin and Chapman, 2012). And the process does not stop with data collection: any qualitative evidence needs to be analysed and interpreted before being applied for a particular purpose (Markless and Streatfield, 2006).

2.12 Examples of narrative-based evidence

The shift from solely quantitative data collection to a mixed method of quantitative and qualitative data has been reflected in the increase of reports in recent years which rely heavily on NBE to demonstrate impact. Several organisations were referred to repeatedly throughout the course of this review: in particular the work of the now-disbanded Council for Museums, Libraries and Archives (MLA), the Society for Chief Librarians (SCL), and the Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC).

After the People’s Network was launched in the UK in 2001, the MLA (2002) published a disc containing case studies of people who had benefitted in different ways from the introduction of computers to public libraries. Both the disc and the report produced the following year (Brophy, 2003) employed the use of case-studies to demonstrate impact.

More recently, the SCL produced two documents in 2012 which also relied on case studies to demonstrate the impact libraries have had on the communities they serve
(Society for Chief Librarians, 2012a and 2012b). The *First Incomplete Field Guide to Wellbeing in Libraries* (Society for Chief Librarians, 2012a) used one case study for every library authority in Wales to demonstrate the impact libraries have had on health in particular, while *The New Super-Users of Britain’s Public Libraries* (Society for Chief Librarians, 2012b) used case studies to look at the impact of selected library services in England on a variety of social factors, including employability, health, learning, social cohesion and information literacy. Neither uses solely qualitative information; rather, they rely on combined methodologies of data collection.

In Scotland, SLIC introduced the Public Library Quality Improvement Matrix (PLQIM), a toolkit for library services to be able to assess their own impact using a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods (McMenemy, 2009), although there are concerns that PLQIM still focuses too much on economic value and not enough on social value (Rooney-Browne, 2011).

2.13 Summary

In recent years commentators have reached an agreement on the importance of using a combined qualitative and quantitative methodology to demonstrate the social impact of library services, but there is no consensus on the best form of qualitative evidence to use. Narrative is a relatively new form of qualitative evidence and there are considerable gaps in the literature concerning the practicalities and effectiveness of gathering NBE. Taken together, these gaps in the literature provide scope for an investigation into how NBE is currently being used to demonstrate social impact in public libraries in the UK.
Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The focus of the research topic is narrative. Given both the nature of narrative as a concept and the research question and the related objectives, the approach taken in this study was an inductive one: the views of participants were gathered and then analysed to form ‘patterns, themes and generalisations’ (Creswell and Clark, 2007: 24). An inductive approach was considered the most appropriate because the use of narrative-based evidence (NBE) by libraries to demonstrate social impact is a relatively new area, and this approach allowed the researcher to identify recurring themes, and develop theories from these (Creswell and Clark, 2007).

In keeping with this approach, the data collected was solely qualitative. This was for two main reasons. Firstly, it was not anticipated that enough practitioners would be engaged in this type of activity to make a quantitative study necessary (especially since such an approach aims to be representative, which was never the aim of this project). Secondly, quantitative data is only concerned with numerical data: it can explain the what, but not the how or why of a situation that qualitative data can. Qualitative data collection allowed the researcher to gather the views and opinions of practitioners, and use these to inform the categories and themes from which the final theory is derived. And, although this was not a major factor in choosing a methodology, the use of qualitative data seemed appropriate given the research’s focus on narrative.

3.2 Research ethics

The project was categorised as ethically low-risk. Although it involves human subjects (library and information professionals) the participants were not classified as vulnerable, nor was the topic considered to be of a sensitive nature.

In order to meet research ethics standards, a proposal was submitted for review to the Information School Research Ethics Panel at the University of Sheffield, outlining the potential risks of the project (see Appendix 1). The proposal was accepted by the
Panel as being in accordance with the University’s policies and procedures (see Appendix 2), and permission was given to begin data collection once an informed consent procedure was in place (see Appendix 3).

3.3 Data collection

In order to identify public libraries which are currently using narrative-based practice as a way of gathering qualitative evidence, practitioners were invited to respond to a posting on the JISCMail e-mail list LIS-PUB-LIBS (see Appendix 4a for the original posting). This asked for participants willing to take part in a semi-structured interview, either in person or by telephone. The findings from the literature review suggested that the terminology around this area is confusing, and that using academic terminology when approaching potential interviewees would be off-putting (Dixon, Pickard and Robson, 2002; Booth and Brice, 2004 and Poll, 2012). This was taken into account both in phrasing the JISCMail posting and in framing interview questions.

For example, the decision was made to use the better-known term ‘qualitative evidence’ rather than ‘narrative-based evidence’. Although ‘qualitative evidence’ encompasses types of evidence other than narrative, it is less likely to be misunderstood. A broader term was deemed to be preferable because it meant the researcher was the one who had to work harder (to pull out examples of specifically NBE), rather than the participants.

Those who indicated an interest in participating were emailed an information sheet and consent form, and asked to confirm a suitable date and time for the interview. The interview guide was included in the main body of the email so that potential participants could see the type of questions they would be asked (see Appendix 5 for the interview guide). Participants were assigned letters of the alphabet in the order they replied to the posting, so that the results could be anonymised. There was a category asking permission from participants to identify their responses by the library authority they worked for (the aim being to share best practice) but, as not enough participants agreed, it was decided not to include this information in the results.
Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the instrument of data collection most suited to this piece of research because it allowed very specific topics to be covered while at the same time allowing participants a great deal of freedom in how to respond (Bryman, 2012). Structured interviews would not have had this inbuilt flexibility, and unstructured interviews would not have provided the focus required for a relatively new area of research. This meant that the focus of the interview could be kept firmly on the use of narrative evidence, but it also meant that the opinions of various public librarians could be gathered. This is because the objectives of the research are more rooted in the participants’ point of view (Bryman, 2012) than in the identification of facts and figures.

The first interview was treated as a pilot, to test the effectiveness of the interview guide in obtaining data that would fulfil the research aim and objectives as stated in the introduction. Given that the interviews were semi-structured rather than structured, it was expected that questions might have to be asked in a different order, or expanded upon if the interviewer felt there was a need. Even so, it was found that some questions were answered so similarly that they may have to be omitted in future interviews (or merged together). For example, there was a question on the particular benefits of gathering narrative evidence – to do with a specific example to be provided by the participant – as well as another question on the general benefits of gathering qualitative evidence. In the pilot, the participant’s answer concerning the benefits of gathering qualitative evidence covered both the particular example they were asked for as well as the perceived general benefits. It was decided that guidance notes would be added to the interview guide, and similar questions could be omitted if the participant had already covered the area in a previous answer. The only real addition to the guide was a question explicitly asking participants how effective they found the use of qualitative evidence to be.

In total there were nine respondents, who all took part in telephone interviews lasting between twenty five and forty five minutes. Demographic information, such as the type of library authority the participant belonged to, or the location of their library service, was not captured; again because this study does not aim to be representative. Nor is it a comparison between different types of library authority, which would be the main reason for collecting demographic information. It was
decided that collecting this information, and seeking out and selecting participants based on a need to be representative, would place artificial constraints on who would be asked to take part. Since the researcher had no way of knowing how many practitioners may be engaged in NBE gathering, limiting the number of potential participants in any way was considered to be imprudent.

3.4 Limitations

3.4.1 Volume of data

One of the main drawbacks of qualitative data collection is the accumulation of a lot of data – it may be rich, but not all of it is necessarily relevant to the research aim and objectives that were decided at the outset of the research process. In order to prevent this accumulation of material from becoming overwhelming, it was important to remember Bryman’s (2012: 689) assertion to ‘use the research questions as a focus’ and analyse transcription passages with this in mind. While this was done at every stage of the data collection, coding and analysis processes, particular care was taken to ensure that material was only discarded at the end of the analysis process in order that emergent findings were preserved.

3.4.2 Qualitative data collection only

It was decided at the outset that qualitative research methods would be used, not quantitative. This was an ideal method to capture the opinions and beliefs held by public librarians on the value of using NBE, although it is recognised that mixed methods of data collection (both qualitative and quantitative evidence) would have addressed any issues arising from the question of validity.

3.4.3 Validity of qualitative data

The validity of the data collection and data analysis could be questioned, since it relies solely on one method of qualitative data collection, using only one instrument: the semi-structured interview. Creswell and Miller (2000) discuss the
importance of demonstrating the credibility of qualitative research by asking researchers to consider the viewpoint (lens) through which they are considering the data, and then using this to inform the procedure they will use to determine validity. In the case of this study, it was the aim of the researcher from the beginning to decide when a saturation point had been reached in data collection, i.e. when clear and recurring themes had emerged from the concurrent analysis: the lens was very much that of the researcher, rather than that of the participants or of individuals who were not involved in the study (Creswell and Miller, 2000). The lens determines the choice of validity procedures which can be used and Creswell and Miller (2000) identify three available to those who use the lens of the researcher: disconfirming evidence, researcher reflexivity and triangulation.

Disconfirming evidence – where researchers use the initial themes they have established to identify opinions which then contradict these themes – was discounted as a validity procedure in this study. Since differing points of view were incorporated into the formation of themes anyway (as a natural result of the overall process of data analysis) there was no need to make it into a separate task.

Researcher reflexivity – where the role of the researcher is declared within the write-up, along with any biases they hold prior to the start of the research – was identified as a good way to make the study credible (Creswell and Miller, 2000). Adopting this approach before the study began, and keeping it in mind throughout the data analysis process, also acted as a check to ensure that the issue of bias was at the forefront of the researcher’s mind. It may not be enough to prevent individual bias from influencing the findings, but it is good practice in research to be aware of it, and to acknowledge it as a limitation. In line with this, the researcher’s background in (and belief in) public libraries is acknowledged.

Triangulation – ‘where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories’ (Creswell and Miller, 2000: 127) – was identified as the main procedure to test the study’s validity, but Creswell and Miller (2000) identify four main types: triangulation across methods, theories, researchers and data sources (participants). A mixed method approach (where both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods are employed) was not deemed to be appropriate for this study, considering that it does not aim to
be representative and because its focus is on the use of narrative in practice. The study’s inductive approach ruled out the triangulation of theories since the formation of theories only comes at the end of the data analysis process; and because there could only be one researcher (given that the study forms part of the fulfilment of an individual’s Masters degree) researcher triangulation was also not an option. This left triangulation across participants. This approach was adopted because it involves the comparison of narratives to elicit themes, an account which Creswell and Miller (2000) consider valid as it relies on multiple accounts rather than on one-off references. The nine interview transcripts produced from this research provided enough material to be able to triangulate the data across participants.

3.4.4 Terminology

The findings from the literature review indicated that the terminology used in this particular area of research is, at best, ambiguous (see Dixon, Pickard and Robson, 2002; Booth and Brice, 2004 and Poll, 2012). In addition, ‘narrative-based practice’ is not a term which is in common use in public library practice, which meant that the original email posting had to be worded carefully to reflect this. Despite exercising caution there was a lack of response to the original posting, which meant that a second message was posted to the list ten days after the first (see Appendix 4b for the amended version). The amended version emphasised an interest in broader qualitative data collection, rather than the narrower narrative-based data collection, in the hope that this would attract respondents who used NBE as part of their wider collection of qualitative data.

3.4.5 Lack of respondents

There was an initial lack of response to the original posting on LIS-PUB-LIBS, which generated only four participants. It was recognised that this was too small a data set to draw conclusions from. In order to address this issue, two strategies were put in place: the original posting was redrafted and reposted on LIS-PUB-LIBS, and fifteen library authorities throughout the UK were contacted directly in order to obtain the
contact details of the librarian in that authority who is responsible for customer care and performance assessment. Since the study is not intended to be representative (and because there was no way to direct appeals for participants to library authorities who are already using NBE) the authorities were selected at random from the list on Public Library News. These strategies generated a further five interviews, which go some way to addressing the inadequate size of the original data set. Securing participants by contacting library authorities directly also had the advantage of addressing the bias of previous participants, who had all come forward because they used and believed in the effectiveness of qualitative evidence.

It should also be noted that there is no definitive answer to the question of how many qualitative interviews are ‘enough’: the answer very much depends on the nature of the research project, the level of analysis the researcher is willing to engage in, the thoroughness of the analytical methods used and the purpose of carrying out the research in the first place (Baker and Edwards, n.d). This research project is not intended to be a comprehensive survey of library authorities in the UK who are currently using NBE; rather, it is designed to elicit the opinions of practitioners who are using this kind of evidence (or who are choosing not to use it). Thematic analysis demands a high level of engagement with the collected data, and a smaller data set is more suited to this. Saldana (2009: 15) also reminds researchers to have ‘not just sufficient qualitative but sufficient quality data with which to work’. Every effort was made to ensure that the data collected during this project would fall into that category, mainly by appealing to participants who deal most directly with NBE (and with customer care and performance assessment in general), and in the construction of the interview guide to ensure that the responses generated would answer the project’s stated objectives.

3.4.6 Interview method

It had originally been intended that at least some of the interviews would be conducted face-to-face. Due to a change in circumstances which limited both the researcher’s ability to travel and the time in which interviews had to be completed,

---

it was decided to conduct all of the interviews via the telephone. There are drawbacks to this approach when compared to face-to-face interviewing: it is easier to lose concentration and there can be technical issues in trying to obtain a clear recording of the interview (Irvine, 2010). There are also what Irvine (2012: 4) calls ‘interactional issues’ to consider, including the difficulty in striking up a rapport and the absence of being able to act on visual clues such as the participants’ body language. The key is in determining whether the differences between face-to-face interviews and telephone interviews would have a bearing on the quality of the data being collected. If a research project only seeks ‘relatively simple or descriptive data’ rather than an in-depth engagement with participants – as this project did – then telephone interviews are considered a viable alternative to face-to-face interviews (Irvine, 2010: 6). Knowing in advance that a loss of concentration during an interview could affect the outcome of the interview made it easier to address, and telephone calls were made on a landline to secure the best connection. In addition to the main recording on a password protected laptop computer, a back-up recording was made simultaneously on a handheld Dictaphone device to ensure that data loss due to technical failures was kept to a minimum. Multiple recordings also helped during the transcription process to verify parts of an interview which suffered from poor quality sound.

3.5 Thematic analysis

Transcripts of all nine interviews were produced in preparation for analysis of the data which had been collected. It should be made clear at this point that the data collection and data analysis stages of the project were conducted simultaneously, and that each stage informed the other. Data coding is itself an iterative process, and is part of the data analysis process rather than a separate stage (Saldana, 2009). As such, it was also carried out while data was still being collected and transcribed.

The aim of coding is to be able to identify categories from which themes will then emerge, going from the particular to the general (Saldana, 2009). This is in line with the inductive approach adopted at the outset of the research process. The decision was taken to assign codes manually instead of assigning them with the assistance of qualitative data software since this gave the researcher a familiarity with the data
that would be beneficial in informing the analysis. The small scale of the research project also had a bearing on this decision.

Codes were constantly revised and refined, and analytic memos were kept throughout. Analytic memos are a means of recording reflections regarding the data being collected and analysed: this includes potential themes which may occur at this stage, even if they are not borne out in the final analysis (Saldana, 2009). They are also a means of highlighting areas which respondents are not addressing (which the researcher may have expected) and in developing observations concerning a lack of response (Clarke, 2005). Although there are many different types of coding (see Saldana, 2009 for an outline of various approaches) it was decided that both a descriptive and values coding approach would be adopted for this project. A descriptive coding approach (where a single word or a short phrase is appended to each passage of an interview transcript, outlining its subject) was felt to be ideal for separating the transcripts into discrete topics. A values coding approach (where a single word or short phrase is appended to each passage of an interview transcript, outlining the participant’s ‘values, attitudes and beliefs’) was felt to be necessary to capture the opinions of participants concerning the use of NBE (Saldana, 2009: 70, 89).

A book of the codes used throughout the coding process was kept, added to and modified (see Appendix 6 for an extract from the final codebook). The transcripts were coded repeatedly, and the coded sections were refined before being grouped into categories, sub-categories and themes (Saldana, 2009).

3.6 Summary

The focus of the research on NBP was only one of the reasons behind the decision to take an inductive approach and collect only qualitative data. Other reasons included the fact that the study did not aim to be representative: it aimed instead to examine the point of view and opinions of public librarians. Semi-structured interviews were carried out after the research had been categorised as low-risk and the data then transcribed. There were a number of limitations concerning the methodology: namely the volume and validity of collecting only qualitative data, the ambiguity of
the terminology which could be used, the lack of respondents and the fact that
interviews were conducted via telephone, not in person. These limitations were
listed in turn and then addressed.

The collected data was analysed thematically after a number of alternatives were
considered, using descriptive and values coding. Coding was completed manually,
and was an iterative process. Coded sections of the transcripts were categorised, so
that themes could then be formed. The next chapter outlines the results of this
analysis.
Chapter Four: Results

The results from the analysis of the nine interview transcripts have been grouped under four main sections: a general discussion of the benefits, drawbacks and perceived effectiveness of narrative-based evidence (NBE); the practicalities of collecting and presenting it; its applications and the sharing of best practice in its use.

4.1 NBE: a discussion

Five main thematic strands were identified in the interviewed librarians’ discussions around using NBE: the importance of using a combined methodological approach; the drawbacks of NBE; the benefits of using NBE; the perceived effectiveness of using NBE and the main reasons why NBE is used.

4.1.1 Qualitative and quantitative methodologies: a combined approach

Several librarians emphasised the importance of first working out what data was required before choosing a method to collect it. Librarian A spoke about how historically staff ‘used to put down as a matter of course that we will increase footfall, we will increase issues, we will get new members, and then find that actually their activity ... wasn’t about that, it was about something else’. Several librarians picked up on this thread, with Librarian C stating that the problem with taking a quantitative approach is that ‘it usually focuses on what is easy to measure, [but] it’s not necessarily relevant.’ The consensus was that qualitative or quantitative data (or a combination of both) should be used where it is most appropriate. Librarian I sums it up by saying ‘they’re very different things for a very different purpose’.

A recurring theme throughout the interviews was the idea that often numbers were not enough on their own to use as evidence to demonstrate social impact:

*The numbers alone don’t carry enough weight* (D)
We’re fairly good at collecting facts and figures but that only tells part of the story (G)

Librarians C, D, E, G and H all referenced this theme, and spoke about the importance of providing a context to quantitative data, in order to tell the whole story.

The overwhelming consensus was that, in order to demonstrate social impact, a combination of quantitative and qualitative data should be used. All but two of the librarians made reference to taking this approach, and gave their reasons for adopting it. Librarian B stated: ‘your issue system will tell you how many books somebody’s taken out, what it won’t tell you is whether they read any of them and whether any of them were life changing’. It is linked very closely with the kind of evidence decision-makers are asking to see: if decision-makers are asking to see how many books are borrowed, quantitative data is enough. If they are asking what impact these books had on the people who borrowed them, then qualitative information is needed. If the reach of this impact is what is asked for, a combination of these two approaches is required. Librarian C spoke about the impact this combined approach could have:

‘They’re not saying word for word the same thing but you can evidence that you’ve got thirty different people over three months in nineteen locations all indicating that by coming and using the healthy living collection, that you’ve helped them improve their lifestyles and therefore improve their health.’

4.1.2 Drawbacks of using NBE

All of the librarians who were interviewed identified several drawbacks to using qualitative evidence (all of which apply to NBE). These are summarised in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drawback of using NBE</th>
<th>Evidence from interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Convincing stakeholders of the value of using NBE</td>
<td>‘we had a bit of distance with senior management in terms of them not understanding what it was adding’ (Librarian C)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Time-consuming nature of collecting, analysing and presenting NBE | ‘finding the time for someone to sit down and work out what the story is ... is sometimes a bit of a problem’ (Librarian E)  
‘if you’re going to use it effectively, you need to be able to obviously put it into something where you can retrieve it, and use it, and that takes time’ (Librarian I) |
|---|---|
| NBP being viewed as less rigorous than quantitative methods, with particular reference to a lack of analysis (Librarian C) and an over-reliance on gathering evidence from the same group of library users (Librarian A) | ‘[there is] still a feeling that it’s somehow not as admissible scientifically as quantitative evidence’ (Librarian B)  
‘[other library authorities] who are gathering it anecdotally and just presenting it like illustrative, snapshot statements rather than actually trying to analyse it and place it in more detail into a framework’ (Librarian C)  
‘[the tendency of front-line staff] to ask people they already knew or the people they knew would give a positive response’ (Librarian A) |
| Lack of material due to much NBE being unrecorded | ‘the conversations that library staff have over the counter are really important but they don’t get recorded’ (Librarian D)  
‘we felt that we needed to do something quickly to try and start capturing the data’ (Librarian E) |
| Questioning the library’s motive in collecting NBE – users believe consultations are the first step in justifying closures and service reductions – leading to a lack of honest feedback, or unhelpful positive feedback | ‘there are probably things library users would like to see change but they think the status quo is preferable to the alternative, where the alternative in their mind is closure’ (Librarian B) |
The issue of bias, where librarians guide users into giving a positive response or choose to focus only on the positive feedback they receive at the expense of the more negative feedback

‘[be careful not to guide library users] too much into what you want them to say’ (Librarian A)

‘[library users are saying] what they think you want to hear’ (Librarian B)

‘in most areas it’s easy to go out and find a wonderful quote where someone says you’re marvellous. But if another ninety nine people have said you’re not marvellous, you’re crap, it’s not honest and ethical to keep quoting the one and ignore the ninety nine’ (Librarian C)

Table 1: Drawbacks of using NBE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefit of using NBE</th>
<th>Evidence from interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Revealing tacit knowledge, and dealing with complexity of evaluating social impact</td>
<td>‘it goes beyond just simply the obvious’ (Librarian C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructive feedback – NBE was seen by some as a way of identifying service improvements</td>
<td>‘[collecting NBE is about] striking a balance and encouraging the more constructive ones’ (Librarian H)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a marked impact on stakeholders because it represents the feelings and opinions of real people – and crucially for councils, real voters</td>
<td>‘you can almost see inside their heads .. in just the words they use’ (Librarian B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘We’re about customers, and we’re about serving people, clients and communities, and in that case you need to know how they feel and how they express that. And the only way you can do that is if you’ve actually got qualitative evidence’ (Librarian I)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘[NBE shows] that there are real people behind the statistics’ (Librarian H)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1.3 Benefits of using NBE

Despite the numerous drawbacks cited by the interviewed librarians, several advantages to using NBE were also identified. These are summarised in Table 2.
The power of using library users’ own words – representing the points of view of real people

‘recommendations from users are far stronger than just us doing anything’ (Librarian G)

‘Comments like this are like gold dust’ (Librarian H)

The power of using library users’ own words – reaching different groups of library users through the words and opinions of their peers

‘If you can get a couple of comments from [the school children], “oh, this is great” or something like “oh, wow”, that can have an effect as well. Using that, we can then use comments from that, say when we’re showing it to another group of children, speak[ing] their language rather than us older people trying to educate them’ (Librarian H)

Easier to understand than statistics

‘[narratives] are something everybody can relate to because it’s presented in words’ (Librarian B)

‘councillors, funding bodies ... the mobile library goes to village X and is there for twenty minutes once a fortnight, people say “what use is that?” But then you show them the evidence that it actually promotes social interaction and allows a local parish councillor to have a surgery and you know, suddenly they can understand’ (Librarian C)

Improving staff morale

‘one of the main benefits has been I think to reinforce with front-line staff the value of their work’ (Librarian A)

‘the main function of [the newsletter] is to collect success stories and good practice from individual libraries so that we can share it with the rest of the library service and also raise staff morale’ (Librarian B)

‘[what] it’s really useful for is feeding back to the staff so that they can actually see the impact of the work that they’re doing’ (Librarian I)

Table 2: Benefits of using NBE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4.1.4 Perceived effectiveness of using NBE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The consensus seemed to be that the use of NBE was most effective as part of an ongoing process, rather than because of one-off events or a collection exercise. Librarians A and D referred to this as a ‘drip, drip effect’ where the constant use of NBE conveys the wide range of services which the library offers its local community.
This was emphasised by Librarian D’s belief that collecting and presenting NBE ‘needs to be an ongoing story which represents an impression of the library service ... rather than expecting to use it as make or break evidence for particular services’.

Perceptions of the effectiveness of NBE varied: some librarians believed it was highly effective, while others believed it had no impact on stakeholders and decision-makers. Librarians C and E demonstrate the spectrum of belief in the effectiveness of using NBE: Librarian C calls it ‘extremely effective’ because he used it to negotiate a reduction in the budget cut for his mobile libraries, while Librarian E said that ‘if I’m brutally honest, then I suppose I would say that I suspect [it’s] not, in the long-term, terribly effective at all’.

Two thirds of the librarians (A, B, C, D, H and I) believed NBE could only be used effectively if enough of it was collected and then used for a variety of reasons (see Section 4.1.5 for a breakdown of the different reasons why NBE is used). They all identified creating a bank of NBE as a way of doing this.

Two librarians were very clear that the effectiveness of NBE is dependent on using it in the right way and presenting it to the right person. Librarian F was firm in his belief that ‘we have to use it in the right way and we have to hit somebody receptive at the other end as well’. His belief is that stakeholders must already recognise the value of NBE, whereas Librarian C was of the opinion that stakeholders should be persuaded of the value of this type of evidence. Librarian H also touched on this theme, saying that ‘if you try and use it in the wrong place, forget it basically’.

4.1.5 Main reasons for using NBE

The over-riding motivation for choosing to use NBE is to demonstrate to stakeholders the social impact of libraries on the people who use them. The interviewed librarians offered four reasons behind the adoption of NBE: demonstrating social impact; demonstrating the range of services libraries offer; providing the evidence stakeholders are asking for and proving library services are meeting the council’s objectives.
4.1.5.1 Demonstrating social impact

Libraries are seen as forces for social change – Librarian C was very definite that public libraries are ‘about empowering people to help themselves’. All of the librarians referred to using NBE either as a way to demonstrate social impact, or proving to various stakeholders the value of the library service. Librarians A, B, C, F and I all spoke of the idea that quantitative evidence fails to demonstrate social impact. Librarian D believes that NBE can also demonstrate another form of social impact – preventing acute social need:

‘it’s easy to demonstrate how effective delivering key services is because you know, you can spend some money and someone comes off drugs, or you spend some money and they can be looked after and treated, so those kind of aims are relatively straightforward to measure. It’s much harder to demonstrate ... [the impact] of intervention at an earlier stage on the prevention end of the spectrum, and of course that in reality is where libraries are in the scheme of things’.

Librarian D also voiced an opinion on the two types of social impact which libraries can have on individuals: life-changing impact and low-key impact. Life-changing impact was referenced by several of the librarians (B, C, D and H) as very being powerful evidence to demonstrate social impact, but Librarian D made the point that ‘those stories are really powerful but they’re inevitably quite few and far between’. Librarians D and E were the only respondents to highlight the low-key impact which libraries can have on individuals, and as Librarian E observes, ‘the everyday life stuff is forgotten about’. Yet it is this kind of impact which has the greatest reach. Librarian D used the example of a library user building a shed based on information he got from his local library: ‘they would be very happy with that and, you know, it’s happened, the library’s made a significant contribution to that happening because it provided the information to do it, but that’s not the sort of thing that’s going to give you a headline in the local paper’.

4.1.5.2 Demonstrating the range of services libraries offer

A consistent theme which emerged across the board was the idea that libraries often exceed the outdated expectations which many people still have of them.
Librarian H strongly emphasised the necessity of proving to stakeholders that libraries ‘offer far more to the community than books and reading, which is what a lot of people still think libraries are all about’. Librarian I also identified the use of NBE as ‘one of the most effective ways to try and demonstrate what we’re doing and the range of what we’re doing’. It is in narrative that this range of services can be demonstrated: Librarian E said his service ‘feel quite strongly that we don’t capture the stories, that [the statistics] don’t incorporate the many different ways that people use the library service’. NBE addresses this failure.

4.1.5.3 Providing the evidence stakeholders are asking for

Many of the librarians who were interviewed (A, C, D, F, G, H and I) observed that there has been a trend in recent years for local councils to ask for more qualitative information to complement the quantitative data they already receive. This change in thinking stems from the need to demonstrate that councils are meeting the needs of their communities caused by changes in society, such as (for example) the need to train jobseekers in employability-related IT skills (Librarian D). All of the interviewed librarians were in agreement that providing quantitative evidence was essential; but seven of the librarians referred to NBE as being the type of data which stakeholders (such as councillors, funders or partners) often want to hear. In the words of Librarian D ‘there’s nothing like a story that has a personal angle to get the attention of everybody ... the press, the decision makers’.

Librarians A, B, E and I talked particularly of the value of using NBE to either persuade potential partners what the library is capable of contributing to a potential project, or to provide them with library user feedback after the project has been carried out. Councillors also featured high on the list of relevant stakeholders; Librarian H suggests the reason behind this change concerns the fact that members are ‘used to people throwing figures and requests for money at them, so when you put in comments from people, who are at the end of the day voters, they are perhaps going to pay a bit more attention’.
4.1.5.4 Proving library services are meeting the council’s objectives

Using NBE seems to have reinforced the importance of aligning the objectives of the library service with the objectives of the council, so that it can be used as a way of justifying services, as Librarian A observed:

‘it’s changed the mindset of staff from starting off thinking ... “this’ll be a fun event, let’s put this event on, and then let’s see if we can attach some objectives to it”. They’ve started thinking the other way, and thinking what do we actually really want to achieve, and then how are we going to achieve that through the activity?’

Two key priorities were outlined by almost every librarian who was interviewed: using NBE to demonstrate that the objectives of the library service are aligned to the objectives of the local council, and using NBE to demonstrate that those objectives have actually been achieved.

Aligning the library service’s objectives with those of the local council was referenced by many of the librarians (A, B, C, D, F and G) as a key priority for their library service. Librarian B was clear that ‘our objectives are always to support one or more of the council priorities’, and she believed in the power of collecting this kind of evidence for the library’s service plan: ‘[we] collect evidence of what we’ve done ... I present it against our objectives and it comes out looking immensely powerful’. Librarian A was the only respondent to speak at length about achieving outcomes (although it could be argued that aligning objectives implies the achievement of outcomes). She spoke about the power of being able to ‘find out from people’s feedback whether [initiatives] are actually doing what we think they’re doing’ and how comments from library users are a ‘brilliant’ way to show ‘that what we set out to do has actually been achieved’.
4.2 NBE: Practicalities of collection and presentation

Those librarians who discussed the practicalities of gathering NBE covered issues concerning data collection, analysis and presentation. There was a consensus amongst the librarians concerning the need to apply a framework to the process of collecting, analysing and presenting NBE. Where the difference lay was in what kind of framework was most appropriate. In the opinion of Librarian C, using a framework is one way of solving the issue of bias because ‘a common framework ... takes away a fair degree of the subjectivity’. But not all of the librarians believed that an appropriate framework actually exists: Librarian B expressed a desire to see the establishment of ‘set standards for processing qualitative research; I think if somehow we could apply quantitative research rigour to that process, we would come up with something that is completely mindblowing’. Yet there are such frameworks in existence: Librarians A, C and I all referred to the MLA’s Generic Learning Outcomes and Generic Social Outcomes, and two librarians (C and G) cited SLIC’s Public Library Quality Improvement Matrix (PLQIM). The frameworks are available, but the results show only partial awareness of them.

4.2.1 Collecting NBE

The kinds of NBE which can be collected fall into two types: written and verbal narratives. The variations of these two types are summarised in Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of narrative</th>
<th>Format</th>
<th>Evidence from transcripts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Written</td>
<td>Forms (hard copies)</td>
<td>‘generally speaking [we don’t] use those horrible evaluation forms that you get at the end of events, because I don’t think people like to fill them in’ (Librarian A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>‘a very short feedback form ... the most interesting bits are the free-text answers’ (Librarian B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>‘what we have is some sort of feedback form’ (Librarian H)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letters</td>
<td>‘we have Royal Mail letters’ (Librarian I)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surveys</td>
<td>‘we do ... typical surveys’ (Librarian B)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘We do member surveys’ (Librarian H)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-it notes</td>
<td>‘we tend to use post-it notes’ (Librarian A)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td>‘We have people who will email us’ (Librarian I)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website forms</td>
<td>‘We do actually get a lot of comments back online ... a lot more’s happening electronically’ (Librarian G)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(online)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media</td>
<td>‘the increasing use of social media by library services which does introduce an element of engagement with your library users which is different in a practical ... sense to before, because it’s easy to record it’ (Librarian D)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshops and</td>
<td>‘we’ve run workshops and we’ve done short interview-based surveys’ (Librarian B)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interview-based</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>surveys</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recordings of</td>
<td>‘it takes peoples’ own words ... it’s also short and snappy, you can usually extract soundbites from it which carry a lot of punch’ (Librarian B)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>customer comments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘I can often now get hold of the actual recording of the person which is really helpful, because you actually hear it in their own words but in their own tone’ (Librarian I)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Collecting written and verbal narratives

Note that a distinction was made between the collection of first and third person narratives.
4.2.2 Presenting NBE

There were several ways in which the interviewed librarians presented their NBE once it had been collected, but they all relied on creating a database of customer feedback. Librarians B, C, D and E all explicitly referenced some form of evidence bank which they could draw from in order to create case studies, reports and presentations (or which could be added to in the case of one-off projects).

4.2.2.1 Case studies

This was the most popular form of presentation: Librarians B, C, D and F all used case studies in presenting NBE. In the opinion of Librarian C, it is the narrative aspect which draws the attention of stakeholders:

‘we get a query from a councillor saying “we want to talk about libraries” and what we’re doing to help – they want some numbers but what they really want is an example, a case study: So-and-so, aged 83, we steered her to advice to help her manage her diabetes more effectively and now she only has to go to the doctor once a month instead of once a week. That’s the sort of thing they like’.

Councillors especially want information that can be easily understood by their electorate – narratives are an ideal way of doing this. Librarian F believes that ‘one good case study to the right person in the council in government can make a huge difference’.

4.2.2.2 Reports and presentations

Librarians A, B, C, D, E and H spoke of collating NBE as part of a report, while Librarians C and H both had to present their findings to stakeholders as part of a presentation. Librarian A presented the NBE she had collected as a storyboard which was put on display in local branches as a way of communicating feedback to library users.

4.3 NBE: Applications

The librarians who were interviewed identified several ways in which NBE could be applied: Librarian B even remarked that when she ‘sat down to think about it [all the ways in which her service uses NBE], I thought good heavens, how much there
is!’ These potential applications of NBE can all be grouped under the following three strands:

- Service planning (including improving performance and tailoring services)
- Justifying budgets and funding applications
- Raising the profile of the library service (including marketing, public relations and advocacy).

4.3.1 Service planning

Librarians B, C and G all discussed the role that NBE plays in planning service delivery. Although most librarians referred to the number of book issues being recorded, only Librarians D and E discussed the implications of using this type of data to justify library services when book issues are falling nationally. Librarian D calls them ‘diminishing returns’ while Librarian E felt that ‘we needed to prove our impact in a different way than just figures and statistics ... because issues are falling and continuing to fall’. Only Librarian E referred to trying to ‘improve the figures’; the other Librarians who covered this issue referred instead to improving services (B and G).

4.3.2 Justifying budgets and funding applications

Librarian C was convinced that the use of NBE had, if not secured him more of a budget, at the very least limited its reduction: ‘that evidence enabled me to negotiate a significant reduction in the amount of my budget that was going to be removed’. Librarian F echoed that sentiment, although he had not seen any evidence of this himself:

‘if we can use qualitative evidence to tie in with the health agenda and prove to the council that we have a strong part to play in the health agenda, that might end with us not getting cuts as much as we might get cut, or it might lead to an increase’.

NBE has also been used by some librarians (A, C, D and I) as evidence to support funding applications, although there has been differing degrees of success. Librarian
A admitted that ‘I haven’t had much success in using it for successful funding bids yet’, while Librarian C had success in drawing ‘in money from a funding stream that’s there to tackle rural isolation because I was able to demonstrate that the mobile library service works to promote ... social interaction’.

4.3.3 Raising the profile of the library service

Several librarians commented on the role NBE had to play in promoting the library to potential and actual library users. Librarians B and H made direct reference to using NBE in ‘marketing materials’. More frequent were mentions of public relations: Librarians A, C, D and H all highlighted the fact that the press look for stories, especially stories with a personal angle. Librarian C commented that ‘personal stories or case studies ... are really, really useful for good, positive publicity about what we do’.

This raising of the profile of the library service (achieved through the channels of marketing and public relations) was identified as a key theme by four librarians (F, H, G and I). There was a distinction made between raising the library’s profile externally, and selling library services internally. This first point relates to the wider theme of marketing but the second relates to selling library services within the council. Librarians F, H and I see this as a key application of NBE: Librarian I makes the point that ‘even within the authority you’ll perhaps have other colleagues in other departments or indeed your elected members who don’t understand the major services and the reach of those services’. And if councillors fail to understand the range and reach of library services, there is a real risk that they will identify libraries as an easy service to cut. Librarians A, D and H all make references to the perception that libraries are ‘an easy target to find savings’. NBE has a clear role to play here in changing this perception.

Several librarians have used NBE as a way to advocate on behalf of public libraries, and therefore raise their profile: Librarians A, B, D and I all mentioned using NBE for advocacy purposes, with Librarian A even commenting that ‘I think [using NBE] has given us a bit more confidence that we can act as advocates’.
Attracting new users was seen as a benefit of raising the library’s profile. Librarians A and H spoke generally about using NBE to attract new users to the library, with Librarian H commenting that ‘we can use the evidence to encourage those who are sympathetic of, or are supportive of, library services, to make use of them’. Librarian B was more specific in identifying teenagers as an under-represented group which could be invited to use library services (this relates to the point raised in Section 4.1.3 concerning the use of library users’ own words to attract members of the same peer group into the library).

4.4 NBE: Sharing best practice

The librarians who were interviewed fell into one of two categories when it came to using NBE: either they worked in isolation or they worked together with partners including colleagues, neighbouring library authorities and external organisations. This section looks at both of these in turn, before presenting the perceived benefits of working in collaboration with others.

4.4.1 Working in isolation

Librarians A, B and G all made reference to individual branches within their services working independently and not sharing best practice when it came to using NBE. Librarian A talked about libraries where a lot of people were doing ‘good things but they were doing them in isolation ... they were doing some really good things but nobody else knew’. Librarian G echoed this sentiment, which Librarian B believes is down to branches not realising they are ‘part of a bigger service’.

Librarians A, C, D and E spoke of working within their own authorities, and not looking to other library authorities as a way of informing their own approach to using NBE. Librarian D was of the opinion that many library authorities across the UK are ‘all guilty of reinventing the wheel’, because they either do not share their own best practice or because they do not seek out the best practice of other authorities.
4.4.2 Working together

Colleagues, neighbouring library authorities, professional networks and external organisations were all identified as potential partners who could be collaborated with in order to gather and use NBE more effectively.

4.4.2.1 Colleagues

Librarians B and C both commented on the benefits of relying on the expertise of research colleague within the council.

4.4.2.2 Neighbouring library authorities

Only a few librarians referred to their links with neighbouring library authorities in any depth: Librarian E was at one end of the spectrum: ‘we’re sort of vaguely informed in neighbouring authorities’ while Librarian G has a close working relationship with his counterparts in other library services: ‘I have close links to my counterparts in neighbouring authorities and we kind of bounce a lot of ideas off one another’. Librarian H admitted that ‘we’re all kind of picking each other’s brains. We’re all under the same pressure from people who have asked us to justify our existence’.

4.4.2.3 Professional networks

This was seen as a two-way process, where librarians were both involved in sharing their own best practice and in seeking out the best practice of others. Professional networks appeared to take the place of neighbouring library authorities as a way of sharing best practice: Librarians A, B, D, G, H and I all spoke of their links with local and national networks, including discussion groups such as LIS-PUB-LIBS (Librarian B), the Scottish Library and Information Council (Librarian G), the South West and Mid-Wales Partnership (Librarian H), the Society of Chief Librarians (Librarian D) and CILIP special interest groups (Librarians A, B and C).
4.4.3 Benefits of working together

The librarians who worked with others in sharing best practice identified several benefits to working this way: the sharing of skills, learning from others’ mistakes, and the time-saving nature of sharing best practice. These are summarised in Table 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefit of sharing best practice</th>
<th>Evidence from transcripts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sharing of skills</td>
<td>‘they then drafted a report which they sent back to me and it was the kind of thing I would have wanted from our libraries’ (Librarian G)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning from others’ mistakes</td>
<td>‘you could ask around and everybody would tell you what they’d done about it, what had worked, what hadn’t’ (Librarian B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘basically you steal good stuff from everybody else and try and make sure you don’t do the bad stuff’ (Librarian F)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘we’re trying to build on the knowledge and the learning experience from a different project then obviously you want to be able to look at what’s worked and what hasn’t worked’ (Librarian I)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time-saving</td>
<td>‘you could ask around and everybody would tell you what they’d done about it, what had worked, what hadn’t’ (Librarian B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘libraries for example aren’t particularly well geared up to sharing this evidence and I suspect that we’re all guilty of reinventing the wheel across the country’ (Librarian D)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘I’m a firm believer that if someone has done it before you then learn from them, why reinvent the wheel?’ (Librarian G)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Benefits of sharing best practice
4.5 Summary

This chapter dealt with the results from the analysis of the nine interview transcripts under four main sections. It began with a general discussion of NBE (including its perceived pros, cons and general effectiveness as well as motivations in its use) before moving onto the practicalities of its collection and presentation. This was followed by a section on the uses of NBE, concluding with a summary of how best practice in the use of NBE is (or is not) shared. These four sections form the framework for the next chapter: the discussion of the results.
Chapter Five: Discussion

The discussion of the key findings has been organised under four main strands: how the interviewed librarians perceived narrative-based practice (NBP) and narrative-based evidence (NBE); the practicalities of its collection and presentation; the applications of NBE, and the ways in which best practice is (or is not) shared. The sections have been organised in this way so that the findings can be related directly to the research aim and objectives stated in the introduction.

5.1 NBE: A Discussion

5.1.1 Qualitative and quantitative evidence: a combined approach

The research bore out the findings from the literature review: that relevance is key to determining the methodological approach required. The researcher must decide exactly what they are trying to evaluate first, and this should then inform the choice of methodology. If a researcher wants to know how much good a library is doing, then quantitative evidence is the wrong tool to use, since it cannot demonstrate social impact (Usherwood, 2002; McMenemy, 2007 and Walker, Halpin, Rankin and Chapman, 2013). All of the interviewed librarians cited the demonstration of social impact as one of the main reasons they use narrative-based evidence.

The wholehearted consensus from the interviews (backed up by the findings from the literature review) was that a combined methodological approach was the best one to use (Dixon, Pickard and Robson, 2002; Usherwood, 2002; Urquhart, 2004; PriceWaterhouseCoopers LLP, 2005; Markless and Streatfield, 2006 and Hart and Schenk, 2010). This was something all of the librarians referenced, but two different motivations stand out. Librarian C referenced them both, speaking of the impact in not only demonstrating the good which the library can do in addition to the extent of its reach, but in also using NBE to illustrate what a statistic means on an individual level: the ‘humanising’ element. This second motivation was highlighted in the literature review, but the first was not.
The librarians did diverge in the weighting which should be given to the separate methodologies. This was very much dependent on the purpose behind gathering the information. Many of the librarians agreed that quantitative data should form the basis for any evidence-gathering and that NBE should be used only for illustrative purposes, but Librarian I believed that in an initiative such as the Six Book Challenge, where the numbers are low but the potential impact is very high, the weighting should be in favour of qualitative, rather than quantitative. Again, the purpose should determine the approach.

5.1.2 Drawbacks of using NBE

Of the drawbacks to using NBE identified in the literature, five were referenced by the librarians. These are outlined in Table 5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drawbacks of NBE</th>
<th>Referenced in literature review by</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Convincing stakeholders of the value of using NBE (Librarian C)</td>
<td>Urquhart (2004) and Markless and Streatfield (2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBP being viewed as less rigorous than quantitative methods (Librarians A, B and C)</td>
<td>Rooney-Browne (2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A lack of material due to much NBE being unrecorded (Librarians D, E and F)</td>
<td>Matarasso (1998); Markless and Streatfield, (2006) and Poll (2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The issue of bias, where librarians guide users into giving a positive response or choose to focus only on the positive feedback they receive at the expense of the more negative feedback (Librarians A and C)</td>
<td>Dixon, Pickard and Robson (2002); Markless and Streatfield (2006) and Poll (2012)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Drawbacks of NBE referenced in the literature review

The research yielded two related drawbacks which were not reflected in the literature:

...
• Questioning the library’s motive in collecting NBE: many users believed consultations were the first step in justifying closures and service reductions (Librarian A, B and H)

• Generating unhelpful positive feedback: when users are not prepared to give honest feedback about services in case this evidence is used to justify their reduction or removal (Librarians A, B and H).

Far from being seen as something which could be used to help libraries, some librarians reported mistrust from library users in evidence-gathering exercises they had undertaken. Often when feedback was given, it was wholly positive. While this is not a bad thing in itself, it is honest feedback which is needed to improve future services. Promoting the benefits of NBE may be as important as promoting the use of NBE itself.

5.1.3 Benefits of using NBE

Table 6 outlines the benefits of using NBE which were drawn from the research results, and which were evidenced in the literature review.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits of NBE</th>
<th>Referenced in literature review by</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Revealing tacit knowledge, and dealing with complexity of evaluating social impact (Librarian C)</td>
<td>Dixon, Pickard and Robson (2002) and Hart and Schenk (2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact on stakeholders because it represents the point of view of real people, and real voters (Librarians B and I)</td>
<td>Dixon, Pickard and Robson (2002) and Booth and Brice (2004) - putting the individual at the centre of evidence-gathering process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More meaningful than statistics when evaluating social impact (Librarians B and C)</td>
<td>Usherwood (2002); McMenemy (2007) and Walker, Halpin, Rankin and Chapman (2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improves staff morale (Librarian A, B, I)</td>
<td>Markless and Streatfield (2006)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Benefits of NBE referenced in the literature review
The power of using the actual words of library users themselves (and not simply reporting them in the third person) was a theme that came through very strongly in the research (Librarians A, B, F, H and I) but was not highlighted in the literature review. Dixon, Pickard and Robson (2002) and Booth and Brice (2004) refer more generally to the benefit of putting individuals at the centre of the evidence-gathering process, but no commentators specifically mentioned that first-person NBE can be used to demonstrate points of view more effectively, and to reach peer groups who do not currently use the library.

5.1.4 Perceived effectiveness of using NBE

Only Librarians A, C and D referenced the idea that using NBE was more effective if it was part of an ongoing process rather than a one-off event. This idea was a key finding in the literature (Dixon, Pickard and Robson, 2002; Usherwood, 2002; Curtis and Dean, 2004 and Stanziola, 2010), and its lack of being taken up and integrated into ongoing processes of performance measurement could explain the discrepancy between Librarian C claiming NBE was highly effective and Librarian E believing it is not effective at all: although both believed in the potential power of NBE, the difference between these two libraries was in the adoption of a framework and a commitment to seeing the process through.

The research bore out the findings from the literature review, that NBE is only effective if enough of it is collected and then used for a variety of purposes (Librarians A, B, C, D, H and I). The data also reflects the need for a broad evidence base (PriceWaterhouseCoopers LLP, 2005; Brophy, 2009; Poll 2012 and Walker, Halpin, Rankin and Chapman, 2012) which is used for many reasons (Dixon, Pickard and Robson, 2002; Markless and Streatfield, 2006 and Poll, 2012). Library authorities are compiling their own databases of customer comments, but they are for use within that authority alone: there is no evidence of a move towards a central professional evidence base which the literature called for.

Librarians C and H were clear in their opinion that NBE is only effective if it is presented to the right people at the right time, which echoes the findings in the literature that stakeholders must be receptive to hearing NBE evidence (Urquhart,
2004 and Markless and Streatfield, 2006). Librarians must be responsive to the evidence stakeholders wish to see, and they have to be able to judge their audience. This confirms Brophy’s (2009) urge to not only listen to the narratives of others, but to use them when it is appropriate.

5.1.5 Main reasons for using NBE

The research confirms the consensus in the literature, that NBE (and qualitative evidence in general) is the ideal tool to use to demonstrate social impact (Brophy, 2009).

5.1.5.1 Demonstrating social impact

The research did uncover two facets of demonstrating social impact which the literature review did not highlight: the role NBE can have in demonstrating the prevention of acute social need (Librarian D), and the different levels of impact there are, from high to low (Librarians C and D). The high impact stories are rarer, but if more use were made of low-key impact narratives – combined with a quantitative approach to demonstrate the reach of the services which are having this impact – then more librarians would find the NBE approach effective. Again, this is dependent on using the data on an ongoing basis. The difficulty is in establishing the causal relationship between the service the library is providing and on the reported impact it is having on individuals and communities (Matarasso, 1998; Usherwood, 2002; Markless and Streatfield, 2006 and Poll, 2012) – this would be even more difficult to establish when trying to demonstrate prevention of acute social need (in terms of health care, for example) and something future research could look at.

5.1.5.2 Demonstrating the range of services libraries offer

The research data supports the role NBE plays in demonstrating the range of services libraries can offer, and convincing those with outdated perceptions of libraries that they provide more than a book-lending service (Librarians E, H, I).
5.1.5.3 Providing the evidence stakeholders are asking for

Seven librarians (A, C, D, F, G, H and I) observed a trend in more and more stakeholders asking to see qualitative evidence to complement the quantitative data they receive. This suggests that councils no longer value only quantitative evidence, and confirms the opinions of commentators that a combined quantitative and qualitative approach is most effective (Dixon, Pickard and Robson, 2002; Usherwood, 2002; Urquhart, 2004; PriceWaterhouseCoopers LLP, 2005; Markless and Streatfield, 2006 and Hart and Schenk, 2010). The key theme to emerge from this is the idea that NBE can be used to demonstrate social impact, when this is the evidence that is asked for.

While the published research is clear that raising the profile of the library service is a key function of using NBE, this research shows that it can be used to reflect the changes in society, and illustrate how library services are adapting to fulfil this need. It can be used to persuade potential partners of the value of libraries (Librarians A, B, E and I) and again build on the need to change perceptions of the library.

5.1.5.4 Proving library services are meeting the council’s objectives

Commentators agreed that most libraries are not currently proving that library services are meeting the council’s objectives (Curtis and Dean, 2004; PriceWaterhouseCoopers LLP, 2005; Markless and Streatfield, 2006; Brophy, 2008; Rankin, 2010; Stanziola, 2010 and Walker, Halpin, Rankin and Chapman, 2012). However, many of the interviewed librarians referenced it as a priority and something that, using NBE, they were actively working on (Librarians A, B, C, D, F and G). It has even been shown to change thinking: Librarian A spoke of using NBE as prompting a change of thinking in front-line staff running events – they are now starting with the objectives they want to fulfil and then planning their events from that starting point, rather than planning the event first and tagging on objectives at the end. This confirms Markless and Streatfield’s (2006) belief that evaluating impact, instead of trying to measure it, can change the way libraries assess their own performance.
The fact that a third of those interviewed did not mention the importance of aligning objectives with their local council shows that more should be done to raise awareness among library services about the potential of NBE to help in achieving this. In the literature review the alignment of objectives was only raised in reference to councils but there is also a role for NBE to play in showing to potential partners the overlap of their aims, especially since partnership working is a key aim of councils in the current climate.

5.2 NBE: Practicalities of collection and presentation

The research shows that there is no consensus on a framework for collecting NBE amongst practitioners, just as there is no consensus among commentators (Rooney-Browne, 2011). Librarian C recognised the importance of a framework in removing accusations of bias, highlighted as a potential drawback by Dixon, Pickard and Robson (2002); Markless and Streatfield (2006) and Poll (2012).

5.2.1 Collecting NBE

The practicalities of NBE collection were not explored in the literature: this was identified as one of the gaps.

5.2.1.1 Written feedback

The research shows that feedback forms are not well regarded as instruments to capture NBE because of the effort required from staff to give them out and of the user to fill them in. The research uncovered innovative types of data collection such as post-its (Librarian A), which address these problems and counter the drawback of much NBE going unrecorded (Matarasso, 1998; Markless and Streatfield, 2006).

A surprising finding in both the literature review and in the data collected during the research project was the fact that the potential of social media was hardly referenced. Librarian D commented on the potential of Facebook and Twitter to counter the drawback of not recording feedback but with this mode of expression the evidence is instantly captured. Yet despite its potential, the results show this medium is currently being under-used.
5.2.1.2 Verbal feedback

The interviewed librarians made a distinction between first and third person narratives. Such a distinction was not highlighted in the literature review, but has a definite impact in practice, particularly when it comes to public relations and sound bites which can be used in broadcasts. This finding would bear further study: is there more of an impact if the narrative which is used is constructed using the third person or the first person?

5.2.2 Presenting NBE

The research demonstrated very few ways of presenting the NBE which had been collected, and every method relied on the creation of a database of customer feedback. This finding reinforces the importance which commentators have placed on the existence of a wide evidence base (PriceWaterhouseCoopers LLP, 2005; Brophy, 2009; Poll, 2012 and Walker, Halpin, Rankin and Chapman, 2012).

The results of the research showed that the most popular form of NBE presentation took the form of case studies (Librarians B, C, D and F) and reports and talks (Librarians B, C, D, E and H). Librarian A spoke of storyboarding the narratives she collected, and displaying the boards in local branches, as a way of feeding back to library users. These reference the different stakeholders (press; council; partners and library users, respectively), and reinforce the earlier finding that the audience determines the most appropriate evidence.

5.3 NBE: Applications

5.3.1 Service planning

Librarians B, C and G all discussed the use of NBE in service planning, which ties in closely with the priority of library authorities to align their objectives with those of the local council.
5.3.2 Justifying budgets and funding applications

Only Librarian C used NBE to negotiate a reduction in his budget cut and also as evidence to support a successful funding bid (although Librarian F recognised the potential of using NBE in these ways). The key finding was that this NBE had already been collected and was on hand when it was asked for (another point in favour of having a definite framework in place). Protecting against future threats was highlighted as being of key importance by Markless and Streatfield (2006) but only a few librarians raised this as an issue. This is an area which is recommended for librarians to look at and address in the future.

5.3.3 Raising the profile of the library service

Brophy (2007b) outlined several potential uses of NBE, including advocacy, and internal/external communication to councils and (prospective) partners, and raising the profile of the library was highlighted in the research findings as a key theme. There was a distinction made in the current research concerning whether this was done externally or internally. Internally, the raising of a library’s profile was designed to change outdated perceptions and prove the value of libraries in helping their councils to achieve their overall objectives; externally it was to secure funding and attract new users. This distinction did not come through in the literature review, and highlights again the importance of knowing the purpose of a task, so that librarians can use this to inform the type of evidence they use.

5.4 NBE: Sharing best practice

The findings from the literature were clear: if librarians were to make more of sharing best practice then it would serve to allay concerns about the effectiveness of using qualitative (NBE) evidence (Markless and Streatfield, 2006). Yet the results from the current research show this is not being done: two thirds of the respondents reported that either branches within their authority worked in isolation from each other (Librarians A, B and G), or that their authority worked in isolation from neighbouring library authorities (Librarians A, C, D and E). Note the
discrepancy between Librarians C and E, both of whom believe in the potential power of NBE – but while Librarian C had researched different frameworks and shared best practice with other colleagues, Librarian E had done neither, and remained unconvinced that NBE was actually effective.

Only three librarians directly referenced working with neighbouring library authorities (E, G and H); it was the use of professional networks which came through most clearly from discussions of best practice. While this incorporates neighbouring authorities, it also encompasses different regions and different library sectors. Although the literature review referenced professional networks, it did not reference the two-way nature of these: not only in sharing best practice but in seeking it out. This came through strongly in the research results, most clearly with Librarian B, who spoke of doing both. The other librarians who were interviewed either sought best practice or shared their own: they did not do both. Again, this highlights another area which could be improved.

5.4.1 Benefits of working together

The results of the research showed the effect that seeking out and sharing best practice can have on using NBE. It can be used to allay concerns about its effectiveness (Markless and Streatfield, 2006) and it can actually be used to save time in the NBE collection process, in that it can introduce librarians to existing frameworks for NBE collection, analysis and presentation, and can teach others to avoid mistakes.

5.5 Issues not referenced in interviews

Commentators agreed that specialised staff training is needed to collect, analyse and use NBE (Brophy, 2008; Marek, 2011; Poll, 2012 and Walker, Halpin, Rankin and Chapman, 2013), but this was not reflected in the research results. None of the librarians directly referenced a need for training in this area – and training here could be a way of countering the drawbacks of NBE and increasing staff confidence in its use.
5.6 Summary

Many of the findings from the literature review were reinforced by the results of this research, namely that the purpose of the research should determine the methodology used, and that NBE is the ideal tool to demonstrate social impact.

The results fill in some of the gaps identified from the literature review in terms of the practicalities of collecting and using NBE, but they also yield fresh insights. This includes the benefits of sharing and seeking best practice in the use of NBE (including the fact that some of the authorities who took part in the research are not fully engaged in this practice).

Now that the findings of the research have been presented and discussed under four broad headings which relate to the project’s original objectives, the results will be summarised in the next chapter. Recommendations for both the future use of NBE, and for future research into NBE, will also be made.
Chapter Six: Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Relating findings to the research objectives

The results of the research have thrown up valuable findings which shed light on why, and how, narrative-based evidence (NBE) is being used to demonstrate the social impact of public libraries in the UK. Taking each research objective in turn, these are the conclusions of the research project:

6.1.1 Objective 1: To identify public libraries which are currently using narrative-based practice (NBP) as a way of gathering qualitative evidence

This was completed through the response to the initial invite to participants which was made via the LIS-PUB-LIBS email discussion list. This is explained in more detail in Chapter Three.

6.1.2 Objective 2: To investigate why these public library authorities started using NBP

The results show that stakeholders are asking for more qualitative evidence to complement quantitative data. The overwhelming consensus was that NBP was used to demonstrate social impact. There are considerable drawbacks to this approach to evidence gathering, but these were all countered in the research results. It is up to librarians to champion the use of this kind of evidence to stakeholders, and prove that it demonstrates their objectives are in line with the overall objectives of the council. Adopting an established framework for the collection of NBE counters the remaining objections, since this would make the process of data collection, analysis and presentation more rigorous, less time-consuming and less likely to be subject to bias. It also prevents less material going unrecorded. Using NBE has the additional benefit of having a greater impact on stakeholders because it is more easily understood than solely quantitative data, especially when told from a first-person perspective. Additionally, it also has a part to play in raising staff morale.
6.1.3 Objective 3: To investigate how these public library authorities are capturing and using the NBE they gather

All of the library authorities who took part in the research and were using NBE, used it in conjunction with quantitative data. Currently only some of these authorities have a framework in place for the collection, analysis and presentation of NBE, and its use is limited to case studies used for the purposes of advocacy, marketing and public relations, and reports and presentations given to stakeholders. Innovative examples of the presentation of NBE are rarer. There is no consensus on the best type of framework to use to gather NBE: only that there should be some kind of consistent framework in place.

6.1.4 Objective 4: To investigate how effective this kind of evidence is in demonstrating impact to stakeholders

In general, those librarians who did have a framework in place found using NBE to be more effective than those who did not. If a framework was in use then the process of collecting NBE was more rigorous and less sporadic, and organising narratives in a central bank of evidence meant that evidence demonstrating social impact could be produced very soon after stakeholders asked to see it. NBE evidence was found to be most effective when it was gathered in response to an ongoing process of performance evaluation and then provided on demand, instead of being collected and then presented in response to a one-off request for evidence.

6.1.5 Objective 5: To gather examples and good practice of libraries using NBE

The literature review covered various reports which demonstrate the use of NBE in practice. The standout finding from the research was that while sharing and seeking examples of best practice is highly recommended, this is not what is happening in practice. Two thirds of those interviewed reported working in isolation, which means they are not taking advantage of the benefits of sharing best practice, including allaying concerns about the effectiveness of using NBE, learning from others’ mistakes, and saving time by using tried-and-tested frameworks instead of creating a system from scratch.
6.2 Recommendations for using NBE to demonstrate social impact:

- NBE should be used in combination with quantitative data.
- To protect against future cuts to library services, NBE collection should be ongoing, integrated and part of a set framework, so that evidence can be collected in advance of it being asked for by decision-makers.
- As a starting point, library authorities should create a central evidence bank from which narratives can be drawn to demonstrate social impact in different areas, depending on the evidence which is asked for.
- The reach of library services should be demonstrated using a combination of easier to find low-key social impact narratives and quantitative data rather than expending effort to find examples of life-changing narratives.
- Awareness should be raised about the benefits of using NBE, so that library authorities realise it can be used to demonstrate that they are aligning their objectives with those of the local council, and are achieving their outcomes. Realising that NBE can be used to counter future threats to the library service should have the additional benefits of allaying the fears of library users that it will be used to justify service reductions and closures.
- Library authorities should investigate forms of NBE gathering which minimise the effort required on the part of both staff and library users (relying less on traditional methods of data capture such as feedback forms, and more on innovative methods such as social media).
- Librarians should both share and seek out best practice in the use of NBE, looking internally within their own service and externally to other library authorities. Links to professional networks are a key way of doing this.
- Staff should be trained in frameworks used for gathering NBE so that it can be used effectively.
6.3 Recommendations for future research:

- Exploring the role NBE can play in demonstrating libraries’ prevention of acute social need.
- Investigating the difference in impact between using first-person and third-person NBE.

6.4 Concluding remarks

The main research aim was to identify how different public library authorities in the UK are using NBP as a way of gathering qualitative evidence to demonstrate social impact. This research has demonstrated how NBE is being successfully used by some library authorities throughout the UK to demonstrate social impact, and includes recommendations for its future use by other library authorities looking to adopt this approach to telling their libraries’ stories.
References


Clarke, A. (2013). A Library is not just about books: it’s also a place for the vulnerable [blog post, 20 July 2013]. Accessed 22 July 2013 from http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2013/jul/20/libraries-books-place-for-vulnerable


MLA, the Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries. (2002). The People’s Network [CD ROM].


Appendices

Appendix 1 – Research ethics proposal

The University of Sheffield.
Information School

Proposal for Research Ethics Review

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This proposal submitted by:</td>
<td>This proposal is for:</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>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Project Title: An investigation into how public libraries in the UK are using narrative-based practice to demonstrate social impact.

Start Date: 1 March 2013          End Date: 2 September 2013

Principal Investigator (PI): Pamela McLean
(student for supervised UG/PGT/PGR research)

Email: plmclean1@sheffield.ac.uk

Supervisor: Barbara Sen
(if PI is a student)

Email: b.a.sen@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)
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:

There is increasing recognition that quantitative evidence (such as book issues and foot fall) is not enough on its own to demonstrate the impact a public library can have on the community it serves. Some library authorities have started to use success stories, case studies and anecdotes (narrative-based evidence) as a way of demonstrating this impact, but very little research has been carried out concerning the practicalities of this kind of evidence gathering. This project will address this gap in the research by investigating how this evidence is collected and used in public libraries, so that examples of best practice can be shared.

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

Overview of Methods:

Practitioners will be approached by email in order to identify public libraries which are currently using narrative-based practice as a way of gathering qualitative evidence. Public librarians from various library authorities around the UK will then be asked to take part in semi-structured interviews, either in person or by
telephone. They will be asked about why they started using narrative-based
evidence as a form of performance measurement, how they collect it and use it,
and how effective it is in demonstrating a library’s impact on its local community.

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 research will be carried out through a series of semi-structured interviews.

Description – how will you apply the method?
The participants will be contacted by email to arrange a suitable time for interview.
They will then be emailed the questions that will be asked in advance of the
interview itself, as well as a copy of the consent form. Interviews will take place
over the phone/face-to-face and will last approximately 25 minutes.

Interviews will be recorded using a digital device. Participants will be asked at the
outset if they have any questions and if they give their consent to being
interviewed. Once this is given the interview will be conducted, and the participant
thanked for their time at the end.

About your Participants

C2. Who will be potential participants?
The potential participants will be public librarians from library authorities around
the UK.

C3. How will the potential participants be identified and recruited?
Potential participants will be invited to take part in the research by responding to a
posting on the JISC mailing list for public libraries (LIS-PUB-LIBS). Public librarians
who are interested in taking part will then be emailed an information sheet
outlining the project – if they agree to take part, an interview will then be arranged.
C4. What is the potential for physical and/or psychological harm / distress to participants?

The potential for harm or distress is no greater than that experienced in everyday life. The emphasis is on gathering opinions offered by participants, rather than on collecting information about the participants themselves.

C5. Will informed consent be obtained from the participants?

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

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

The interview questions, information sheet and consent form will be emailed to participants before the interview is conducted. Participants will be asked if they have any questions at the outset of their interview and they will then be invited to sign the consent form before the interview begins. In the case of telephone interviews, participants will be asked to complete and return their consent by email.

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. Participants will be informed that they can read the dissertation at the end of the year, when the findings are made publicly available.

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>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant observation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio recording</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video recording</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer logs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaires/Surveys</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other:</td>
<td></td>
<td></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?

Participants will be assigned an arbitrary number, so that the computer files containing the data they provided in their interview can be identified. The key which identifies participants with the number they have been assigned will be saved in a separate file on a password-protected laptop, and will be destroyed once the dissertation is complete.

C9. How/Where will the data be stored?

The digital recording of each interview will be transferred onto a password-protected laptop where it will be transcribed for analysis.

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

The data will only be used for the purposes of the researcher’s masters dissertation. To that end, all of the interview data relating to the project will be destroyed once the dissertation is complete.

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.

The interviews will take place during working hours at the participants’ places of work/via the telephone, providing a safe environment for both the researcher and the participants.

The University of Sheffield.

Information School
Research Ethics Review Declaration

Title of Research Project: An investigation into how public libraries in the UK are using narrative-based practice to demonstrate social impact.

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):**

Pamela McLean

**Name of Principal Investigator (or the Supervisor):**

Barbara Sen

**Date:** 18 June 2013
Appendix 2 – Research ethics: letter of approval

Information School Research Ethics Panel

Letter of Approval

Date: 19th June 2013

TO: Pamela McLean

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

Title: An investigation into how public libraries in the UK are using narrative-based practice to demonstrate social impact.

Submitted by: Pamela McLean

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: 19th June 2013

Dr Angela Lin

Research Ethics Coordinator
Appendix 3 – Information sheet and consent form

| The University of Sheffield. Information School | An investigation into how public libraries in the UK are using narrative-based practice to demonstrate social impact. |

Researchers

Researcher: Pamela McLean (plmclean1@sheffield.ac.uk)
Supervisor: Barbara Sen (b.a.sen@sheffield.ac.uk)

Purpose of the research

The purpose of the research is to identify public library authorities which currently use success stories, case studies and anecdotes as a way of demonstrating the impact a library has on its local community. It aims to identify why and how this evidence is collected and used, and will bring together examples of best practice which can then be shared.

Who will be participating?

Participants will be public librarians from authorities around the UK, which currently use narrative-based evidence as a form of performance assessment.

What will you be asked to do?

I will arrange a suitable time with you to conduct either a telephone interview or a face-to-face interview, which will last approximately 25 minutes. The questions I will ask will be emailed to you in advance of the interview, and you will be given an opportunity to ask any questions you have before the interview begins. I will also ask you to sign a form giving your consent to be interviewed.

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?

The answers you give during the interview will be audio recorded onto a digital device.

What will we do with the data?

The interview recording will be transferred onto a computer where it will then be transcribed for analysis. The analysis will be included in my masters dissertation. When the dissertation is complete, the data will then be destroyed.

Will my participation be confidential?

Participants will be anonymous but may be identified by library authority, so that the results of best practice can be shared (as per the aims of the research project). Participants are able to opt out of being identified by library authority if they include this in the declaration of consent.

What will happen to the results of the research project?

The results of this research will be written up and made publicly available on http://www.shef.ac.uk/is/research/centres/cplis/publications/pgtpublications by the end of 2013.

I confirm that I have read and understood 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 any 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 understand that although I will not be identified personally, I may be identified by the library authority I work for, unless otherwise requested. Please indicate if you do not wish to be identified by the library authority you work for:

I do / do not wish to be identified in the written report by the library authority I work for.

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
PAMELA MCLEAN                         Pamela McLean
____________________________________________________________________________
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.
Appendix 4(a) – Original LIS-PUB-LIBS posting

Does your library make use of narrative evidence (for example, case studies, success stories, user testimonies) to demonstrate its impact on your community? Would you like to contribute to research that aims to bring together examples of this kind of performance assessment?

I’m a Librarianship student based at the University of Sheffield. I’m currently working on my masters dissertation and am looking to interview public librarians who collect qualitative evidence that is narrative-based. I will be interviewing from Mon 1 – Wed 3 July, and from Mon 8 – Fri 19 July. If you would be willing to take part in either a face-to-face interview, or a telephone interview lasting no more than 25 minutes, please email me at plmclean1@sheffield.ac.uk with your preferred day and time.

This study is being supervised by Barbara Sen and has received approval from the Information School Research Ethics Panel at the University of Sheffield. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at plmclean1@sheffield.ac.uk.

Best wishes,

Pamela McLean.
Appendix 4(b) – Amended LIS-PUB-LIBS posting

I’m looking to speak with librarians who use case studies, success stories and user testimonies to demonstrate their libraries’ impact on the local community. Do you make use of this kind of qualitative evidence? Would you like to contribute to research that aims to share best practice in using qualitative data?

I’m a Librarianship student based at the University of Sheffield. I’m currently researching the use of narrative-based evidence as part of my masters dissertation and am looking to interview public librarians who collect qualitative evidence: this includes – but is not limited to – case studies, success stories and user testimonies. I will be interviewing from now until Friday 19 July. If you would be willing to take part in either a face-to-face interview, or a telephone interview lasting no more than 25 minutes, please email me at plmclean1@sheffield.ac.uk with your preferred day and time.

This study is being supervised by Barbara Sen and has received approval from the Information School Research Ethics Panel at the University of Sheffield. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Best wishes,

Pamela McLean.
Appendix 5 – Interview guide

1. Briefly, can you tell me a bit about yourself, and your background in libraries?
2. I’m interested in library authorities which use evidence such as success stories and case studies to demonstrate the impact they have on their local communities. You’ve indicated that you collect and make use of this kind of evidence. Can I ask you to give me some examples?
3. Why did you start to collect this kind of evidence?
4. Did you look to any other library authorities for ideas?
5. What did you hope to achieve by collecting this evidence?
6. How did you go about collecting this evidence?
7. Did you encounter any problems?
8. In your opinion, what went particularly well?
9. Can you tell me which stakeholders you showed it to, and why?
10. How did you present the evidence you gathered?
11. How else have you used the evidence you collected?
12. What have you found to be the main benefits of gathering this type of qualitative evidence?
13. And what drawbacks have there been?
14. In your opinion, how effective is the use of qualitative evidence?
15. In general, how do you feel qualitative evidence compares with quantitative evidence?
Appendix 6 – Final codebook (extract covering codes used for Librarian A’s interview)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non library background</td>
<td>Previous experience of working in a non-library sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shop floor to top floor</td>
<td>Started as a library assistant and promoted to management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget</td>
<td>In charge of budget for events and activities; tied into performance measurement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading and health</td>
<td>Initiatives designed to improve health and wellbeing through reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-tasking role</td>
<td>Library management role which involves many disparate tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reader development</td>
<td>Initiatives designed to encourage wider reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding</td>
<td>Money to allow projects &amp; services to go ahead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Front-line support</td>
<td>Management providing support for front-line staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extent of qualitative evidence</td>
<td>How much/in what areas the library service makes use of this data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management comments</td>
<td>Input from library management prior to events/activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence</td>
<td>Qualitative data gathered to prove outcomes are achieved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achieving outcomes</td>
<td>Fulfilling objectives set prior to an activity/event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photos</td>
<td>Example of type of qualitative evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User comments</td>
<td>Example of type of qualitative evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proving outcomes have been achieved</td>
<td>Setting objectives before an event/activity and proving how they have been met</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty in using qualitative evidence</td>
<td>Voicing doubts concerning using qualitative evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proving value</td>
<td>Using qualitative evidence as a way of proving value of libraries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exceeds expectations</td>
<td>People being surprised at the range of services the library can offer – “more than just books”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Libraries Day</td>
<td>UK-wide campaign to raise awareness of work libraries do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generic Social Outcomes</td>
<td>MLA indicators to assess the social impact of libraries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generic Learning Outcomes</td>
<td>MLA indicators to assess the impact of libraries on learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in approach</td>
<td>Change in how the library service gathered qualitative data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council objectives</td>
<td>Priorities the local council has set which the library service must prove they are meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universal Library Offer objectives</td>
<td>Priorities Arts Council England have set which local library services in England must show they are meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Project approval (priorities)</strong></td>
<td>Projects within the library services which get money from the budget because they meet specific objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>England</strong></td>
<td>Initiatives and projects related solely to England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scotland</strong></td>
<td>Initiatives and projects related solely to Scotland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wales</strong></td>
<td>Initiatives and projects related solely to Wales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Digital</strong></td>
<td>One of the priorities outlined for public libraries by Arts Council England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CILIP</strong></td>
<td>Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SCL</strong></td>
<td>Society of Chief Librarians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reading Agency</strong></td>
<td>National agency set up to promote reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Library closures</strong></td>
<td>Threat of closure because of funding withdrawal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Save our libraries – negative</strong></td>
<td>Campaign against library closures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supported not saved</strong></td>
<td>Campaign should be about supporting libraries, not saving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reason</strong></td>
<td>Reason for collecting qualitative evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Using the evidence</strong></td>
<td>Ways in which library services use the evidence they gather</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stakeholders</strong></td>
<td>Individuals, communities &amp; organisations with a stake in public libraries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Advocacy</strong></td>
<td>Evidence used to advocate on behalf of public libraries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public relations</strong></td>
<td>Qualitative evidence used with the press</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>No help from other LAs</strong></td>
<td>Didn’t look to other library authorities for ideas or advice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Post-it notes</strong></td>
<td>Qualitative data collection method</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Black History Month</strong></td>
<td>Month in which libraries actively promote events, activities and writing by or about black authors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Verbal</strong></td>
<td>Verbal feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Written</strong></td>
<td>Written feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Impact</strong></td>
<td>The perceived impact of using qualitative evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Summer Reading Challenge</strong></td>
<td>Reading Agency initiative designed to prevent the drop in reading ability over the school summer holidays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Feedback forms</strong></td>
<td>Evaluation forms given out at the end of events to assess its success; qualitative data collection method</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Problem</strong></td>
<td>Perceived problems in gathering qualitative data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relying on usual suspects</strong></td>
<td>Only asking members of the public who are sympathetic/regular users of the service for feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Easy</strong></td>
<td>Assessment of ease of collecting qualitative data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Variety of responses</strong></td>
<td>A varied range of feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unhelpful positive feedback</strong></td>
<td>When the library service is looking for constructive criticism to improve the service and doesn’t get it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constructive feedback</strong></td>
<td>Comments the library service can use to inform and improve future events, activities and services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bias in data collection / analysis / presentation</strong></td>
<td>When the person asking the questions guides a particular response / only selects what they want</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Publicity</strong></td>
<td>Using qualitative evidence for advertising purposes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social media</strong></td>
<td>Using qualitative evidence on social media, eg Facebook, Twitter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Website</strong></td>
<td>Using qualitative evidence on library’s own website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Library users kept informed</strong></td>
<td>Feedback shown to many library users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>One piece many uses</strong></td>
<td>Using the same piece of evidence in different ways, or showing it to different audiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Councillors</strong></td>
<td>Members of the locally elected council; stakeholder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Practitioners</strong></td>
<td>Public librarians; stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Partnerships</strong></td>
<td>Libraries working in partnership with other organisations to achieve particular objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Combination of evidence</strong></td>
<td>Whether that’s different types or simply different pieces of evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Internal communication</strong></td>
<td>Eg staff bulletins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Working in isolation</strong></td>
<td>Branches/authorities which do good work but don’t share this within the service, locally or nationally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Benefits</strong></td>
<td>The perceived benefits of using qualitative evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Confidence</strong></td>
<td>Library staff speaking out about the benefits of the library service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recent change</strong></td>
<td>In the way qualitative evidence is used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Easy service to cut</strong></td>
<td>Perception by councillors that libraries are a service they can make cuts to with the least resistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aligning objectives</strong></td>
<td>When libraries align their objectives to that of the council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ongoing process</strong></td>
<td>Using qualitative evidence has to be ongoing, not one-off</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive POV of qual evid</strong></td>
<td>Public librarian’s enthusiasm for using qualitative evidence comes across</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Morale booster / motivator</strong></td>
<td>Making staff aware of user feedback acts as a boost to morale (whether this is intentional or not)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Change in thinking</strong></td>
<td>Using qualitative evidence resulting in a change of thinking/operation within the service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attract new users</strong></td>
<td>Using qualitative evidence to attract new users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social impact</strong></td>
<td>The effect (good or bad) the library service has on its local community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Drawbacks</strong></td>
<td>The perceived drawbacks of using certain types of feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quantitative</strong></td>
<td>Statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outcomes</strong></td>
<td>Deciding what the purpose of an event/initiative is before it is run, and stating what you want to achieve by doing it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>QQ Comparison</strong></td>
<td>Respondents comparing the use of quantitative data with the use of qualitative data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fit for purpose</strong></td>
<td>Using the right kind of evidence for a particular purpose</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Access to Dissertation

A Dissertation submitted to the University may be held by the Department (or School) within which the Dissertation was undertaken and made available for borrowing or consultation in accordance with University Regulations.

Requests for the loan of dissertations may be received from libraries in the UK and overseas. The Department may also receive requests from other organisations, as well as individuals. The conservation of the original dissertation is better assured if the Department and/or Library can fulfill such requests by sending a copy. The Department may also make your dissertation available via its web pages.

In certain cases where confidentiality of information is concerned, if either the author or the supervisor so requests, the Department will withhold the dissertation from loan or consultation for the period specified below. Where no such restriction is in force, the Department may also deposit the Dissertation in the University of Sheffield Library.

To be completed by the Author – Select (a) or (b) by placing a tick in the appropriate box

If you are willing to give permission for the Information School to make your dissertation available in these ways, please complete the following:

X (a) Subject to the General Regulation on Intellectual Property, I, the author, agree to this dissertation being made immediately available through the Department and/or University Library for consultation, and for the Department and/or Library to reproduce this dissertation in whole or part in order to supply single copies for the purpose of research or private study

(b) Subject to the General Regulation on Intellectual Property, I, the author, request that this dissertation be withheld from loan, consultation or reproduction for a period of [ ] years from the date of its submission. Subsequent to this period, I agree to this dissertation being made available through the Department and/or
University Library for consultation, and for the Department and/or Library to reproduce this dissertation in whole or part in order to supply single copies for the purpose of research or private study.

Name: Pamela McLean

Department: Information School

Signed: [Signature]

Date: 1 September 2013

To be completed by the Supervisor – Select (a) or (b) by placing a tick in the appropriate box.

(a) I, the supervisor, agree to this dissertation being made immediately available through the Department and/or University Library for loan or consultation, subject to any special restrictions (*) agreed with external organisations as part of a collaborative project.

*Special restrictions

(b) I, the supervisor, request that this dissertation be withheld from loan, consultation or reproduction for a period of [ ] years from the date of its submission. Subsequent to this period, I, agree to this dissertation being made available through the Department and/or University Library for loan or consultation, subject to any special restrictions (*) agreed with external organisations as part of a collaborative project.

Name

Department

Signed

Date

THIS SHEET MUST BE SUBMITTED WITH DISSERTATIONS IN ACCORDANCE WITH DEPARTMENTAL REQUIREMENTS.