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Schools Library Services from Survival to Growth?

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CONTENTS

<u>PART A: THE PROJECT</u>	1
1. The context for this work	1
2. Project aim and objectives	2
3. The Project approach	2
4. The Project programme	2
4.1 Case studies in Schools Library Services	2
4.2 National questionnaire survey	3
4.3 Preliminary review of the issues	3
4.4 Dissemination phase	3
<u>PART B: THE NATIONAL QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY</u>	5
1 Introduction to the project and the survey	5
<u>MANAGEMENT AND FINANCE ISSUES</u>	6
2 Fitting SLSs into the management picture	6
3 Funding and budget issues	6
3.1 Delegated versus devolved funding	6
3.2 Budget Setting and Fair Funding	8
4 Strategic presence of the SLS	8
4.1 National, regional or local initiatives	8
4.2 Collaboration	8
4.3 Inclusion in the Education Development Plan	9
<u>STAFFING AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT</u>	9
5 Staff change and adaptation	9
<u>PROVISION OF SERVICES</u>	10
6 Priorities and changes in provision	10
7 Target groups for Services	13
<u>OPERATING IN A 'COMMERCIAL' ENVIRONMENT</u>	14
8 'Trading' beyond local boundaries	14
9 Marketing of Services	14
<u>MEASURING PERFORMANCE AND IMPACT</u>	15
10 Monitoring and evaluation	15
<u>SUCCESS FACTORS</u>	16
11 Keys to success	16
12 Conclusion	17
<u>PART C: TOWARDS SURVIVAL and GROWTH: SOME ISSUES</u>	19
1 Budget Setting and Fair Funding	19
1.1 Sorting out Fair Funding	19
1.2 Maintaining inequality	21
1.3 Pricing the services	21
1.4 Reviewing budgets	22
1.5 Consultation groups	22
2 Education versus Libraries	23
3 Strategic presence of the SLS	24
3.1 Strategic means:	24
3.2 Other strategic factors	25
3.3 Operational versus strategic	26
4 Collaboration/National initiatives	26
4.1 The opportunities	26
4.2 National literacy and reading strategies	27
4.3 Deciding when to get involved	27
4.4 Making collaboration work	28

5 Professional development for a changing world?	29
5.1 Key skills, knowledge and expertise	30
5.1.1 Stability and change	30
5.1.2 Business skills and commercial awareness	30
5.1.3 Information and Communications Technologies	31
5.1.4 Education	31
5.1.5 Managing Information	31
5.1.6 Interpersonal Skills	32
5.2 Issues and Dilemmas	32
5.2.1 Preparing for what future?	32
5.2.2 Librarians or entrepreneurs?	32
5.2.3 Investing in the future	33
5.3 Professional development: some options	33
5.3.1 Redefining structures and roles	33
5.3.2 Developing staff	34
6 Operating in the 'market place'	34
6.1 Oh, brave new world	35
6.2 Thinking strategically	37
6.3 Needs identification	38
7 Assessing impact	38
7.1 Efficiency versus effectiveness	38
7.1.1 Addressing impact	39
7.1.2 Core indicators	39
7.1.3 Tiered indicators	39
7.1.4 Recording qualitative information	40
7.1.5 Benchmarking and standards	40
7.1.6 Other points	40
7.2 An OFSTED LEA view	41
7.2.1 Broadening the scope of reading materials used by pupils through:	41
7.2.2 Impact on literacy	41
7.2.3 Contribution to the work of school libraries	41
7.2.4 Value for money	41
7.2.5 Working to clear and comprehensible standards	42
7.2.6 Strong collaborative and co-operative working	42
7.2.7 Flexible and responsive provision	42
7.2.8 Parity of provision	42
7.2.9 Support for curriculum development	42
7.2.10 Meeting specific pupil needs	42
7.3 Methods used to gather performance information	42
7.3.1 What provides the best quality information?	42
8 Success factors	44
Appendix A: Case study interviews: schedule	47
Appendix B: Seminar participants	49
Appendix C: Workshop participants and programme	50
Appendix D: Budget Setting and Fair Funding: a checklist	51
Appendix E: Menu of services: edited example	52
Appendix F: Examples of Performance indicators	54

ABSTRACT

The **aim** of the project was to assess the key factors leading to the recent survival and growth of Services, especially fully delegated ones, and the extent to which these and other factors are likely to apply in future.

The specific project **objectives** were to:

- establish the policies and practices adopted by SLS managers and others over the past five years to ensure the survival and growth of Services, especially where these are fully delegated
- examine how and to what extent Services contribute to meeting Government education and libraries priorities
- gather views from key players (school managers, governors, elected members, local authority officers, representative parents) on critical success factors and strategies for the continued survival and growth of Services in the next five years
- share the project findings with SLS managers, policy makers and the wider library management community in the UK.

The work was carried out through case study visits to 15 Schools' Library Services, supplemented by three management reviews contributed by project team members; a national questionnaire survey across England and Wales (which achieved a 90% response rate); an invitation seminar to review the emerging findings; and a plethora of dissemination activities, including a national workshop, two research seminars at the Ascel conference and various journal articles for the library press. The research report reflected this concern with active dissemination – part B (reporting the findings of the national questionnaire survey) and part C (some issues from the case studies and seminar) are both written as journal articles.

The survey which was conducted in the early Summer of 1999, found that, overall SLSs are proving remarkably resilient and most are showing realism about what is required to keep on succeeding although some had not recognised the likely impact of the Fair Funding financial regime introduced in April 2000.

Success was seen as likely to depend on active marketing and willingness to adapt to significant changes in demand.

A range of issues was pulled out from the case studies and related work. These covered budget setting and Fair Funding, strategic positioning of the SLS, partnerships and national initiatives, professional development, operating in a commercial environment, assessing the impact of services (identified as a weak area in the survey), and various success factors as viewed by SLS managers and other concerned managers (heads, directors of education, library service managers) and advisers.

Note on terms used in this report

In order to avoid frequent repetition of 'Schools Library Services' or the clumsy acronym 'SLSs':

- *we have used the words 'Service' and 'Services' (capitalised) to stand for Schools Library Service(s).*
- *'service' (lower case) refers to any form of specific SLS provision, or to other Directorates of the local authority (e.g. the Education service).*

PART A: THE PROJECT

1. The context for this work

The current year will be a potentially turbulent time for many Schools Library Services (from here on referred to as 'Services'), with Fair Funding legislation about to change the funding basis of many LEAs and schools. Until now, local authorities have been able to choose whether and to what extent to delegate their SLSs; even so, several Services have been forced to close down in recent years following delegation of funds to schools. By April 2000, funds for all Services to secondary schools will be delegated and funds for Services to primary schools will be devolved and earmarked. One of our concerns in proposing the work was that, in some smaller authorities, it would only require a small proportion of large secondary schools to reallocate funds for the SLS to become non-viable (however highly the other schools might regard them). In contrast, some authorities may choose to move back from primary school delegation and instead to devolve and earmark the primary budget.

This project set out to examine the key factors which have helped Services to survive and develop through the recent difficult times and which are likely to do so in future. Our intention was that this study would be of specific value to SLS managers and this stance was endorsed by the ASCEL Committee who supported the project. We also hope that library managers in other settings will find the study useful. To this end, specific issues of general interest have been pulled out in a briefing paper.

In describing our programme of work it is important to recognise that Services vary in the services that they provide in response to differing local needs and other factors. Some Services concentrate on services to secondary schools, others concentrate on primary provision and others again spread their coverage more evenly. The range of services also varies, with differences amongst Services in whether they offer (*inter alia*) central purchasing schemes, fiction loans, mobile library services to schools, in-service training of teachers or school librarians, electronic networking, and various kinds of consultancy and advice services to schools.

Since the future funding of Services is now a matter of strategic Government consideration we focused very specifically on their contribution to meeting Government priorities. (These priorities included the *National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies* in England, the *School Improvement Programme* in Northern Ireland and their equivalents in Scotland and Wales; the *National Grid for Learning*; as well as other emerging programmes such as *Social Inclusion*, and target setting in relation to *School Improvement* by schools and Local Education Authorities.) Looking at these issues brought us face to face with a core question – how can Services judge whether they are having real impact in these areas? The whole issue of impact and achievement evaluation loomed large in the project and has since led on to further work¹.

The relationship of SLSs to public library services are also directly relevant, not least because of the national strategy outlined in the *New Library: the people's network* and the provision of ICT training of public and school librarians through the *New Opportunities Fund*. Accordingly, the project looked specifically at these relationships both in the context of SLS survival/growth and that of implementing Government strategies.

Since the work was intended to help Services reposition themselves in order to market their services effectively to schools, we ensured that the results could be shared through an

¹ INFORMATION MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATES, with DAVID HAYNES ASSOCIATES, LONDON BOROUGH OF HAMMERSMITH AND FULHAM LIBRARY SERVICES and WILTSHIRE AND SWINDON LEARNING RESOURCES *Best Value and Better Performance in Libraries* funded by the Library and Information Commission (1999-2000).

Autumn 1999 workshop and through a (double) presentation at the Ascel Conference so that the findings could be taken up and used by Service managers.

2. Project aim and objectives

The **aim** of the project was to assess the key factors leading to the recent survival and growth of Services especially fully delegated ones, and the extent to which these and other factors are likely to apply in future.

The specific project **objectives** were to:

- ◆ establish the policies and practices adopted by SLS managers and others over the past five years to ensure the survival and growth of Services, especially where these are fully delegated
- ◆ examine how and to what extent Services contribute to meeting Government education and libraries priorities
- ◆ gather views from key players (school managers, governors, elected members, local authority officers, representative parents) on critical success factors and strategies for the continued survival and growth of Services in the next five years
- ◆ share the project findings with SLS managers, policy makers and the wider library management community in the UK.

3. The Project approach

In carrying out this project we applied our usual precept that research should be of potential use to practitioners. It should, however, be stressed that although we strongly believe that research should address issues of direct interest to practitioners, we recognise that it is vital to maintain our research integrity in carrying out the research and in presenting the research findings.

A collaborative approach to the research issues was secured through the support of the Association of Senior Schools' and Education Librarians, which includes many SLS managers. ASCEL nominated a team of three practising SLS managers to work with the project consultants and supported the formative seminar at which the emerging findings were explored.

The main thrust of the project was to identify issues through interviews with Service managers, representatives of client schools and appropriate local authority managers. The views on issues in managing Services gleaned in these ways were then tested through a national questionnaire survey of Service managers. This approach is based on the premise that all research methods have inherent weaknesses that can be ameliorated by adopting more than one approach (the process referred to as 'triangulation' in the social science research literature).

4. The Project programme

The project consisted of four main phases:

4.1 Case studies in Schools Library Services

The three 'project SLS managers' documented their own experience of managing services and the approaches adopted to ensure the survival and for development of their services. These management reviews covered Hampshire, Islington and Somerset.

A series of visits was made to a total of 15 Services in different parts of England and Wales to look at the provision and to conduct structured interviews with staff, governors, elected

members, local authority officers and representative parents. The three 'project SLS managers' were involved in several of these visits, thus capitalizing on their practical expertise to complement the general expertise of the consultants. The Services visited were:

- Barnet
- Gloucestershire
- Lancashire
- Newham
- N E Wales Consortium (4 Counties)
- Nottinghamshire
- Sheffield
- West Yorkshire (5 Metropolitan authorities)

Copies of the interview schedules used in the case studies are shown in appendix A.

4.2 National questionnaire survey

A questionnaire survey was conducted across all public library authorities in England and Wales to establish which authorities were offering SLSs or buying into Services elsewhere. The questionnaires were addressed to the Service manager (if any). Questions covered the management links into the local authority, whether services had been delegated or devolved, staff issues including levels, roles and training, the services offered and to whom, collaboration and integration with other agencies, marketing of services, quality control and evaluation of provision, and future development priorities.

4.3 Preliminary review of the issues

An invitation seminar on *Schools Library Services: Survival and Growth?* was held in London on 15th July 1999. This seminar focussed on some key issues in managing Services (the strategic presence of the Service, the LEA agenda, monitoring and evaluation, keys to success and the main report messages). Those attending included representatives of professional bodies (the Library Association, Schools Library Association, Ascel and the LIC), relevant educational organisations (an LEA, the Education Management Information Exchange service for LEA education officers, advisers and inspectors, based at NFER, and HMI/Ofsted), an education consultant specialising in school improvement, various senior library managers and heads of Services, and all five members of the project team.

We deliberately invited people with different professional perspectives on education and library service provision and encouraged them to respond to the issues raised, contribute their own ideas and help to ensure that the right messages would be picked up by education and library policy makers as well as Service managers. The overall aim was to enable participants to consider the issues raised by the research before they were 'fixed' in the project final report.

A list of participants is shown in appendix C.

4.4 Dissemination phase

- ◆ A workshop entitled *School Library Services: from survival to growth?* was held in London on 23rd September 1999, in association with Ascel and attracted 40 participants. The overall aim was to encourage uptake of the project findings. The specific objectives were to consider the key findings emerging from the project, identify some important issues relevant to their work, and explore the main implications of these issues. The programme consisted of a mix of presentations on the project findings and a pair of parallel workshops, led by members of the team, covering budget betting and 'Fair Funding', exploiting national initiatives, marketing and professional development. The workshop programme and a list of participants are shown in appendix B.

- ◆ Two seminar sessions on the project findings were held at the Ascel Annual Conference in October 1999 and attracted around 45 participants in all.
- ◆ Briefing papers have been prepared for SLS managers (see part C below), for Public Library managers and for other local authority policy makers featuring key issues of concern for SLS survival and growth. The first of these will be published in *School Libraries in View*, the second will be offered to the *Library Association Record* and the third to a local government journal.
- ◆ The remainder of this report has been prepared in modular form to include a report on the results of the questionnaire survey (again prepared in the form of a journal article that will be offered to *Information Research* and to the *Education Libraries Journal* – see part B below) and all three briefing papers. This version of the report is also presented here as a separate publication for SLS managers and others.
- ◆ The conclusions drawn from this work are subsumed into the issues presented in part C below.

PART B: THE NATIONAL QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY

Schools Library Services: from survival to growth? David Streatfield and Sharon Markless

Contribution prepared for *Information Research* and (in edited form) for the *Public Libraries Journal*

1 Introduction to the project and the survey

This project set out to examine the future of the Schools Library Services (referred to from here on as 'Services') offered by most local authorities through their Education or Libraries departments. The aim of the project was to assess the key factors leading to the recent survival and growth of SLSs, especially fully delegated Services, and the extent to which these and other factors are likely to apply in future. This work was funded by the Library and Information Commission and was supported by the Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians (ASCEL).

The specific project **objectives** were to:

- establish the policies and practices adopted by SLS managers ... to ensure the survival and growth of Services, especially where these are fully delegated
- examine how and to what extent Services contribute to meeting Government education and libraries priorities
- gather views from key players ... on critical success factors and strategies for the continued survival and growth of Services ...
- share the project findings with SLS managers, policy makers and the wider library management community in the UK.

The core of this project consisted of a series of case studies in a total of 15 Services in different parts of England and Wales, combined with a questionnaire survey of all 169 Library authorities in those countries. This report concentrates on the results of the questionnaire survey, which was the most exhaustive and best-supported study of its kind. A total of 154 replies was received, giving an outstandingly good overall response rate of 91%. 24 replies identified Public Library authorities with no SLS² and we also heard from 30 Services involved in joint arrangements with neighbouring authorities (including the lead authorities). The project team members based in two authorities responded at length in the form of management reports on their Services and four of the case study authorities were treated in a similar way.

The responses below are based on the 99 replies to the full questionnaire, including two that were only providing limited loans and advice. The replies came from all types of authority:

County	28
Metropolitan	26
London Borough	21
Unitary	14
Welsh Unitary	10

² The 24 authorities with no SLS were Barnsley, Bath and North Somerset, Bexley, Bournemouth, Brent, Bridgend, Brighton and Hove, Bromley (advice INSET etc. via public libraries), Hackney, Lambeth, Lewisham, Liverpool, City of London, Manchester, Newcastle upon Tyne, Oxfordshire, Peterborough City (Schools buy into Cambridgeshire - high level take up), Rochdale, South Gloucestershire (formerly Avon), Stoke on Trent, Vale of Glamorgan, Waltham Forest (project loans through Education), Wokingham, York City (not including authorities without a separate service but in joint arrangements).

MANAGEMENT AND FINANCE ISSUES

2 Fitting SLSs into the management picture

Despite changes to many aspects of their provision over time, most of the respondents (71 or 72%) had kept the name 'Schools (or School) Library Service' to describe their operations. 'Education Library Service' was preferred by 5 organisations and others offered variations on 'Learning Resources', 'Education Resources' or 'Resources for Learning', with 'Books+' providing an interesting variant and 'Project Loans Service' signalling more limited provision.

Most Services were managed by the Libraries Department (75 or 77%), with 14 falling within the ambit of the Education Department and 5 operating as Independent Business Units. There has been some debate about the relative merits of being based within Education or Libraries/Leisure services. According to our case study and workshop informants³, a place in Education provided a strong local authority focus (although changes in LEAs have weakened the links to schools) and makes keeping up with education initiatives easier. It could also provide easier (but not automatic) inclusion in the Education Development Plan, but might lead to being left out of national initiatives, since Services are inevitably a small constituent of the LEA.

On the other hand, being linked to Public Libraries was seen as offering the potential for stronger ICT support and sometimes hidden subsidies (less likely with the arrival of Fair Funding). This positioning also offers scope for 'joined up thinking' about lifelong learning and a stronger base for involvement in national initiatives – important now that public libraries are apparently 'fashionable'. It also offers automatic inclusion in the DCMS Annual Library Plan and, potentially, a strategic 'champion' at local authority senior management level. The downside may include less involvement in educational strategies over literacy and numeracy and remoteness from 'price setting' of provision to schools.

In the end, however, "It doesn't matter if you are in Libraries or Education. What matters is that you have proactive people with good collaboration and communication skills."

The SLS Manager usually reported directly to the Head of Library Services (36 or 37%), to another Senior Library Services Manager below the level of Head of Service (28 or 29%) or to another Head of Service (24 or 25%, including 4 people reporting to the Education Director). 4 people reported to an Education Adviser or Inspector, 2 to an Assistant Education Director and 2 to a management group, with 1 person noting that a line manager had not been assigned for several months prior to the survey. 12 people reported that their line manager had changed within the previous three years (5 of these changes involved a Library Services Manager other than a Head of Service; in other words, it appeared to be relatively easy to reassign responsibility 'within the family').

3 Funding and budget issues

3.1 Delegated versus devolved funding

Since Fair Funding will lead to delegated or devolved Services in England (there is no equivalent prescription in Wales), we were interested to see the extent to which this was already happening. Predictably, the extent of 'decentralization' of funds and the preferred form of reallocation varied amongst respondents and between school types:

³ An invitation project seminar on was held in London on 15th July 1999 and a project workshop was held, again in London on 23rd September 1999, in association with Ascel.

Table 1.1: Delegated, devolved or centrally-funded Services

	Delegated	Partially delegated	Devolved	Centrally funded	Totals
Primary	24	18	5	42	89
Secondary	36	16	3	27	82
Special	24	18	5	44	91

The 'preferred' form of funding varied significantly between the different types of authority, with Counties and London boroughs tending towards full or partial delegation, Unitary authorities balancing between partial delegation and central funding and Metropolitan boroughs still predominantly centralised. Any suggestion that the Metropolitan boroughs were likely to find the adjustment to Fair Funding difficult was largely confirmed at the seminar on the theme mounted jointly by Cambridgeshire and Leicestershire SLSs in June 1999. The apparent lack of preparedness by some Services for the imminent change was sufficiently disturbing for Ascel to conduct a small survey on *SLS Budgets and Fair Funding*⁴ (at the suggestion of the Project Head) in order to produce guidance for members. We also ensured that one of the parallel sessions at our Autumn 1999 workshop was devoted to this theme. The variations between types of authority are shown below:

Table 1.2: Delegated, devolved or centrally-funded Services: variations amongst types of authority

Counties

	Delegated	Partially Delegated	Devolved	Central
Primary	7	7	3	9
Secondary	17	6	1	2
Special	8	7	3	10

Metropolitan

	Delegated	Partially Delegated	Devolved	Central
Primary	4	2	0	16
Secondary	4	3	0	15
Special	3	2	0	16

London

Primary	9	4	2	5
Secondary	11	2	0	2
Special	9	4	2	6

Unitaries

Primary	1	5	0	7
Secondary	1	5	1	5
Special	1	5	0	7

Wales

Primary	3	0	0	5
Secondary	3	0	1	3
Special	3	0	0	5

⁴ DUBBER, E. 'SLS Budgets and Fair Funding' Ascel September 1999

How successful were Services in recovering wholly or partially delegated funds through subscription and other buy-back arrangements? Responses varied widely, with an average recovery of just over 80% for the 37 SLSs (out of 52) who gave the figure for the previous year.

3.2 Budget Setting and Fair Funding

At the time of the survey, many Services were struggling with questions about the Fair Funding regime to be introduced in April 2000. For many, the main issues were about setting an appropriate budget and, in particular, how to influence the allocation formula. Discussion in the case studies and in the project workshop made it clear that Services needed to:

- establish how the SLS budget was set and by whom (most case study SLS managers were only peripherally involved in these processes)
- explore what flexibility they had in splitting the budget between phases, in establishing the buy back rate or in influencing these processes, and in holding back amounts for specified purposes
- resolve whether to offer a core or menu service and establish whether this should be over a one or three year period
- review what the SLS package should contain
- ensure that the consultation with schools is carefully conducted.

4 Strategic presence of the SLS

4.1 National, regional or local initiatives

Looking outwards from the immediate service demands, we wanted to know if people were actively involved in any national, regional or local initiatives or special projects over and above their normal work. A range of local initiatives (from homework clubs to local implementation of the National Literacy Strategy and from lifelong learning steering groups to local competitions - 33 replies or 34%) took pride of place and the other main preoccupation was with the National Year of Reading (27 responses) which was reaching its peak at the time of our survey; in addition 14 Services were involved in the Bookstart campaign and 6 with the Reading Safari. Other regularly mentioned initiatives included ICT training of school librarians (9) and Summer literacy schools (8), as well as the Carnegie Medal and Kate Greenaway Award, and inter-authority training (7 each). Some Services were active in a range of activities (up to 10 reported by one SLS in a total of over two hundred) but it was noticeable that 40 of those replying (41%) were involved in none or very few of these 'additional activities'.

By and large, these sorts of involvement did not attract additional funding for the Services concerned. Exceptions included 23 initiatives with local authority funding, 11 projects with private company sponsorship or funding (mostly linked to reading promotion), 2 successful National Lottery bids, 2 Regional Arts Council grants and individual initiatives that resulted in EC, Welsh Office, EAZ, GEST, Health authority or Challenge funding.

4.2 Collaboration

When we asked about any good quality collaboration locally within or beyond the authority, a slight majority of respondents ducked this question. Taken with the earlier replies from much the same people that they were not involved in 'additional' local, regional or national activities, this suggests that the pressures of maintaining a Service locally might be precluding the development of strategic relationships. Those who replied again emphasised a plethora of local initiatives (24 replies), inter-authority initiatives (15) and regional/local libraries schemes (13). The National Year of Reading featured strongly, along with other literacy and reading development activities (13 all together).

4.3 Inclusion in the Education Development Plan

We asked whether the Service featured in the Education Development Plan of the authority and, if so, where it featured. 44 SLSs did not appear in the Plan or did not know if they had been included (although many Services will be included in the Annual Library Plan instead, or in addition). As to where the SLS featured, the replies to this question can be summarised as:

Table 2: Where the SLS featured in the Education Development Plan (n = 98)

	no.	%
National Literacy Strategy/ Raising literacy standards	26	27
Part of Education Strategy	11	11
Supporting independent learning	3	3
Improving school libraries/school improvement	3	3
Included but not specifically	2	2
Sharing good practice	2	2
As part of Cultural Services	1	1
ICT (National Grid for Learning)	1	1
Education for Under Fives	1	1
Yes (unspecified where)	6	6
Hardly at all	5	5
No mention/don't know	44	45

A few respondents reported several areas of inclusion, up to 24 in one case.

STAFFING AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT

5 Staff change and adaptation

The total SLS staffing reported amounted to 804 people (617.9 full time equivalents). These included 91 Heads of Service (74.4 ftes), 238 other professional librarians (191.1 ftes), 21 other professional staff (10.9 ftes) and 454 other staff (341.5 ftes). Unsurprisingly, county authorities employed more staff (424) than did all other Services combined.

Had pressures on the Service led to reductions in staffing? We asked whether their had been any significant changes in the staffing levels over the past three years. Over half of the respondents were in 'steady state' for that period (43 or 44%) or had managed some increase (14); by contrast 26 people reported reductions in staffing over the previous three years and 11 had experienced staff loss or limitation upon local government reorganisation. Other replies referred to staffing readjustment to cover holiday periods, having posts frozen, to senior post changes, or to increased use of temporary staff (1 each).

Most respondents (70 or 71%) reported significant changes in the roles of staff over the previous three years. These changes could be summarised as entailing greater responsibility at lower staff levels (26 replies - sometimes as a result of lost senior posts), an increased advisory or, sometimes, consultancy role (22 - especially with schools), regarding of staff (9), greater specialisation within roles (8), more ICT development (7), and greater emphasis on marketing (6). Other people noted changes resulting from local government reorganisation (5), closer working with education advisors/inspectors (3) or teachers (3) and more contact with external agencies (2). Several people pointed to a more integrated and highly focussed approach to the work.

How were staff adjusting to change? When we asked about the main focuses for any training or development provided for SLS staff in the past three years and whether these training priorities were changing, the replies could be grouped into categories, as shown:

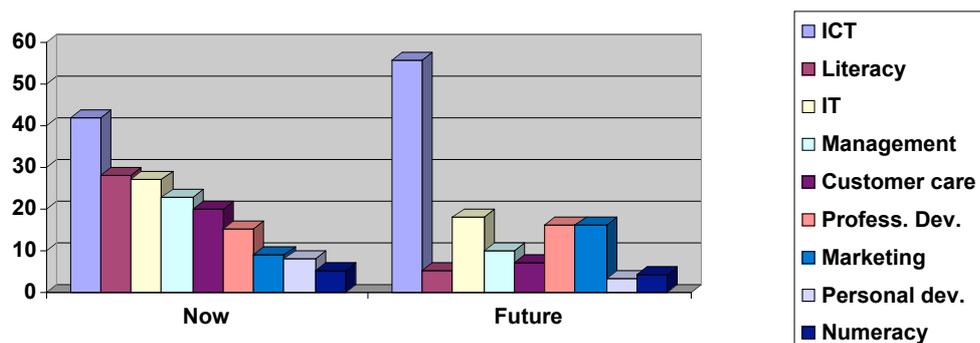


Table 3: Focus of SLS staff training (n = 99; 98)

	Recent	%	Future	%
ICT - especially educational uses	42	42	55	56
Literacy strategy and related issues	28	28	5	5
Information technology	27	27	18	18
Information retrieval skills	-	-	17	17
Management skills	23	23	10	10
Customer care	20	20	7	7
Professional skills/development	15	15	16	16
Marketing	9	9	16	16
Personal development and training	8	8	3	3
Specific financial skills/knowledge	-	-	6	6
Numeracy	5	5	4	4
NVQ	4	4	5	5
Pre-Fair Funding	4	4	3	3
Readjustment to re-organisation	4	4	-	-
Investors in People	3	3	-	-

Welsh authorities, London Boroughs and Counties reported ICT training somewhat more frequently (38%; 26%; 25%) than did Metropolitan authorities (21%) and especially Unitaries (10%). Looking to the future, there is likely to be a continuing emphasis on ICT and on adapting SLS staff to the increasingly strong business environment anticipated.

PROVISION OF SERVICES

6 Priorities and changes in provision

All respondents were asked to rank a set of 23 activities in terms of their importance for their Service (not necessarily how much time the activity took up) by ticking one box for each on a five-point scale.

Table 4.1: Services provided and their importance (n = 98)

	Very important		Not important			Scores
Project loans made up on demand	82	5	3	0	0	169
Advisory services to schools	75	14	7	1	0	163
Loans to support literacy	59	18	11	1	0	135
Direct support for school librarians	52	17	13	6	2	111
Bulk/exchange loans – fiction	44	25	7	1	2	108
Designing and refurbishing school libraries	43	31	11	5	2	108
INSET courses for teachers	37	24	16	3	2	91
Group reading collections	39	14	11	5	5	77
Mobile visits	33	7	3	0	1	71
Promotion activities	28	28	25	9	2	71
Bulk/exchange loans – non-fiction	29	16	10	5	4	61
ICT training for school librarians	21	12	8	7	0	47
Displays at SLS of books etc. for sale	16	17	8	7	2	38
Pre-packed book etc. collections	18	14	5	6	4	36
Displays at SLS of books etc. for loan	15	24	31	7	7	33
Buying books for schools	15	16	13	6	5	30
Loans of artefacts/ pictures	14	12	13	5	6	23
Loans of video materials	16	20	21	16	7	22
Recording services	5	6	0	2	0	14
Loans of audio materials	15	16	23	18	10	8
Internet services/ searching	5	10	8	10	3	4
Loans of CD-ROMs	3	5	4	4	6	-5
Travelling exhibitions	1	10	11	4	11	-14

There were some interesting differences between the types of authority in their responses here. 'Project loans on demand' were ranked first by the London Boroughs and Welsh authorities, and second or second equal by the others. The Counties and Unitary authorities featured 'Advisory services to schools' first, whilst 'Loans to support literacy' came top for the Metropolitan Boroughs. These variations continued, as shown in table 4.2:

Table 4.2: Provision: rank order: leading results (n = 98)

	Counties	Met. Bors.	London Bors.	Unit-aries	Welsh Auths.	ALL
Project loans made up on demand	2	2	1	2=	1	1
Advisory services to schools	1	3	2	1	4	2
Loans to support literacy	5	1	3	6=	2=	3
Direct support for school librarians	8	4	5=	5	6	4
Bulk/exchange loans – fiction	6	5	9=	2=	2=	5=
Designing and refurbishing school libs.	7	6	4	4	11=	5=
INSET courses for teachers	3=	8=	8	8	14	7
Group reading collections	10	8=	5=	13=	8=	8
Mobile visits	3=	15=	15	9	5	9=
Promotion activities	12	7	9=	10	11=	9=
Bulk/exchange loans – non-fiction	9	12	9=	6=	7	11

Unsurprisingly, the Counties and Welsh authorities were more enthusiastic about 'Mobile visits' than the other respondents (22 of the 28 Counties replying offered this facility). It is likely that the low assessment for 'Bulk exchange/loans' reflects the relative smallness of these authorities making teacher access to centres relatively easy and deliveries to school locations through heavy traffic correspondingly difficult.

Various services were offered by only a minority of respondents but were rated highly by them. This can be seen by calculating the mean response score (dividing the total score by the number of respondents) for each service listed, which has the effect of excluding from the reckoning those who do not offer the service. Using this method of ranking, 'Mobile visits' rose to third place and 'Recording services' figured in ninth position in an otherwise unchanged list (see table 4.1 above).

The services that were least frequently reported as being available were:

Table 4.3: Services not provided (n = 98)

	no.	%
Recording services	83	85
Loans of CD-ROMs	75	77
Internet services/searching	60	61
Travelling exhibitions	59	60
Mobile visits	54	55
Pre-packed book etc. collections	49	50
Displays at SLS of books etc. for sale	48	49
Loans of artefacts/pictures	47	48
ICT training for school librarians	47	48
Buying books for schools	41	42
Bulk/exchange loans - non-fiction	32	33

Everyone reported offering 'Advisory services to schools' but, interestingly, 8 Services did not offer the most highly rated facility, 'Project loans made up on demand'.

Is there any evidence of a shift in the pattern of provision? We asked whether any of the listed services had significantly increased or decreased in importance over the past three years and whether any were likely to increase in importance in the near future. Elsewhere in the questionnaire we also asked whether Services had adapted any of their offerings in the light of customer feedback in the past three years.

The **growth areas** in recent years have been 'Loans to support literacy' (predictably, in the light of the National Literacy Strategy – 51% of all respondents, although several people reported no change over the three years), 'Group reading collections' (35%), 'Advisory services to schools' (32%), 'Project loans made up on demand' (24%) and 'ICT training for school librarians' (with the NOF-funded national programme just beginning to roll at the time of the survey – 21%). Specific changes were made in response to user feedback over support for the Literacy initiative, bulk loans and specific resources provided, whilst 25 Services reported developing specific new provision because of demand.

None of the provision was really called into question over the period but a few people reported the **decreased importance** of 'Displays at SLS of books etc. for sale' (13% of all respondents), 'Bulk/exchange loans of fiction (10%) or non-fiction' (8%), and 'Loan of video (9%) or audio (8%) materials'.

Turning to the future, the services predicted as areas of enhanced importance were:

Table 4.4: Services likely to increase in importance in the near future (n = 99)

	no.	%
ICT training for school librarians	44	44
Loans to support literacy	24	24
Advisory services to schools	16	16
Internet services/searching	15	15
INSET courses for teachers	12	12
Project loans made up on demand	10	10
Group reading collections	10	10
Promotional activities	7	7
Loans of CD-ROMs	7	7
Direct support for school librarians	6	6
Displays at SLS of books etc. for sale	5	5
Buying books for schools Loans of audio materials	5	5
Bulk/exchange loans – fiction	4	4
Loans of video materials	4	4
Pre-packed book etc. collections	3	3
Displays at SLS of books etc. for loan	3	3
Loans of artefacts/pictures	2	2
Bulk/exchange loans - non-fiction	2	2

The most frequently reported of these forecast changes follow the Government agenda fairly closely (i.e. ICT Training for School Librarians, the National Literacy Strategy and School Improvement).

7 Target groups for Services

56 of the 99 respondents were able to report the numbers of schools served in 1998-9. Although these totals clearly under-report the overall provision by Services, the proportions of various types of school receiving most services are of interest, as shown in table 5.

Table 5: Proportion of schools etc. receiving all or most SLS services

	no.	number receiving all or most services**	% receiving all or most services
Primary	13,934	11,586	83.1
Middle*	340	269	79.1
Secondary	2,099	1,351	64.4
Sixth form colleges	47	9	19.1
Nursery schools	481	382	79.4
Special schools	809	660	81.6
Independent schools (all phases)	430	117	27.2

**There is under-reporting here because some respondents listed their 'middle schools deemed primary' or 'deemed secondary' under the primary or secondary groupings.*

***A few respondents did not provide this figure, resulting in the proportions shown being slightly too small.*

These proportions underline the problem for Services in retaining the loyalty of secondary schools within the Fair Funding regime. Much will depend upon the extent to which allocation formulae take account of provision to primary schools. If the local formula is weighted towards secondary schools this could (as we had anticipated from the outset) lead to smaller Services coming under threat if one or two large secondary schools opt out of the Service, however positively they are viewed by other users.

Other customers being served by Services included advisory/inspectorate staff (mentioned by 50 respondents, or 51%), pre-school, playgroup and nursery providers (25), Summer literacy

schools and pupil referral units (13 each), home tutors (11), and community groups (9). Also mentioned more than once were hospital tutors (6), literacy consultants and multi-ethnic groups (5 each), as well as travellers, governors, FE colleges, FE governors, teachers' centres and the youth service (3 each).

OPERATING IN A 'COMMERCIAL' ENVIRONMENT

8 'Trading' beyond local boundaries

Selling services to schools and other education providers in neighbouring local authorities has not yet taken off on a grand scale. 28 SLs (29%) reported some provision to others (excluding joint arrangements). Unitary and Welsh authorities are not yet in this market place; the picture in the other types of authority can be seen below:

London Boroughs (9)

5 serving 6 schools or fewer
3 serving 10 schools or more
1 numbers fluctuate

Metropolitan Boroughs (10)

7 serving 5 schools or fewer
1 serving 13 schools
1 serving 31 schools
1 serving 100 + schools

County Councils (9)

4 serving 10 schools or fewer
3 serving 20 – 60 schools
2 serving more than 60 schools

9 Marketing of Services

We began by asking who respondents thought of as their main or **targeted customers or users**. This resulted in a wide range of replies, which are summarised below:

Table 6.1: Main customers or users (n = 97)

	no.	%
Teachers*	58	60
Headteachers*	33	34
Schools*	30	31
Pupils/students	25	26
Governors	16	16
Only primary schools	13	13
Advisory/Inspection service	12	12
School librarians	10	10
Early Years providers	4	4
Literacy coordinators	2	2
Education department	2	2
Adults with learning difficulties	1	1
Parents	1	1

* Respondents variously referred to schools or to teachers and heads.

These responses broadly echo the picture of current users presented in section 7 above.

Asked what their main methods were for **conferring and consulting** with customers and users, most people (89%) used some methods but there was heavy reliance on the 'traditional' user survey.

Table 6.2: Main methods of conferring/consultation (n = 88)

	no.	%
Service questionnaire/survey	60	68
Direct contact including telephone	32	36
User groups	19	22
Informal user responses	18	20
Visits/annual visits	13	15
Formal meetings	12	14
Formal meetings – headteachers	11	13
Printed evaluation sheets	10	11
Formal recording of user responses	8	9
Newsletters	7	8
Conferences	4	5
Formal consultative letters	4	5

Many respondents reported more than one method of consultation

Did this consultation result in any modification of provision? As already noted, 25 SLSs developed new offerings on the basis of feedback from users and 92 other changes were reported, ranging from changes to bulk loans to adjustments to stock and materials available, and from altering the price structure to changing the name of the Service.

Turning from active listening to **communicating with users**, we asked what methods of publicising the Services had most impact. Word of mouth communication was most frequently mentioned (39 people or 43%), followed by publicity leaflets and flyers (35 or 39%, including 8 references to annual brochures), newsletters (26 or 29%), direct mailings (17), meetings (12), promotional displays (7) and INSET involvement (6).

Looking at these results in a marketing context, it is pertinent to ask whether other businesses would be content to rely on questionnaire surveys and telephone contact in developing their market? Equally, what businesses are content with word of mouth publicity for their services, even if this is supplemented with leaflets and newsletters?

MEASURING PERFORMANCE AND IMPACT

10 Monitoring and evaluation

One recurrent theme in this research is the extent to which SLS managers are gauging the efficiency and effectiveness of their provision. Local government is currently becoming increasingly evaluation conscious, with prompting from HM Treasury, the Cabinet Office, the National Audit Office and others.⁵ How much is this movement affecting Services? All but 13 respondents were involved in national or local **quality initiatives**, including Investors in People (54 or 55%), Best Value (53 or 54%) and the Chartermark (10).

It is fair to say that the benefits of being involved in these types of initiatives were not seen as overwhelming! Only 30 Services volunteered a total of 43 benefits so far (16 others felt that it was too early to say what the rewards might be). Improvements in Service management were cited by 8 people, 7 felt that the processes provided an element of staff development, 6 reported some clarification of training needs and 5 felt that there was an improvement in the customer focus of the Service.

⁵ The involvement of these agencies was described at the *Achieving Effective Performance Management and Benchmarking in the Public Sector* Seminar, University of London, QMA Public Policy Seminars, London, October 1999.

What methods did people adopt to gather performance information about the SLS? Our summary of the replies is given in table 7.1:

Table 7.1: Methods used to gather performance information (n = 98)

	no.	%
Routine generation of performance statistics	83	85
Specific collection of performance statistics	64	65
User satisfaction surveys	61	62
Systematic logging of user comments	56	57
Focus groups to evaluate response to services	25	26
User satisfaction interviews	24	24
Benchmarking with other Services	18	18
Independently conducted user satisfaction survey	16	16
Formal groups to evaluate response to Services	13	13
Case studies to assess impact of Services in specific schools	6	6

Traditional library monitoring is well to the fore in these replies with performance statistics and logging of user comments, whilst user satisfaction surveys are also regularly employed. Only a quarter of Services had indulged in the ubiquitous focus group. However, when asked which of these methods provided the best quality evidence for assessing provision, a different picture began to emerge:

Table 7.2: Methods giving the best quality evidence (n = 88)

	no.	%	% of those using this method
User satisfaction surveys	29	33	48
Routine generation of performance statistics	16	18	19
User satisfaction interviews	15	17	63
Specific collection of performance statistics	14	16	22
Formal Service review groups	7	8	54
Focus groups to evaluate response to services	4	5	16
Benchmarking with other Services	4	5	22
Systematic logging of user comments	4	5	7

Relating these assessments to the information about who used what in the previous table is not entirely reliable, because some respondents may have chosen methods that they had not used, but User satisfaction interviews, Formal Service review groups and User satisfaction surveys all appear to be under-used methods of gathering evidence (on this evidence!).

If we look back to the information about target audiences for Services given earlier (table 6.1) a key question would appear to be 'What evidence will heads, teachers and governors take seriously?' and, bearing in mind their own assessment environment 'What kinds of evidence are Ofsted looking for that "bear upon improvement of school standards, quality or management?' to use their own terminology. These questions in turn raise the issue of whether assessment of Services is primarily about gathering internal management information, material for promoting and marketing, or evidence required to meet local authority or central government agendas.

SUCCESS FACTORS

11 Keys to success

We asked about the three main success factors contributing to the success of the SLS over the previous three years. Again, we have summarised the main replies:

Table 8: Factors contributing to success (n = 99)

	no.	%
Professional expertise/understanding of education world	49	49
Quality of Service	35	35
Contact with/responsiveness to customers	27	27
Flexibility and commitment - staff	15	15
Service efficiency	14	14
Senior Management support	13	13
Service adaptability	13	13
Specific initiatives	12	12
Flexibility - financial	11	11
Support from schools	10	10
Reputation of Service	9	9
Awareness of/responsiveness to change	8	8

Respondents were asked for three factors

These success factors were in strong accord with the views expressed in the case study interviews, where emphasis was placed on really listening to the customers, resulting in continuous adaptation or adjustment of the provision, and requiring constantly evolving skills (do library skills matter in this changing environment?). The other key elements reported in the case studies were getting the price structure right and “understanding the world of education” and how new initiatives were likely to create opportunities and affect services.

What will people concentrate on to ensure success in the near future (and how much of what has worked up to now will work in the future)? Our summary of the replies is given in table 8.1:

Table 8.1: Requirements to ensure success in the near future (n = 99)

	no.	%
Response to demand	27	27
Consultation with users	27	27
Marketing	25	25
Quality of materials	25	25
ICT skills	16	16
Meeting the challenge of Fair Funding	16	16
Pro-active approach	12	12
Relationship with LEA	10	10
Raising profile of the Service	10	10

12 Conclusion

Perhaps the most worrying aspect of this survey came in the replies from the 23 authorities where there is no current SLS. Any prospect of redressing this form of school deprivation is being dissipated by implementation of Fair Funding, since the schools in areas without an SLS will not be beneficiaries of devolved or delegated funds. In effect, these schools will be doubly deprived, since they will not be in a position to make positive choices about resourcing teaching and learning.

The main area of current weakness identified in this survey is that most Services are not well placed to demonstrate the effectiveness of their provision in relation to the current government and schools agenda. What evidence can the SLS offer that they are contributing to (or, in Ofsted-speak, ‘bearing upon’) school improvement, enhancement of student learning and social inclusion. Or, in terms of the local authority agenda, what does the SLS contribute to economic regeneration or to improved citizen access to electronic information, and how are the Welsh and Scottish Assemblies affecting priorities? Our work in exploring impact and achievement indicators (as distinct from, but aligned with, performance indicators), should

help to provide a way forward here.⁶ If and when this type of evidence becomes routinely available, it will be possible to look objectively at the difference between schools receiving services from an SLS and those who choose not to do so or where there is no service on offer.

Overall, Services are proving remarkably resilient, given the recent history of local government cuts. There is clearly plenty of determination to keep on succeeding and, for the most part, realism about what is required to adapt to the increasingly turbulent environment. We were, however, concerned that some Services were slow to realise the extent of change likely after Fair Funding is fully introduced.

Success in the next few years is likely to depend upon more active promotion and marketing of Services and a willingness to adapt both provision and staff roles to meet changing demand.

Again, the evidence from this survey suggests that these issues are well recognised and that steps are being taken to 'gear up' in these areas. Looking further ahead, it seems likely that ICT will begin to have the major effect on teaching and learning that has regularly been predicted over the past twenty years. If schools do begin to change it will be essential for Services to respond. It remains to be seen how adaptable Services will be when the Age of Information finally arrives.

Acknowledgement

Our thanks are offered to all the SLS Managers and other Librarians who responded to the survey at an especially challenging time. We would particularly like to thank three practising SLS Managers - Rachel Boyd (Somerset), John Dunne (Hampshire) and Pam Dix (Islington) - who worked as part of the project team, as well as our IMA colleagues, Alec Williams, Ray Swan and Greg Jefferies for all their help and support.

⁶ INFORMATION MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATES and others *Best Value and better performance in libraries* [Project funded by the Library and Information Commission 1999-2000]

PART C: TOWARDS SURVIVAL and GROWTH: SOME ISSUES

Sharon Markless and David Streatfield

1 Budget Setting and Fair Funding

1.1 Sorting out Fair Funding

There was considerable concern about the likely impact of Fair Funding whilst we were conducting this project. Some people were dismissive of the whole venture, such as a City Librarian who described it as “one of the most stupid exercises they could have done. Making universal rules for ‘failing’ LEAs.” In particular, there were suggestions that some Metropolitan boroughs were underestimating the extent of change involved:

“Fair Funding hasn’t made the same ripples here as elsewhere. The CEO says ‘Don’t worry about Fair Funding’”.

This attitude had a knock-on effect further down the organisation:

“I had real difficulty finding out from Education Finance what the [formula] breakdown for Primaries was; we were eventually offered a figure from someone’s head.”

What was described as ‘old-fashioned Metropolitan borough paternalism’ was seen as likely to make the adjustment to Fair Funding difficult. How difficult this tradition might be can be judged from these comments by a Metropolitan Librarian:

“Historically we have seen the money from Education as a ‘nice little earner’ but we haven’t seen the SLS as separate; it has always been regarded as an integral part of the service. The services offered have been too good for too little (so that school expectations are set too high); with Fair Funding we cannot afford to continue to subsidise the SLS from the mainstream budget. The threshold for failure is probably closer to the present position than schools may suspect, unless we can find way of delivering services more cheaply. If the schools kill it by not buying back at a sufficient rate - the Public Library Service won’t be incredibly hospitable!”

The apparent lack of preparation in some authorities was largely confirmed at the seminar on the theme mounted jointly by Cambridgeshire and Leicestershire SLSs in June 1999. In response we built a Fair Funding session into the project Autumn workshop. John Dunne (Assistant County Librarian, Hampshire) based this session on a set of ‘funding preparedness questions’ which are listed in appendix D. Some of these questions will, of course, have lost their immediacy, but together they provide a useful starting point for reviewing the basics of funding the SLS.

Other Services had a more positive attitude towards Fair Funding, such as a County library manager who judged that “Delegation focused attention and drove through processes which are critical to the review of what we are delivering and at what cost.” Another County SLS manager decided that “overall I prefer delegation and don’t want to go back. The result is a smaller Service but better. The Heads are now used to demanding what they want and we are unable to go backwards”. Crucial factors in the sustainability of the SLS after Fair Funding are likely to be the quality and price of the Service at the point when it is delegated or devolved.

Most secondary school budgets were already delegated by 1999, according to the DfEE official responsible for Fair Funding, who reported that by 1997 only about £3 million remained undelegated.⁷

Some of the key points to emerge from the June workshop and from our case studies were:

⁷ Stephen Bishop, speaking at the Kettering Conference organised by Cambridgeshire and Leicestershire SLSs in July 1999.

- ◆ the **need to be proactive** in persuading Education Finance to take sympathetic action (a London borough SLS Manager said “This wasn’t too difficult. It took two ‘phone calls only to change the LEA from saying delegate to making the decision to devolve!”). There were different interpretations of what was desirable; most SLS managers saw the need to work to persuade LEA to devolve and not delegate⁸ and to adopt a favourable formula for them (with a weighting towards primaries and an additional element for special schools, where provision is expensive). One SLS manager feared that “if too much is delegated to secondaries they might cut and run with it.”
- ◆ the effects of a moving from one to three year budgeting on take up by schools will they be willing to ‘sign up’ for three years? (Most of the experience reported here was positive; one SLS manager wrote
“we offered a special ‘discount’ (actually covered by hiking up the non-discount rate) for schools prepared to subscribe for a three year period. Quite a high proportion of schools have opted for this”.)
another reported
“a good selling job on heads and governors – the amount per pupil for the SLS was in budget.”
- ◆ expectation that the **longer-term impact** of delegated funds was likely to be on buildings, maintenance, stationery and provision of advice
- ◆ recognition that partly delegated Services (e.g. staffing and overheads, but not bookfund) could devolve the whole primary budget by **clawing back** the previously delegated budget to be devolved, but this required courage in the face of likely opposition (three authorities were identified as opting for this approach)
- ◆ less evidence of **Government concern** about SLS provision for the secondary sector (which was seen as able to cope on its own) than for primary and special schools (which were viewed as in need of protection).
- ◆ the expressed view that if delegation led to the **demise of most Services**, the Government would not see this as successful outcome because it would threaten other national policies, or, in the words of a Director of Education “The Government would look very silly if it allowed lots of Services to die because of their emphasis on literacy and reading.”
- ◆ a variety of attitudes towards **provision for secondaries**, which was perceived in some places as the key to survival, and elsewhere was seen as an area to be recaptured (via advice and INSET provision, or through provision of loans to support Key Stage 3 literacy). Other Services saw secondaries as dispensable, where the existing provision was weak. Discussion of these views led to consideration of whether secondaries were more difficult to retain after delegation, especially in small authorities
- ◆ confirmation that **nursery school** monies were not within the Fair Funding framework and would not be delegated. If an SLS provided a service to them, this cost should be drawn against central funds
- ◆ again, confirmation that **Welsh authorities** had the option not to devolve their Services
- ◆ additional complexity in the case of **joint Service provision** arrangements, since the ‘commissioning’ authorities could not just provide the ‘lead’ authority with a lump sum to provide them with Services. The money still had to be devolved to schools and the lead authority would then have to take all the risk and try to ensure buy-back. (North East Wales took advice from the Welsh Office in creating an acceptable consortium across the four new counties involved)
- ◆ some uncertainty about where the SLS ‘cog’ will fit into the calibration of planning cycles after Fair Funding is introduced – if at all.

⁸ Definitions:

Delegate - include money in the budget of individual schools to use at their discretion for any purpose.

Devolve - the money still belongs to central funds and is divided between schools on a locally determined formula to be spent on the specific named service – but not necessarily on the local service; the money may go to another supplier of the same service.

1.2 Maintaining inequality

At least two elements in current Government policy were seen as having an adverse effect on equity of provision across the country or as penalising Services:

- ◆ Under Fair Funding there is no obligation on authorities, or on the Government, to assign money to their schools equivalent to SLS provision in authorities where there is no Service at present. As a result, the schools that have been penalised by closure of their SLS will now be further disadvantaged by not receiving money to buy Services from somewhere else.
- ◆ Because of the terms of the Standards Fund Grant to schools for purchasing books, schools were unable to spend their money on loans even if they wanted to secure better value for money by this means. Direct funding to school in this way had a negative short-term effect on SLS loans services as schools bought group reading sets etc. (which Services might well have already bought in anticipation of demand - “Loans have gone down because of the Literacy Centre, after we had taken a huge financial risk buying group readers and big books.”) Services will presumably be expected to take up the slack when Government largesse is diverted elsewhere. Meanwhile “The Schools get the service without risks”. One SLS tried to redress this balance:
“We did persuade about 83 schools to transfer their book grant money from the DfEE to the SLS to enable us to set up a ‘Literacy Hour Collection’ (but it is only available to those same schools).”

1.3 Pricing the services

Moving towards a more commercial way of working (with or without the impetus of Fair Funding) requires careful consideration being given to the pricing of services. Several people with experience of operating delegated services offered comments or advice about pricing:

- ◆ “Don’t be afraid to ask for help: this is too big an issue to get wrong. We are seeking costing and pricing help from our own finance people.” (Metropolitan SLS manager)
- ◆ “SLSs are not fragile but they are brittle – the right angle and force will shatter them. We do too much for too little – we are undervaluing the nature of what we deliver.” (Metropolitan Library Service Manager)
- ◆ “It was initially difficult to consider anything other than a complete package because of the cuts scenario we were involved in and the need to convince senior management that we would reach our income target (so that they could withdraw our redundancy notices and allow the service to continue). Schools have in the main become comfortable with this approach, but we do individual negotiations with schools that are not able to buy the complete package.” (London SLS manager)

Several people pointed out that pricing decisions offered a form of rationing where there would otherwise be too much demand. A common pattern was to offer a core service for all with additional elements provided for an extra charge. It was sometimes difficult to restrict services, however, because

“we are not able (financially) to give advice a lot but we do get lots of phone calls: this is subsidising secondary schools in reality.”

The other key piece of advice was that the initial costing was crucial “because you are stuck with it” and that it should take into account more than just the cost of delivery. Other pertinent factors mentioned in arriving at the Service price were the costs of other local authority services; what the market will bear; and the costs of maintaining and renewing services. Whatever pricing structure was arrived at would ideally allow for some flexibility and the possibility of ‘making deals’, whilst taking account of capital expenditure on, for example upgrading mobile vehicles or replacing an outmoded computer system.

1.4 Reviewing budgets

In looking at budgets it is important to remember that there are significant differences amongst Services in what is on offer and to whom. The main differences in services shown in the questionnaire survey are reviewed elsewhere;⁹ the current recipients may or may not include nursery, primary, secondary or independent schools and the recent history of Services has shown varying provision for GM schools, leading one manager to comment that “The advent of GM schools gave us our first experience of working in a commercial sphere and we learnt a lot of lessons as a result.”

Other service recipients might include “the Learning Support Service, Section 11 teachers, the Inspection and Advisory Team, play and youth” with additional income from “miscellaneous sales, here, in other authorities and elsewhere – publications, artefacts loans, reviews of school libraries”.

There has also been variable experience of budget cuts and staff reductions, with some services forced into closure in recent years and a few managing to retain level funding. The other main dimension of difference is about menu-based or subscription service provision for schools where budgets are devolved or delegated. This area of difference has given rise to lively debates, with strongly held views on both sides.

The actual budget setting and review process was mysterious for many of our informants. Fairly typical was the SLS Manager who said:

“Each year we produce a budget projection – then there is six months silence. What we suggest is based on history and our projection. It is impossible to get advance information so I have stopped worrying about it.”

1.5 Consultation groups

Decisions to be faced in moving into a commercial environment are discussed more fully below, but an important lesson learnt by the ‘pioneer’ Services is that budget setting should involve consultation with potential ‘customers’. One approach was described for us in a management review:

“The creation of Service Review Groups ... led to the drawing up of Service Level Statements. Having expressed concerns to both Groups (Primary/Special and Secondary) about our ability to respond to increasing demand they suggested introducing the concept of ‘core’ and ‘options’ for provision. Basically ‘core’ was what we provided to everyone, while ‘options’ would enable schools to buy more e.g. leasing extra books. They also suggested we charge for all INSET (to help generate income) regardless of the fact that we were centrally funded. The outcome was enough potential money to fund six part-time, term-time professionals for an initial two-year period.

“The key to our success [in securing adequate Fair Funding arrangements] was that the Heads on the Service Review Groups spoke up for us at their area and county meetings. They also suggested that we emphasise in the Service Level Agreement that schools not buying into our Service would have to return all our books. They reinforced this point at their area and county meetings. In the SLA the same package of ‘core’ and ‘options’ was offered.”

This kind of consultation did not necessarily run smoothly:

“Over Fair Funding we fully costed the Service in detail and produced an interim document for our Consultation Group of Head Teachers; this went to all schools and governing bodies for reaction. The secondary heads were unhappy because we proposed to base delegation on their historical use (very low) with an element for pupil numbers. The heads were looking for a 50:50 split but if they obtained this the SLS would fold because 90% of the Service is primary; where

⁹ STREATFIELD, D.R. and MARKLESS, S. ‘School Library Services: from survival to growth?’ Contribution prepared for the *Public Libraries Journal*.

would the capital come from to increase use? I expect this to sort itself out - after a row with the heads! We go in for very open government!"

2 Education versus Libraries

The debate about the pros and cons of positioning Services in the Education Department or the Library Service kept recurring. Some of the main views expressed are summarised below, but the debate will run and run!

2.1 Advantages of being positioned in Education:

If the SLS is based in Education:

- ◆ this should provide a strong local authority focus since Education will be the largest (and heaviest spending) department¹⁰
- ◆ traditionally, the LEA positioning has helped to maintain strong contact with schools but this is less true now. Schools are becoming more powerful and independent and the role of the LEA is being redefined in more limited terms of information support to schools
- ◆ it should be easier for Services to pick up quickly on education developments, especially those where there is some prospect of securing additional funding, and to form internal alliances for this purpose. However, the SLS will always be a small cog in the large education wheel
- ◆ if the SLS is in Education it should be easier to secure better than token inclusion in the Educational Development Plan (but this is by no means automatic and if the line manager changes to one with different ideas this can lead to (and has resulted in) rapid marginalisation and sudden exclusion from the EDP)
- ◆ it should also (at least in theory) be easier to become directly involved in 'price setting'
- ◆ it is easier for SLS staff in their advisory role to be equated with (and to collaborate with) LEA Inspectors/Advisers from within
- ◆ since Directors of Education often do not fully understand what the SLS can do for schools (especially at primary level) there should be more opportunities to argue the case from within.

One leading County SLS moved into delegated funding at the same time that they transferred into Education. The manager saw this as helpful because:

- ◆ schools now see the SLS as part of the Education service
- ◆ this has helped to build trust, respect and ownership
- ◆ they are part of QA (featuring in the School Improvement Strategy and Educational Development Plan)

2.2 Advantages of being positioned in Libraries/Cultural services

On the other hand, being part of Libraries (with or without Cultural services) may lead to:

- ◆ stronger ICT support by being identified as a key area of development within the Libraries service and by being an integral part of the development of the People's Network
- ◆ hidden subsidies (less so after Fair Funding)
- ◆ direct contact with school heads as the front line service provider

¹⁰ Some reaction to this imbalance can be seen in authorities where lifelong learning departments are being created. These usually incorporate adult and continuing education, youth work and public libraries, creating a second major department on a scale with (schools) education.

- ◆ 'joined up thinking' about lifelong learning, combining SLS involvement with nursery, primary and secondary education and Public Library commitment to informal learning for all
- ◆ a stronger base for national initiatives, since the potential of libraries for information access and for reading promotion are now being recognised – and libraries are 'fashionable' ("Best ever opportunity")
- ◆ possibly, less involvement in education strategies for literacy, numeracy etc., although a culture of cross-departmental partnerships is now being fostered in local government
- ◆ a strategic champion at senior management level (if the right person is in post)
- ◆ easier entry to the Annual Library Plan (without precluding possible inclusion in the EDP)

Some of the people and cultural issues about 'working in both camps' go beyond reporting relationships and organisational structures. One of the (Library-based) case study managers described one such issue:

"We recently encountered a mysterious undercurrent emanating from somewhere within Education which spread the view that the SLS is too negative and concerned with protecting the status quo – that we whinge about falling buy-back but do not have the vision to look for radical, collaborative solutions that would appeal to schools more and improve take-up. We suspect this was triggered by the views of one particular individual ... but it unfortunately coloured the perceptions of the (relatively new) Chief Education Officer. I think we have since done some good repair work through getting the SLS forum off the ground and through NGfL liaison, but it was worrying how rapidly a misconception could take hold."

In the end, it is more important that there are effective links between Education and Libraries from Chief Officer level downwards through appropriate working groups and informal contact:

"It doesn't matter if you are in Libraries or Education. What matters is that you have proactive people with good collaboration and communication skills."

3 Strategic presence of the SLS

According to the survey results and case study reports, being strategic as an SLS is about getting involved in a combination of short and medium term activities whilst continuing to pursue other ongoing activities:

3.1 Strategic means:

Short-term:

- ◆ securing a satisfactory starting point for Fair Funding by influencing the allocation formula and, ideally, being devolved not delegated!
- ◆ using the opportunities created by Government attention to literacy and reading (especially through KS3 and the Literacy Summer Schools) to strengthen links with Education and where appropriate to attract secondary schools; and to build other links through such initiatives as Family Literacy and Bookstart
- ◆ supporting the National Numeracy Strategy
- ◆ capitalizing on the People's Network if opportunities arise
- ◆ remaining alert to the next Government 'instant idea'

Medium-term:

working out coherent strategies for any of the following, but especially the first three:

- ◆ contributing to school improvement efforts
- ◆ supporting schools in enhancing opportunities for student learning
- ◆ encouraging social inclusion
- ◆ helping to support economic regeneration
- ◆ becoming involved with the National Grid for Learning

as well as picking up on national and regional issues such as helping to enact the Welsh Assembly agenda.

Continuous:

- ◆ being there! (on key committees; involved with high visibility initiatives):
“As soon as the National Literacy Strategy came into view I contacted the County English Inspector and got onto the Education Steering Group. A similar process has just arisen (through the officer side, this time) in relation to a cross-departmental Steering Group on out of school hours learning ... All of this activity enables us to develop our Service in line with current initiatives and it also ensures that colleagues in other related departments think ‘libraries’ when these new developments arise”
- or
“We successfully lobbied to get an Under Fives resource centre put into the SLS so that we would have a presence. We had to jump in very fast to ensure that it came here - it nearly went elsewhere because we were not at an important meeting.”
- ◆ seeking to achieve and demonstrate economies of scale
- ◆ efficient provision (maintaining the core services)
- ◆ treating ‘Best Value’ as an opportunity for rethinking the Service rather than as a necessary evil (or, if circumstances so require, doing the opposite!)
- ◆ building up the provision of advice and support to schools and other parts of the Education service, as an area of potentially high added value (through application of professional expertise) with low resource implications.

Long-term:

We were not surprised to find that longer term horizon scanning was difficult to identify and that such potentially important issues as how schools will function in ten years’ time (will teaching roles and expectations of students have changed dramatically as a result of ICT advances?) are not apparently being addressed. However, we do know that the worlds of information access and of publishing are changing rapidly. Longer-term survival of the SLS (or its successor) will depend on the ability to continue to adapt to rapid change, but also to sustain a vision of where the SLS is going.

3.2 Other strategic factors

There was no shortage of suggestions offered about other important elements in becoming and remaining strategic and of some changes that are likely to help. These included:

- ◆ recognising that, as ‘true believers’ (to recycle an expression used to describe all the SLS managers at our seminar) SLS managers are not always the best advocates for their own Services. Senior management support is, of course, important, as is identifying the other people with drive and energy in the organisation as collaborators, and finding people with credibility to act as ‘champions’ and help argue the case. Some of the tactics adopted to strengthen alliances ranged from organising high profile events and photo opportunities for elected members (“inviting members in for half-day chats and getting people to drop in”) to targeting secondary heads, who were increasingly seen as the most important local education ‘players’
- ◆ new structures changing the landscape of local government, such as ‘cabinet’ local government; the creation of lifelong learning directorates (with librarians in key roles); and the growing importance of regional agencies
- ◆ new processes such as LEA inspections, which provide opportunities to have SLS support for education programmes recognised and scrutinised
- ◆ a ‘fifth column’ of people with children’s/SLS backgrounds taking up senior management posts in public libraries (“In the past, senior managers did not understand children’s services”)
- ◆ vision and taking risks (one example amongst several was in a county Service where the entire public image, including the livery on the stationery and the SLS vehicles were redesigned and presented as a *fait accompli*)
- ◆ building on opportunities as they arise (Following the “...creation of a policy guideline on *Planning and Design for Secondary Schools* ... I attended the Secondary Building Brief Group (made up of heads, an architect and education officers) to present the document. This

led to the document being used as a blueprint for a new school and also to much closer contact with architects generally. As a result of this document and our benchmarking exercise, the Group is now looking at standards of library accommodation in secondary schools generally.”)

- ◆ the emergence of competitors to the local SLS, including the threat of other Services trading across borders and the creation of local literacy centres
- ◆ recognition that some Services might be more efficiently (and perhaps more effectively) provided on a regional collaborative or competitive basis, such as:
 - secondary school advice and support
 - INSET for teachers and school librarians
 - quality assurance.

At least one other element should be added to this list. Our survey drew attention to the need for Services to pay more attention to marketing. A key skill here is the ability to assemble a convincing business plan for the Service. Such plans should include realistic projections of likely levels of take-up of specific services and should be grounded in accurate information about the actual costs of delivering particular services. An element of contingency planning will become increasingly necessary so that alternative tactics can be adopted if, for example, income targets are not being met.

Other elements in the struggle to have strategic impact, such as the scope of national initiatives and the importance of partnership building, are considered below.

3.3 Operational versus strategic

Some Services had apparently restricted their attention to operational matters. This may have occurred in reaction to the pressures of restructuring their Service following delegation, because the Service felt protected by a ‘paternalistic local authority culture’, or again because as a small part in a large organisation they were cut off from strategic considerations, so that the staff had no experience of operating strategically. One of the case study Services had no real strategic presence but had developed an apparently very successful service by ‘staying close to the customers’. However, this appears problematic as a long-term survival strategy, especially after Fair Funding. Who will orchestrate the customers to speak up for the Service when the need arises and, more importantly, who will be in a position to spot that the need is about to arise?

4 Collaboration/National initiatives

4.1 The opportunities

Almost half of Services were getting involved in national initiatives (according to our national survey) for reasons ranging from helping to support local education priorities to “knowing what going on in schools and in the inspectorate” and securing limited funds, or because they felt there was no alternative (“Planning a Service that delivers into key government agendas is critical”, or “We must work together with our users or else we become irrelevant.”). The range of possibilities now on offer was substantial: examples of national initiatives and their local manifestations included:

- National Literacy Strategy
- National Numeracy Strategy (“It is difficult to support numeracy because of how this is taught but we have had numeracy topic boxes for some time.”)
- Education Action Zones
- Early Years Development and Childcare plans
- Behaviour Support plans
- ICT (New Opportunities Fund) Training for teachers, school librarians and public librarians
- Social Inclusion
- Best Value
- School Organisation plans
- Asset Management plans (appropriate learning environment for delivering curriculum)
- Lifelong Learning plans
- Family Literacy initiatives

Ofsted Action plans
 National Grid for Learning plans
 More and Very Able Action plans
 National Year of Reading /Read On Campaign (including Bookstart)
 Literacy Summer Schools
 Heritage Lottery Board bids for funding (e.g. an ICT-based project to allow young people access to their heritage using artefacts collection)
 DFEE Museum Development Award – ‘H2000’ (e.g. a joint bid including Education, a Canal museum and another local museum on the theme of water and its importance in the local history of the area)
 Carnegie/Greenaway Awards (e.g. to manage a scheme involving visiting schools and working with children)
 NOF Study Support
 Investors in People and the Chartermark
 Recognition in EDPs and DCMS plans, although “it was made very clear that we were unlikely to obtain any of the small pots of centrally held funding via the EDP, as everyone would be fighting for them”.

4.2 National literacy and reading strategies

The National Year of Reading (which came to a head at the time of the project fieldwork) and the National Literacy received frequent mention as raising the strategic profile of Services, even if they were sometimes ‘riding on the coat tails’. A Director of Education felt that these strategies “made the primaries think about the provision of books and about books and libraries” and a county libraries manager acknowledged that “without the NYR the SLS manager would have had to chase the advisers, but this provided a high profile event especially to engage members and develop the image”. An English Adviser agreed that:

“The Literacy strategy has been a great help. The evidence? An explosion of use: all the statistics support this view and the primaries have said ‘yes’ to Fair Funding.”

On the other hand, there was concern that the Literacy Hour was so prescribed that teachers resorted to buying and using the same books because of the effort of planning (and in some cases had even reorganising the school library purely to support the Hour). Several people reported that the Literacy Strategy had reduced school library use (“Teachers have come in [to the SLS Centre] until this year, now there are more ‘phone contacts - teachers are more classroom-based, but this is changing.”) SLS managers thought there was greater scope at secondary level, because the Literacy Strategy led to more diverse projects in LEAs, which had a broadening rather than narrowing effect.

More generally, one delegated Service manager warned

“National Initiatives can have a dire impact on a delegated Service – we can get burned and left with stock and there is no fat to help us to cope (e.g. acquired lots of stuff on Benin to help with the National Curriculum, which then changed so now this is not borrowed).”

4.3 Deciding when to get involved

Each SLS had to weigh up the value of having a strategic presence through national and local initiatives against the time and financial costs of so doing. Here are two views from public library managers :

“We sometimes need to assume that the time spent will bring benefits: at other times we must get money from central funds, such as from activities arising from the EDP ... for example, [a large City SLS] said to Education and Finance ‘We are doing all this which is of benefit to all schools, therefore this should not be a charge on individual schools and it is worth £30,000 a year - it will buy you help, advice to advisers and participation in working parties.”)

“Pots of money will continue to come in targeted and therefore independent of LEA whims. We need to attract that money down to the SLS. A lot of it is now in the form of regionally-based projects. But we need to spend time and energy on bidding etc.”

The value of collaboration will become more of an issue when Fair Funding calls into question all the costs of operating services and how managerial time is spent (“We must be selective because of costs; we need to make choices and evaluate.”). A county SLS manager summed up their position:

“National Initiatives may enable you to gain extra money, staffing etc. and they are a useful vehicle to improve your profile. Although we have not had extra money or staffing for recent initiatives we have raised our profile through involvement in Summer Literacy Schools, the National Literacy Strategy and the National Grid for Learning.

“Our response to national initiatives is pragmatic; we use them to your advantage but we don’t let them deflect us from providing a high quality service.”

One concern was that the local culture of collaboration might be detrimentally affected by the ‘commercial imperative’ after Fair Funding. However, the new regime may also bring increased realism about the value of time spent on collaborative activities in Services that may hitherto have been regarded as a cheap source of resources. A (devolved) county SLS manager said:

“Collaboration really works if money is attached to it: the other parties need to pay their way! This is not a problem with Education because they are used to paying their way.”

4.4 Making collaboration work

Collaboration for most Services means working with the Education department. This was well expressed in one of the management overviews:

“Our best examples of collaboration are with Inspectors and Advisors ... close links at county and local level which are invaluable ... good links with the English team and we recently had an exhibition and slot on their KS3 literacy training courses. Meetings with Secondary Inspectors to disseminate the results of the benchmarking exercise ... Good links also exist with the IT Inspectors ... local meetings with Attached Inspectors to discuss particular schools. Staff are also invited to attend area wide meetings to update colleagues on SLS and library developments. Our weak link if anything is with education officers. Once the Service Review Groups were set up the emphasis shifted from officers to heads.”

This level of involvement was not usually lightly achieved. An SLS manager described his early experience in post:

“I got myself invited to the Advisory Team meeting when I first came; I followed this up with a letter and was sent the agendas to all Advisors meetings. I was invited to pick the ones of interest to the SLS but diligently went to all of them! This was very important for our survival because it led to our tapping into GEST funding (and INSET funding in the 80s). Without this involvement budget decisions around Local Management of Schools might have gone a different way.”

This need to be proactive was probably more typical than the experience of the new SLS manager in a supportive Metropolitan borough:

“I was immediately invited to join in Advisors’ meetings although there had been a gap of two years since my predecessor left. Being in Education is good because we are actively involved automatically (e.g. invited to briefing courses for heads) ... Maintaining these links is absolutely critical.”

Whether and to what extent there was scope for collaboration with Education varied according to the local political climate and could fluctuate. A London SLS explained that:

“As long as we can link into economic regeneration or raising academic achievement we tend to get money for projects, but we need to get the internal competition sorted out. The Literacy

Centre had millions! They spent a lot on books and the SLS has not seen a penny of it! We are getting competitive with Education and the relationship is in danger of breaking down.”

Some Services saw little scope for collaboration. One delegated Service reported:

“No real strategic presence in public libraries or Education - partly historic personalities and enmities, partly due to delegation which creates a *downwards* focus!”

Even where there was willingness to work together this did not necessarily work. A metropolitan librarian described their one-sided efforts:

“We keep trying to make links with EAZ but largely unsuccessfully; similarly with NOF out of school and study support issues. The schools are seeing the NOF money as their money; the efforts are school led and dominated, rather than being partnerships or strategic alliances. We should work together on the 10% of what schools do where there is real overlap but there are too many other agendas: there is a mythology around EAZs. The words are said, but there is no corporate lead.”

Since the National Year of Reading featured strongly as a partnership theme for Services, it may help if we refer at this point to our study of Public Library involvement in the NYR¹¹, which was also conducted in 1999. Local library campaign organisers reported that their most positive partnership links were with local schools, other local authority departments, the LEA, other local library services and then such bodies as local health authorities and regional arts boards.

When collaboration was good, this tended to be because:

- ◆ partnership working was recognised as **fundamental** (“solo working doesn’t work”). Several people described project team approaches involving a small core of activists and other people joining in for specific initiatives. This accorded with the precept from research into successful networking that there is no role for ‘passive participants’ who are there only because this is thought to be right
- ◆ libraries were seeking to be **solid and workmanlike** rather than “chasing transient effects”, also described as “building in not bolting on”
- ◆ enough time was accorded to **fostering contacts** and people recognised that partnerships do take time to mature (“co-operation is about time – it is fundamental, not extra”)
- ◆ The participants were sufficiently **flexible** (“recognising ‘other people’s agendas’”)
- ◆ Participants were **clear about their objectives** and what they could contribute.
- ◆ The **right theme** for collaboration had been found.
- ◆ as is true with any major organisational innovation, active **senior management** support was vital to success, especially to enable contact making at strategic level.

As for moving on from these partnerships, the next phase was described by one senior manager as

“Exciting but scary as well – getting more involved with everything. For example, community education, basic skills in the library, also the Millennium Project (a community archive) and we are part of the Education Action Zone, looking at opening a family resource centre at another library.”

5 Professional development for a changing world?

The questionnaire survey and case study interviews raised a number of important questions in relation to the professional development needs of SLS staff:

¹¹ STREATFIELD, D.R. and others *Rediscovering reading: an evaluation of the role of Public Libraries in the National Year of Reading. Library and Information Commission research report 30* London: Information Management Associates 2000

- ◆ what key skills are now needed by an effective SLS?
- ◆ what major training issues and dilemmas face managers trying to develop their Services?
- ◆ which job structure is most appropriate?
- ◆ how can effective training be pursued?

5.1 Key skills, knowledge and expertise

5.1.1 Stability and change

The low turnover of staff in most Services is remarkable; doubly so given the number of changes that have affected many Services and the amount of remodelling that has had to occur to ensure survival. This low turnover has meant that existing staff have had to learn new skills and adopt new ways of working. In the words of one SLS manager “I have got the same staff... but they are now very different people compared with pre-delegation.”

All SLS managers recognised the need to develop new skills or to enhance existing ones; many Services emerging from central funding were facing particular challenges brought about by “the great change from a service to a business culture with a different customer focus”. However, even those Services that were fully delegated years ago spoke of the need to prepare for further changes in, for example, the balance between providing resources and helping schools make the best use of their resources. According to one senior adviser “ELS will move from providing books to being an agency for bringing people and books together...” and a number of SLS managers talked of increasing amounts of advice, INSET and involvement in inspection.

Appropriate training and development was therefore seen as an important element in the survival and growth of Services.

One general point needs to be made before looking at specific development needs. The low staff turnover can produce difficulties. Staff may be unable or unwilling to change and may hold the Service back. It is very difficult to ‘remove’ staff in local government, but Services – especially small ones – cannot afford to carry ineffective personnel. Training may help; however it may be necessary to use individual targets, clear performance standards and job descriptions to alleviate the situation. Work shadowing and mentoring procedures have also been used to good effect in helping people to embrace change.

The questionnaire survey asked about the main focuses of training and development in the recent past and what was planned for the near future. The skills deemed to be important are not surprising, encompassing as they did: ICT (especially educational uses); the literacy strategy and related issues; information retrieval skills; project management skills (“a library refurbishment project can be a major undertaking costing £40,000 or more”); customer care (“including telephone techniques”); specific professional skills; and marketing. However, interviews with SLS managers, advisers, education officers and heads produced some interesting perspectives on these skills.

5.1.2 Business skills and commercial awareness

Everyone was clear about the need for SLS staff to work effectively within an entrepreneurial environment - “adapt to the market place or die” in the words of one manager and, as we have seen, there was a strong consensus about the sorts of skills required. However there were questions raised about the level of skills needed. Some people felt that if an SLS looked too commercial heads would become antipathetic. They felt that business skills were a necessary addition and could be obtained through an LEA-run seminar or on-the-job. Other Services were convinced that survival and growth depended upon the development of sophisticated business skills “The LEA workshops were very basic, not giving us more than an introduction ... we need much more, and that is expensive...”

If marketing is important to survival, and if customer care has to be improved to make a real difference to buy back-levels, these activities must be done well. High quality skills and knowledge are needed and they may have to be ‘bought in’ from people operating in the commercial world at high rates (£1,200 per day was quoted to an SLS from one such

provider). This may be money well spent; certainly in the view of several SLS managers. It is questionable whether 'basic' skills will provide enough to support SLS growth.

Investment in more 'value added' training may be necessary. Perhaps the costs could be shared amongst smaller or poor Services. The research has made it clear that standing still in this area is not an option. We think that it is important to opt for improved quality training to provide the SLS with the necessary edge.

5.1.3 Information and Communications Technologies

ICT poses the same question as business skills – at what level? Up to now a lot of time and effort has been spent on equipping SLS staff with basic IT skills – does this provide the best enhancement for the Service? Does it improve service quality? Much of the national debate about ICT and learning focuses on advanced ICT skills such as: creating material for NGfL and contributing resources to local internets; creating information gateways for improved access (one-stop shops); website design; database construction; understanding how to search the Internet effectively and to evaluate sites; and advising on Internet searching. The role of ICT in learning is still evolving and the possibilities are not clear – what can the SLS add to the debate? Do Services have the imagination necessary to develop the role of ICT? Many Services admitted that they were 'light' on ICT skills ("major re-education is needed ... we have big IT deficiencies...") but then talked about enhancing electronic ordering or use of library management systems. Stronger IT-based administrative capacity may be important but this is not perhaps the key to keeping the SLS central to schools. Some case study Services were moving into database construction, website design and increasing the content of their websites beyond the resources catalogue, as well as creating content for NGfL. A number of Services have undertaken some form of IT training needs assessment. However, the results of such an audit are only as useful as the questions asked – and again many focus on basic IT skills.

One other matter came to light during discussions and in the project workshop. Many Services need to develop new computer-based information management systems to help them operate effectively. Existing systems have usually not been designed to provide the type of information needed by a business enterprise: for example, how much a particular element of the Service was costing to deliver at that moment, so that it could be adjusted. The design or selection of such systems depends upon high quality analysis of information needs and priorities, not just relying upon what the 'techies' think is appropriate. A number of LEAs are entering the information auditing arena and using outcomes to draw up more appropriate system specifications. Services should be considering how to move along the same route, individually or in consortia. Overall it is vital that "we are not left behind in the technology race".

5.1.4 Education

It is not surprising that those completing the project questionnaire reported literacy-specific training as a recent preoccupation. Understanding the implications of government and LEA policy and of how the SLS can support literacy work in schools is central to survival and growth. (When LEA Ofsted reports mention the SLS, they almost invariably comment on the contribution made to the National Literacy Strategy and improving literacy in schools.) Keeping up with other initiatives, including changes in the National Curriculum was also seen as important in case study authorities. Most people seemed comfortable with their ability to keep abreast of curriculum changes (although one manager did see 'keeping current' as a weakness). What was striking was that only one case study SLS manager focused on the need to understand "how education works: knowledge of what is going on in the classrooms and developments in teaching". This theme was picked up by several heads and advisers/inspectors who thought that the SLS could best meet school needs by enhancing their insights into teaching and learning and not just into the 'written curriculum'.

5.1.5 Managing Information

Some SLS managers who had been through Ofsted inspections or were engaging in Best Value, emphasised the importance of managing information effectively to show value. They talked of understanding benchmarking, being able to gather and manipulate relevant information, knowing what mechanisms to put in place to ensure relevant information is

routinely collected (including drawing upon the work of inspectors or advisers in schools). People at the project seminar and workshops all agreed that this was an area ripe for development.

5.1.6 Interpersonal Skills

Although 'personal development' was not a high priority for training as reflected in the survey, interpersonal skills seem to underpin the success of the SLS. Flexibility, lateral thinking, teamwork, open-mindedness, proactivity, building close relationships and communication skills were all deemed important by those interviewed in the case studies. But can these skills and qualities be fostered, especially when staff changeover is not a real option? And are these skills really important or just part of the rhetoric of management? Perhaps, although such skills continue to be important in a changing world, they are almost taken for granted or assumed and are not, therefore, a training priority.

5.2 Issues and Dilemmas

5.2.1 Preparing for what future?

A professional development strategy should evolve from views of what schools and Services will be like in a few years time, and therefore what the roles of SLS staff will be. Is there any discernible pattern? Some people talked about: growth of advice about using resources to support curriculum planning; interactive work through the NGfL; and creating a gatekeeping or filtering operation. However, horizon scanning is difficult (most major companies don't do this well according to the management literature) and different authorities saw things differently!

Many managers admitted that they were fully occupied in reacting to current circumstances and that the skills needed were judged within that context. It is not surprising that those Services that have been centrally funded until now are concentrating on areas such as financial planning, marketing, improving their customer focus and nurturing business acumen in their staff. Would horizon watching have led to earlier professional development in this area? Survival and especially growth in the commercial world come from anticipating or creating opportunities, changes and trends. Can the future skills development requirements of Services be adequately discerned using appraisal systems, audits and identification of current performance gaps?

5.2.2 Librarians or entrepreneurs?

One issue that emerged from the case studies was ambivalence about the role of 'traditional' library skills and aptitudes (such as in-depth book knowledge). One SLS manager was sure that the new SLS librarian "combined book knowledge with entrepreneurial flair" – but which would take precedence in a small SLS, since finding an individual with both in equal measure is most unlikely?

From one group we were told that "book knowledge is our unique selling point; it's what teachers value." They want "advice over the phone to find something to enthuse boys" combined with "boxes packed individually for teachers, not pre-packaged". Traditional skills were what enabled the SLS to provide value for money "by choosing high quality resources closely related to the curriculum".

By contrast, an SLS management team was clear that the traditional librarian was no longer necessary. They needed "someone who keeps an eye on the National Curriculum, and the worlds of Education and Publishing; understands the power and potential of libraries, and above all has good business skills and a firm grasp of financial management". Others warned against being sentimental about traditional library skills and their value. For example, a metropolitan SLS manager had found the benefits of recruiting from a wider base "A staff member with a shop background... spotted things that the librarian colleagues didn't..."

Larger Services may not have to face this dilemma head-on: they can employ a mix of people with different skills and try to ensure that they have a depth of knowledge and expertise across the board. Small Services (perhaps running with a staff of 1.5 people) have to make difficult choices about their skills mix. Their very size also makes staff development more difficult – where does the time and spare capacity come from?

To think about the types of expertise required by the future SLS as two opposite camps is to over-simplify the skills and expertise issue. The nature of professionalism is changing, as described by one Service manager:

“The advisory role has increased considerably and this includes a number of areas. There is more involvement now in writing ‘inspection’ reports, often following a new head’s review. An extensive range of INSET courses is provided, many delivered by the SLS team ...”

Of course, SLS staff have always had a promotional role and INSET involvement is nothing new. What does appear to be changing is the extent and depth of professional expertise required in these and other areas – if necessary at the expense of traditional library skills.

5.2.3 Investing in the future

It is important to acknowledge the issue of time – or, rather, lack of time! With almost half of Services reporting recent staff reductions and the prospect of further cuts in the wake of Fair Funding (“If staff can’t hack it, they will go”), remaining staff are very stretched to cover the service basics, never mind planning for new developments.

Training and professional development take time. If the world of the SLS is changing as rapidly as many predict, this calls for a significant time investment in staff development. Successful businesses faced with a similar scenario may respond with substantial in-house or externally supported continuous staff development, probably expressed in weeks (rather than days) per person per year. Most Services would find extreme difficulty in moving this far, even if long term survival may demand it (the highest level of current provision we encountered was an entitlement of five days training per year for all SLS staff). The only way forward may be to concentrate on mutual professional development with a cluster of like-minded Services, re-opening the question of differentiated provision at regional (e.g. INSET and advice, acquisitions) and local (resource provision) levels.

How such a regional-local service could ensure staff support and development opportunities can be envisaged by scaling up from the experience of one county Service, which is currently operating from local area centres:

“The SLS operates in a decentralised way with six local centres (five based in public libraries and the sixth in a school). This way of operating has benefits in being a local Service for schools, which is important in a large county, but the disbenefits are isolation and inevitably duplication in some areas (e.g. stock). Professional isolation is partly countered by Area Schools Librarians (ASLs) selecting new books together on a fortnightly basis. They also use this time to work on topics together e.g. library plans, and I use it as a regular updating session as things crop up. There are also termly meetings with ASLs and bi-annual meetings with Assistant ASLs. Our electronic mailing system which links all libraries and SLS Centres is invaluable for effective communications.”

5.3 Professional development: some options

Returning to the issue of finding time for professional development when everyone is busy with basic provision, it is clear that in this environment, Service development requirements take (and will continue to take) precedence over any individual professional preferences. The other important consideration is how to create professional development opportunities whilst getting the job done, that is, not falling into the trap of equating professional development with training. The burgeoning literature on the how to realise the concept of ‘the learning organisation’ puts heavy emphasis on informal development – providing that it is well structured and systematically shared. The two main routes forward are to change what we are doing and how people are doing it.

5.3.1 Redefining structures and roles

There are various options in redefining people’s roles, all of which have advocates in the case study Services:

- ◆ if people show a particular flair for aspects of the work (such as INSET delivery; talking to heads; or using their stock knowledge to help teachers with loans) it may be possible to reassign work on functional lines
- ◆ if there is a significant skills shortage in a particular area (such as ICT), a specialist post may be the answer, but there was strong resistance to this approach (“An IT librarian? – a retrograde step! All staff need IT skills and IT people need to be library knowledgeable. New people being appointed will be professional librarians with IT knowledge. We will not go for separate IT people”)
- ◆ an alternative is to employ generalists but to invest in specialist training for them so that emerging specialist requirements are met (“with generalists you get more seamless service and teamwork”)
- ◆ another option for larger teams is to organise on operational and developmental lines. In this version the operational team concentrates on providing all services and systems needed to ensure effective and coherent provision to customers: the development team is concerned with work on partnerships initiatives; marketing and development of new services
- ◆ an alternative is to buy in expertise to cover such areas as ICT; marketing; finance; or advances in the Education field (e.g. on writing frames to support literacy).

5.3.2 Developing staff

Some of the options for professional development that we have encountered, beyond signing people up for the training workshop include:

- ◆ mentoring – forming an alliance between a staff member and a more experienced practitioner in the field or in a specialised area that the SLS is trying to develop. This may be achieved through a voluntary arrangement but the SLS should be prepared to buy in this type of service if there is a priority need
- ◆ work shadowing – this is probably the best way for SLS staff to find out how their opposite numbers do things
- ◆ professional exchanges – it may be possible for an SLS manager or worker to engineer an exchange arrangement (or ‘job swap’) with an opposite number in another SLS. These arrangements are often mutually rewarding (with much learning about how the other person went about ‘your’ job), providing that enough care is taken in setting up the links, notifying work contacts about what is going on and in sharing reflections on the exchange period. Ascel might consider ‘brokering’ this sort of arrangement.
- ◆ ‘learning by teaching’ – one powerful way to find out about a topic or theme is to get involved in teaching it! (e.g. enhancing ICT understanding through work with ICT Training Consortia or doing NOF ICT training). Unfortunately this takes time, so it can only be contemplated if there is likely to be a significant financial return to the SLS
- ◆ organising ‘bespoke’ training or consultancy to address priority issues by enlisting the help of experts within the LEA, in other Services, or beyond. This type of expertise can be expensive but it may be possible to form temporary consortia or longer term arrangements to spread the costs.

6 Operating in the ‘market place’

The new environment of the SLS after Fair Funding is not yet a ‘real’ market place – there is no scope for raising venture capital; and at present there is only minimal opportunity for business diversification or ‘growing the market’ (“We get approached by other schools to buy our services. Up until now we have only expanded into authorities where there is no SLS”); two SLS managers reported that potential competitors to the local SLS had been ‘seen off’ by an exchange of letters at borough librarian level, two others had ‘encroached’ elsewhere despite SLS protests by ensuring ‘approval’ from the other director of education).

Services had sometimes found extending their catchment area difficult:

“At the time when the neighbouring county was disaggregated into new unitary authorities, we were invited to promote our Services to schools ... which had no SLS of their own. Despite

fairly good support, from the Education service in one unitary in particular, this has never led to much business and we have agreed we should concentrate our main efforts on our own LEA market.”

We had reports of arbitrary limits being imposed by the local authority on trading beyond the borders, selling to independent schools and buying in external trainers for SLS staff, leading to a danger that delegation, and now Fair Funding, will give the SLS all the disadvantages of ‘the enterprise culture’ and none of the advantages.

There are differences, now and for the future, occasioned by the shift to a ‘business culture’, especially if the future offers consolidation rather than expansion. In a service environment, attrition over time leads to retrenchment, decline, decay, atrophy and tokenism. In a business unit attrition soon leads to rationing and closure.

Some questions for the future include:

- ◆ how much of the Service will be offered at regional, local or community levels?
- ◆ will Fair Funding hinder the optimum positioning of Services?
- ◆ is it useful to focus on quality of resources if heads and teachers do not have a clear idea of what quality looks like?

6.1 Oh, brave new world

To what extent are Services changing as they adopt more of a business ethos? For those who are already there:

“When you go live, there is a great change from a service to a business culture with different a customer focus – we have achieved this with the same staff (now beginning to change): “we have embraced training in marketing and customer awareness for various levels of staff.”

“A real change in culture is coming (hiding behind devolved budgets) - a market place: other Services may appear, especially around advice (less around stock).”

“Initially we still kept a library culture (leisure use of resources); for the past 3-4 years have got into a teaching and learning culture (now information and business side of individual requirements; use ICT in teaching and learning curriculum development)”

Interestingly, most of the managers who are now working in the new environment prefer this way of working (“We like being in control of our own destiny but want to be safer!”)

For those who are looking ahead to this world:

“We are not yet seeing schools as customers, although the budget cuts helped. We are now saying ‘Yes we can do it and it will cost’.”

“We are at the most dangerous point – the transition from central support as ‘a good thing’ to the new environment. If we survive three years, we will be stable in the new environment.”

But what sorts of changes result from the shift in focus? In keeping with the business mantra about ‘staying close to your customers’ it is necessary to look more carefully at how the need for change is assessed:

“Management information is important to success – we need monthly statements of income to keep track of what we are doing, costs of improving what schools want - these are critical for prediction, and will be audited, so we need to keep control.

“A SWOT analysis is done every year and is at the front of the Business Plan; we identify potential threats (these may not be real e.g. competition, but others are important e.g. pace of change).”

Elsewhere, this transition has involved commitment accounting and detailed calculation of all Service costs. One Service manager had moved beyond the usual assumption of a six to one ratio in terms of spending on resources via the SLS as against the school buying direct. He calculated that the rate of return was equivalent (in his authority) to a 19 times return for some primary schools, but only a 3 to 4 times return for some secondaries that had chosen to purchase paperbacks.

Assessing the need for change can be more painful:

“Initially there was no full consultation (very short time scale). A representative heads’ group helped - and they got it wrong (vouchers which were disastrous!)”

There will certainly be realignment with strategic decision makers, partners and customers. Elected members will have to be cultivated:

“Members are influenced by feedback from schools and media views – a high profile and satisfaction are really important to influence members. Get them in on lots of high profile events, then they will remember what the SLS is about and what would be lost if it was not properly funded.”

“I took the Chairman and Director of Education to a ‘model’ school – the head sold the Service ‘I couldn’t do without this Service’. [The service manager could have shown as many statistics as he wanted but wouldn’t have made the same lasting impression – influencing key players by any means.”

“The relationship with the public libraries is very important. We established a Service Level Agreement so that there is no duplication or competition.” Another Service manager commented “There is a danger that progressive blurring of library service roles vis-à-vis schools may render the SLS redundant”

Various methods were adopted for getting and keeping schools on the SLS side:

“We decided to eliminate a local base because we needed to reduce staffing and building costs in order to keep book fund up! There was lots of resistance to this change because it came at the same time as other Education closures. We personally visited each school in the North of the county to explain and as a result only lost two schools. We talked to Heads, whole staff and school librarians to overcome hostility”.

“We began a user group of primary heads, nominated initially, but this didn’t work because they didn’t turn up. It is now voluntary and has a mix of heads and teachers, from different areas and school types.”

“We use service statements which we send to each school at the end of each academic year to reinforce and identify usage and I think schools are very aware of the excellent Service they get.”

“Our aim is to ensure schools receive five times the value of their subscription, in other words they borrow at least five times more single items than they would be able to buy new books using current average book costs. This information is given to schools annually.”

“There was a change in heads view and approach: they always used the SLS, so they carried on: now heads look at the budget and see whether it’s what they want to do.”

“Now we are not carrying on with good will, we have to convince heads. A lot more questioning.”

“The SLS keeps heads aware that they get access to such good quality only if all of them buy back.”

“We need to combat rumours and misinformation.”

As to what is on offer:

“The definition of the Service into ‘core’ and ‘options’ has also allowed us to be realistic about what we try to achieve. Before that we tried to be all things to all schools and were frustrated by not being able to achieve everything.”

“Initial pricing was based on quality – in the overhead costs of putting a book in a school (e.g. stock selection, Service buildings) the only key moveable factor was how long a book would last. We decided to have better quality books that lasted longer – the quality of resources are a selling point (physical quality as well as content).”

“A longstanding arrangement with one library furnishing company provides a good quality refurbishment service to schools and some income in commission for the SLS.”

“Booked visits might be useful (like inspection visits: a designated number of visits by a person as part of the package.”

“We had to rebuild/rebrand/streamline processes e.g. self service project loans (teachers do it themselves); creating a professional image; offering services at very low cost.”

“The extensive training programmes we provide also links us very closely to schools and we are seen as the main provider in this area. There are even occasions when some of our courses stray into the English Inspectors’ area but we have had no problems to date with that.”

There were losses as well as gains:

“We had a huge exhibition and book purchase scheme but with sudden delegation were unable to continue because it was labour intensive and took up a lot of room” or “we reduced mobile visits.”

“Staying close to schools: how to if you can’t go in and do it for free?”

6.2 Thinking strategically

According to the marketing management literature, key factors in marketing of services, whatever the service, include:

- ◆ demand – is it growing, shrinking or changing?
- ◆ accessibility – do all potential customers have easy access to services, when they need them?
- ◆ competition
- ◆ market niche – what services can the SLS uniquely provide that customers value?
- ◆ price
- ◆ patterns of demand – are these constant, seasonal, predictable?
- ◆ potential customers

If some of these topics invoke echoes of Best Value and the associated ideas of constant challenge in questioning of services and of assessing competition, the business literature goes further in exploring the notion of ‘competitive edge’.

In expounding his views on creating and sustaining competitive performance, Michael Porter concentrated on the five forces whose mastery he regarded as crucial to success.¹²

These were:

¹² PORTER, M.E. (1985) *Competitive advantage: creating and sustaining superior performance* London: Collier-MacMillan

- ◆ industry competitors: for the SLS this might mean neighbouring Services, specialist education trainers and consultants as well as other LEA services to schools;
- ◆ potential entrants: such as regionally-based agencies offering INSET and advice; resource centres in local authorities as a result of the latest government education initiative; and perhaps, specialist library suppliers (particularly if the government continues to offer windfall payments to schools for books etc.);
- ◆ suppliers: where the issues are about their adaptability to change and their bargaining power;
- ◆ buyers (the schools and others): where the issues are the same as for suppliers;
- ◆ substitution: the threat of new products and services, such as ICT-based resource provision direct to schools.

Keeping abreast of all these forces requires the ability to thrive on constant change and high quality intelligence (in the military sense). To date, the Services that have led the way into devolved and delegated working have shown their adaptability, but will their informal networks and political nous substitute adequately for any continuing shortfall in strategic management information, or is good strategic and operational management information the key to success?

6.3 Needs identification

Ironically, our national questionnaire survey showed heavy (we are tempted to say 'unwarranted') reliance on the questionnaire as the main means of consulting with users. Whereas the questionnaire survey is a good way to find out who is doing what in general terms, it is much less useful as a tool for finding out about the relative merits of services, how these are being used and how circumstances or preferences are changing amongst customers in directions that suggest alterations to provision. Questionnaires are likely to be even less useful as a means of engaging with customers and potential customers in discussion about the appropriateness of the Service objectives and how these can best be met.

Questionnaires and telephone contact with users did feature in the 'consultation armoury' of case study Services, but they also resorted to a range of other methods of finding out about needs and wants. One of the management reviews listed:

- ◆ school visits
- ◆ individual teacher discussions
- ◆ feedback on loan collections
- ◆ surveys, both general and specific (e.g. on development of an artefacts service for a Heritage Lottery Board bid)
- ◆ work with members of the Inspection and Advisory service and with the National Literacy strategy team
- ◆ networking with other SLS managers about Service developments
- ◆ national curriculum developments

Where there was a customer support service linked to devolved service provision for Education, "members of this senior team visit their allocated schools regularly and ask them for feedback on all services provided through the annual catalogue of traded services. Comments are fed back ..."

7 Assessing impact

7.1 Efficiency versus effectiveness

How is effectiveness measured? Service managers usually answered this question by talking about mission statements, service objectives and targets or service level agreements.

These usually covered:

- ◆ accessibility of the service
- ◆ VFM (“We need to talk money before quality”, according to one Head of Library Service)
- ◆ appropriateness of the response to individual and school needs
- ◆ provision of a comprehensive range of resources to supplement those used in teaching the curriculum
- ◆ prompt responses to requests
- ◆ providing advice
- ◆ supporting promotion of books and reading
- ◆ trading performance/balancing income and expenditure
- ◆ quality of resources (emphasis on quality not volume)
- ◆ levels of complaints
- ◆ buy-back and subscription levels

However, these are all about **service performance** and look at **efficiency**; most are not about the **impact** of the service, that is effectiveness, which can balance available resources against impact or achievement. It is not surprising that the measures of ‘effectiveness’ based on these efficiency statements and objectives, tend to be efficiency measures (even though they might be called ‘effectiveness’).

The research has raised a number of issues about measuring efficiency and assessing effectiveness:

7.1.1 Addressing impact

It is, of course, harder to gather evidence of effectiveness because establishing ‘causal links’ is problematic, but this should not stop the SLS getting some evidence of the effect of their contribution (‘bearing on’ rather than caused by the SLS provision, in Ofsted-speak). The SLS is not alone with this difficulty: the LEA too has to look at the total impact of their contribution on schools, and they must be made to see the SLS impact. LEA advisers assess impact and it is equally hard for them to separate out what difference they make! Advice from the project seminar is to make sure your inputs are acknowledged towards levels of outcomes (e.g. by seeing if there is any coincidence of poor literacy reports and absence of SLS provision).

7.1.2 Core indicators

Is there a need for a core of critical indicators? If so, these should cover some performance areas and some impact areas, but the total should be as few as possible (“we have indicators for everything that moves”). There is a need for Services to develop a set of really telling indicators – but these are hard to create!

The consensus in the project seminar was that a core of crucial indicators could be developed but that this depended on the degree of precision needed. Turbulence (e.g. teacher turnover) could too easily distort Value Added measurement in schools and the small number of teachers and pupils in primary schools made any meaningful year-on-year measurement impossible. Secondary schools were judged to be “fairly good at value added”, but an LEA-level focus was thought to be most appropriate.

7.1.3 Tiered indicators

Various levels of indicator might be useful to accord with the different tiers in Education:

For heads: efficiency; value; perhaps support to advisers. Ability to respond to Government initiatives; physical improvement of the school library (layout, stock, overall appearance);

For teachers impact of teaching strategies/learning activities used with children; variety made possible (otherwise not able to study some authors); relate provision to use of resources in the classroom.

For pupils: attitudes, motivation.

7.1.4 Recording qualitative information

Qualitative data should be systematically recorded. Examples offered in our seminar were:

- ◆ systematic requests for teachers to write about the contribution of the SLS to learning!
- ◆ feedback from parents after homework centre support (e.g. about the time now spent on homework)
- ◆ heads' observations on any perceived wider range of teachers' strategies in classrooms
- ◆ impact of advice (on library design and development) – 'before' and 'after' library photographs

7.1.5 Benchmarking and standards

There is scope for benchmarking comparisons of Services of similar types but good profiles are required as a starting point (those available through the work of LISU tended to be favoured at the seminar). At present, all SLS benchmarking focuses on efficiency, rather than effectiveness, and this is unlikely to change until better impact evidence is available. In the longer term, comparison of impact in relation to aims is likely to be much more fruitful than the present comparison of processes (which are likely to vary according to local circumstances).

Similarly, it may become possible eventually to agree on standards to ensure effectiveness. At present, standards in provision are usually associated with minimum or optimum levels of efficiency.

7.1.6 Other points

Other specific points made in the case study visits or at our seminar were that:

- ◆ the SLS should fight for inclusion in LEA and school inspections in order to secure external feedback against the evidence assembled
- ◆ there is a pressing need for good IT management systems to secure information on, for example, the costs of specific provision now; or demonstrating specific 'value added' to individual schools. Few Services appear to have adequate and sufficiently flexible systems in place at present (see also 6.1 above)
- ◆ the help of LEA advisers should be sought in generating evidence - they are in a position to provide observation and feedback (e.g. on better quality parental story sacks after SLS involvement). A good example was offered by an English Adviser:

"With the National Literacy Strategy we can't do the job without SLS support. We are monitoring the impact ... pairs of Advisers have been viewing four Literacy Hours per school – 400 observations.

There is no doubt in our minds that explicit use of non-fiction, Big Books and Group Readers is much improved. There is far less dependence on reading schemes. The quality of the resources provided by the SLS has enabled this change to occur."

- ◆ It is important to be able to demonstrate the strategic role of Services beyond school improvement (i.e. beyond schools, into lifelong learning, Child Care Challenge etc.)

A consultant specialising in school improvement reported to the project seminar that, in a number of failing schools, the first thing that has been done has been to revamp the library. The effect is to provide a beacon, a signal for change, offering a good environment and comfort for pupils and teachers.

Impact is based on observable differences. To evaluate impact ask:

- What would the LEA lose if there were no SLS?
- What would the school lose if there were no SLS?
- What would subject departments and teachers lose if there were no SLS?
- What would pupils lose if there were no SLS?
- What would the loss look like in practice? What would the observable differences be?

Some examples of indicators are shown in appendix F.

7.2 An OFSTED LEA view

When inspecting LEAs (and Schools Library Services) Ofsted asks:

What are the main priorities of the service? These might be: extending the range of resources available to the school; enriching learning.

What are the main activities through which priorities are pursued? These might be: resource provision and rotation; advice/information services; support and quality assurance for school libraries; training; curriculum development and planning support (e.g. with advisors/inspectors; heads' meetings and conferences); monitoring and evaluation of services.

Once the main areas of activity have been identified, the Service should examine how provision **bears on** (not causes) improvement of school standards, quality or management (to adopt a piece of useful Ofsted-speak). An interesting feature of this project has been the regularity with which people pointed to the importance and usefulness of being inspected by Ofsted as part of the LEA.

Analysis of all the references to Services in Ofsted LEA reports) showed that the Ofsted emphasis is on:

7.2.1 Broadening the scope of reading materials used by pupils through:

- ◆ provision of a wide range of books
- ◆ advice on choosing books/extending the use of library resources
- ◆ INSET for teachers on integrating books into the curriculum or using resources to support literacy
- ◆ promotional activities
- ◆ help with purchasing books (e.g. what motivates teenage boys)

(All of these are part of the fight against "limited vision in schools" and "inadequate spending on learning resources" Ofsted, 1998.)

7.2.2 Impact on literacy

- ◆ nurturing individual pleasure in reading by providing a wide enough range to motivate pupils of different interests and cultures
- ◆ linking literacy levels in schools to the use of the SLS
 - Improved teaching of literacy - range of strategies
 - Reduced reliance on reading schemes and on a limited range of authors and genres

7.2.3 Contribution to the work of school libraries

- ◆ resources to transform libraries so that they able to support teaching and learning in specific ways (e.g. ethos, differentiation, ICT skills, lifelong learning skills)
- ◆ high book stocks/enhanced book provision
- ◆ advice on library environment/development/use
- ◆ development of libraries (supportive learning environment, facilities for independent learning)
- ◆ support for and development of school librarians

all contributing to a reply to the question: 'Are school libraries better able to contribute to teaching of literacy in schools if supported by an SLS?'

7.2.4 Value for money

- ◆ increase in the range of resources for pupils by X%
- ◆ low overheads
- ◆ high quality library stock (condition, curriculum match, differentiation, variety)
- ◆ enabling the school to maintain its quality of learning resources
- ◆ value of the books supplied to an average school

- ◆ efficient provision of: materials used less frequently by a school; expensive resources; short-term needs
- ◆ rate of return compared with buying materials

7.2.5 Working to clear and comprehensible standards

Schools should be able to operate in the full knowledge of the range of services available.

7.2.6 Strong collaborative and co-operative working

Collaborative working between schools and Services should be evinced to meet LEA and government priorities. This depends on evidence of the quality of relationships; quality of mechanisms and structures for collaboration.

7.2.7 Flexible and responsive provision

Demonstrating the ability to alter services to respond: to teachers; to schools (e.g. in making a speedy response to curriculum change/initiatives); or to government priorities (such as remodelling provision to support the National Literacy strategy). Satisfying user needs.

7.2.8 Parity of provision

Services can help provide equitably to smaller primary schools and can help to ensure equality of access to resource-based learning. (“The most remote schools get the same service as town schools.”)

7.2.9 Support for curriculum development

Helping to provide resources of enough quality to enable pupils to develop key skills; contributing to INSET; and offering advice; including support for inculcating the skills of lifelong independent learning.

7.2.10 Meeting specific pupil needs

Effectively addressing specific needs, such as those of children with moderate learning difficulties.

7.3 Methods used to gather performance information

Given the enormous emphasis now put on performance management (Best Value, performance indicators and targets, annual plans etc.), it is perhaps surprising that hardly more than a quarter of the Services that replied to the questionnaire had used any of the less traditional methods of collecting performance data (most continued to rely upon performance statistics, user satisfaction surveys and systematic logging of user comments). A significant number of respondents did comment that they knew that this was not satisfactory “but it is all we can cope with at the moment”. However LEA Ofsted Inspections and Best Value both demand more. It is interesting that a number of the services that had used more ‘unusual’ methods of gathering performance information had been inspected or were already involved with Best Value. These processes had encouraged them to examine the contribution the SLS made to school improvement, teaching and learning and LEA priorities.

The impact of services cannot be gauged from stock levels; buy-back levels, levels of service use and user satisfaction surveys alone. More information is needed – and therefore the use of a wider range of methods to capture that information. It is difficult to imagine that our favourite questionnaire response will continue to be acceptable:

“customers are too busy to fill in forms, SLS is too busy to evaluate. Customers want us to just get on with the job”.

7.3.1 What provides the best quality information?

Obviously the answer to this question depends on what you are trying to find out. If you are focusing on efficiency elements and on how well your internal processes work (e.g. speed of response to requests; complaints; delivery and collection; loans to schools) then generation of statistics will provide good information. If, however, services are concerned about impact,

most valuable services and user perceptions, or want information to support strategic planning and growth, other methods are needed. (This is closely linked to the range of indicators used to judge a service; an issue explored in sections 7.1 and 7.2 above.) A number of important points were made in the survey and case studies as well as at the project seminar about how to obtain high quality evidence of SLS performance:

- ◆ **overall buy-back levels** were regularly invoked as providing hard evidence of performance (“schools won’t buy-back if we are not up to standard”) but this is questionable since it assumes that schools are aware of the impact of the SLS on teaching and learning and discounts other school priorities. Take up of specific services in a menu-driven service is likely to provide more sensitive indication of user perceptions;
- ◆ **one to one, face-to-face feedback** was seen as very useful. School visits were universally recognised as valuable if time allowed; discussions with non-users were seen as at least as important as those with users;
- ◆ our national survey showed that, although only a minority of Services undertook **user satisfaction interviews**, those who did rated this most highly as a source of useful performance information;
- ◆ similarly, the few Services using formal **Service review groups** rated this highly, as did those engaging in **user satisfaction surveys**, especially if these were conducted by an independent agency, the implication being that independence was more likely to produce “convincing evidence”;
- ◆ in a number of cases, the local authority conducted school surveys and included questions on Services, which provided some useful information. One question to ask about school surveys is ‘who answered the questions?’ Is evidence gained from teachers completing evaluation sheets about resources as useful as that from heads completing questions on the value and usefulness of the Service? Many managers felt both were needed, but that they only did the former;
- ◆ **focus groups** were seen as relatively disappointing in their results by the significant minority who had tried them. Our wide experience of focus groups suggests that they have taken over from the questionnaire as the most abused research instrument. Judging by first-hand experience as a participant in poorly run events and comments from other victims, not nearly enough attention is usually paid to the focus. Focus groups can be a powerful way of gathering evidence from carefully chosen well-informed people, providing that the activities are properly structured and designed to obtain information in the areas that concern you – the focus group should not be an excuse for discursive conversation!
- ◆ there was some recognition that evidence of how resources were used was becoming more important
 - “I think this (student learning) can only be gauged by pilot work in schools. ...librarians in schools have never really tackled this area as an issue and this makes it difficult for SLS to try”.

A small number of services were trying to incorporate class visits into their schedules to see the difference made by access to well chosen resources.
- ◆ One important, but underused option emerging from the case studies was adviser/inspection observation. Advisers spoke of how they could see the benefit of Services in the schools (for example, more interesting lessons, greater variety of activity; or extending the range of reading). Some systematic tapping of this evidence should be possible and would certainly enhance the ability of Services to evaluate their impact and contribution to schools. Even Ofsted remarked in one LEA inspection report that “more analysis by the Advisory and Inspection service of the quality of library use in schools would be helpful”. Surely a collaborative initiative with Education is called for?

Overall, a combination of quantitative (performance statistic) and qualitative evidence (based on surveys or interviews) was seen as desirable to provide complementary elements and to build up a better picture. A few Services deployed a formidable battery of methods (“all useful; different perspectives”).

There are all types of evidence available or obtainable within 'the system'. The problem is to put some mechanisms in place that capture the required evidence in a systematic way. Some Services are already working on this ("We ask teachers to put in writing any evidence they have on the contribution of SLS to learning – instead of them just telling us in passing.")

8 Success factors

In thinking about success there is a paradox to be addressed by SLS managers. If they concentrate on demonstrating success to teachers, their heads may not see the full value of the Service and may be reluctant to buy-back. On the other hand, if the head is the main focus and is persuaded to buy-in the service, the teachers may not feel commitment to the ideas behind the decision and may be too busy to integrate resource use into teaching. Success for SLS managers is likely to involve engaging in a subtle process of influencing heads to influence teachers to grasp the full potential of the Service to support the school (with scope for infinite variations on persuading school librarians to persuade curriculum managers to persuade the head, or persuading teachers to persuade etc.)

What else does success mean? Our conversations with service managers raised several issues:

- ◆ a Service may be successful in some aspects and not in others (e.g. it may not work well with inspectors/advisers but may generate lots of successful work in schools)
- ◆ is the prime goal to achieve and sustain a high buy-back rate, to expand the service, to survive under difficult circumstances, or what?
- ◆ if the Service has the potential to grow (well positioned, lots of ideas and a good portfolio of services) but is unable to do so through lack of staff or capital investment, should this be regarded as success or failure?

In our case study interviews, we regularly asked 'what do Services really need to do for successful survival and growth in future?' Perhaps predictably, when we look at the replies of case study Service managers, these are generally more immediate than those of other librarians and educationists interviewed. For SLS managers, to remain successful it was necessary to:

- ◆ have clear and credible (realistic) aims (such as, to support and enrich children's learning)
- ◆ deliver what is promised (stay credible)
- ◆ keep quality high but realise that this is not a cheap option and sell the service on the basis of providing good value for money ("to satisfy the majority of demands at a reasonable quantity and quality and in an acceptable time span")
- ◆ be proactive
- ◆ respond to needs in a realistic way
- ◆ devise a sound pricing policy
- ◆ maintain a presence in schools: offer practical and hands on help as well as advice
- ◆ be at strategic meetings so that when new things come up people 'think libraries'
- ◆ be flexible
- ◆ seek support from key staff in the authority
- ◆ show leadership
- ◆ Exude confidence

The 'views from the sidelines' offered by library service managers and from education staff (heads, officers, advisers) could be summarised as:

- ◆ ensuring a visible presence on key forums (including those involving members)
- ◆ being ready to change and rethink roles when the Internet begins to take over as a resource provider
- ◆ helping the local authority to meet its targets

- ◆ helping the LEA inspection/advisory services by adding to the value of their work (e.g. reading lists to support multi-cultural initiatives; mounting exhibitions at literacy conferences)
- ◆ demonstrating that the Service enables schools to do more than they could without their support or if the service was provided at a lower standard
- ◆ showing whether and how Services enhance school libraries and enable them to contribute more effectively to teaching and learning as well as to pupils' reading
- ◆ recognising the difference between being a popular Service and being indispensable
- ◆ getting more proactive in exploiting Ofsted inspections at LEA and school levels (e.g. collecting reports from school and following up on action points, such as weak subjects or problems over differentiation)
- ◆ obtaining and using high quality information on SLS performance and achievement (hard evidence of impact/value added)
- ◆ shifting emphasis towards more advice and support to balance resource provision
- ◆ emulating the achievement of two Services which, in the judgement of Ofsted, "set out and work to comprehensive, measurable standards"

Finally, two Service managers, who had firmly established their services 'in the marketplace', offered advice to colleagues:

"It is important to maintain (and where possible extend) the customer base. It is important to maintain a high profile in schools and in the LEA. We have to be anxious to diversify services and expect people to be surprised at the range of services we do."

"Don't make judgements; always have an open mind. Listen to what people are saying; take staff with you; be open with your staff. Recognise that someone else has a different agenda."

Sharon Markless and David Streatfield February 2000

Appendix A: Case study interviews: schedule

Case study interviews with SLS Managers

Ensure that authorities visited have completed/will complete the national questionnaire.

Overview of the service

What is going on now in the Authority that affects the SLS?

What is special about their situation? *(Including delegation/devolved budgets; Fair Funding)*

Finance

Negotiating your budget: how do you go about it?

How important is pricing to success? Strategy for deciding pricing? How sensitive? How to change in next few years to continue to be successful?

Pricing policy: issues

Supplementing through initiatives, projects, bids etc.

Staff

structure }
roles }
skills }

most effective mix for success in past?

changes for success in future?

gains and losses in expertise?

morale

development versus burn-out

Activities

How do you arrive at your priorities for the service?

How does the balance of your activities reflect these priorities?

Rationing access?

What are the growth areas?

Where do national initiatives feature in your view of the world? *(What are key priorities affecting you? How does SLS contribute to meeting national priorities?)*

What sorts of collaboration really work and how do you make them work? *(Who with? What are the specific benefits?)*

How do you maintain and build your other relationships?

How do you get the schools on your side? *(Any devious ploys?)*

Managing the service

What sorts of management information do you collect? How? How does it contribute to the work/success of SLS?

How much strategic involvement do you have in the Authority? *(e.g. support for inspection teams; chairing key committees?)* How important is this to the development of SLS?

Appendix A continued

Evaluation

How do you arrive at realistic targets – if you do?

What contribution does the SLS make to school improvement? Evidence?

How can you gauge the impact of the SLS on student learning?

Who collects the performance information you need?

Managing change

Message for other SLS managers? *(e.g. drawn from experience of devolved budgeting, marketing, 'local politics', strategies/policies adopted over past years to ensure success.)*

Key changes over next few years:

What will you have to do to make sure that your SLS is still around in five years' time?
(Critical success factors and strategies)

Questions for Officers/Advisers

Their perceptions of the service (and basis for these judgements)

Ways in which SLS contributes to school improvement? Student learning?

Key elements in the service (for them)?

Areas of collaboration (if any)? [Prompt literacy, numeracy, NYR?]

Key success factors (or what would make it a success)

Need to change in response to changing school needs?

Questions for County/Borough etc. Librarians

Their view of involvement with SLS and how services fit together

SLS management involvement (if any) – probe if line management link; does this work? How? Level of autonomy?

SLS finance/budget setting involvement (if any)

Collaboration between PL Service and SLS?

How is PL service aspiration towards lifelong learning affected by SLS (anomalous? complementary?)

View of successfulness of SLS

What makes it successful (if seen as success)?

How will it need to change to continue being successful (if seen as success)?

Appendix B: Seminar participants and letter

Participants in *Schools Library Services: Survival and Growth?* Invitation Seminar: 15th July 1999

Trish Botten	Library Association
David Cross	Assistant Director, Hammersmith & Fulham LEA
Margaret Croucher	Library and Information Commission (Project funders)
Valerie Gee	Education Management Information Exchange (NFER)
Christine Hall	Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians (ASCEL) Hertfordshire
Patsy Heap	Principal Officer, Children, Youth & Education, Birmingham
John Heartrich	HMI/Ofsted
Kathy Lemaire	Executive Secretary, Schools Library Association
David Lightfoot	County Library Manager, Lancashire
Lucy Love	Principal Librarian, Children & Education, Enfield
Susan McCulloch	Wiltshire Learning Resources
Margaret Smith	Head of SLS, Cambridgeshire
Sarah Titcombe	School & Youth Services Manager, Caerphilly
Wendy Wardle	Children's & Schools Librarian, Coventry
Glenys Willars	County Education Librarian, Leicestershire
Dick Weindling	Create Consultants

Project team

Rachel Boyd	Manager, Library Services to Education & Young People, Somerset
Pam Dix	Head of Education Library Service, Islington
John Dunne	Assistant County Librarian, Children's & School, Hampshire
Sharon Markless	Project Director
David Streatfield	Project Consultant
Alec Williams	Project Researcher

Appendix C: Workshop participants and programme

School Library Services: from survival to growth? Workshop for SLS Managers

PARTICIPANTS

Sue Anderson	Children's & Special Services Officer, Redcar and Cleveland
Janet Andrew	Senior Librarian – Schools LS, Camden
Sarah Arkle	Senior Librarian SLS, Bedfordshire
David Barker	Manager, North East Wales SLS
Peter Bone	City Schools Librarian, Portsmouth
Alison Burgess	SLS Manager, Dorset
Sue Bussey	Principal Librarian, Young People's Services, Harrow
Catherine Collingborn	School Services Librarian, Haringey
Jacque Cranfield	Senior Librarian, Hounslow
Gordon Dickins	Education & Young Peoples Librarian, Shropshire
Eleanor Dowley	Senior Assistant Librarian – Schools, Sunderland
Rosemarie Fleming	Young People's Library Services Librarian, Herefordshire Council
Janet Grimes	SLS Librarian, Merton
Susan Heyes	Head of Schools Library Service, West Sussex
Jean Heywood	Children's & Young People's Resource Officer, Kirklees
Steve Hird	Senior Librarian, Education and Young People's Services, Rotherham
Brenda Hooper	Principal Librarian schools, North Yorkshire
Janet Huffer	Principal Librarian, Education Library Service, Nottinghamshire
Pam Jones	Learning Resources Manager, Knowsley
Sue Jones	Head of Service (SLS) Hertfordshire
Judith Lilley	Schools & Education Library, St Helens MBC
Andrew Milroy	Group Manager, Sheffield
Sue Needham	Manager, Birmingham
Barbara Newman	Service Manager, Bristol
Kerry O'Neil	Principal Librarian, Youth Services, Bedfordshire
Christine Pountney	Senior Children's & Schools Librarian, Redbridge
Cheryl Pridgeon	Schools Librarian, Salford
Sue Riley	Schools Librarian, The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea
Harry Robertson	SLS Manager, Essex
Sue Rogers	Manager, Birmingham
Christine Selby	Principal Librarian, Caerphilly County Council
Eileen Smyth	Children's and Schools Manager, Hillingdon
Frances Stanbury	Principal Librarian, Hounslow
Jaine Stannard	Learning Resources Manager, Newham
Veronica Stower	Cambridgeshire
Beverly Wheeler	Young People's Services Manager, Cornwall
Gerry Williams	SLS Manager, Knowsley
Myra Woodhead	Children's & Young People's Resource Officer, Kirklees
Jean Wolstenholme	Manager Young People's Services, Lancashire
Dawn Woods	SLS Manager, Worcester

Appendix D: Budget Setting and Fair Funding: a checklist

Contacts

1. Do you know on what historical basis your budget is based, if any (e.g. per pupils sum across phases)?
2. Who are the key people in education who can give you answers (e.g. budget holder)?
3. Is there an LMS Group of officers or Heads to which you should be a part?
4. Is there a Service Review Group or similar for your service to which you can refer for advice?

Information

1. What “freedom” do you have to define how you would like your budget to be split between primary/special and secondary?
2. Do you know what the split is in all your budget headings between phases? If not, you need to work them out.
3. Are you allowed to keep amounts back for strategic planning (EDP), nurseries, pupil referral units, early years centres etc.?
4. Are there education policies on the way budgets should be delegated/devolved (e.g. flat rate plus per pupil sum or flat rate only)?
5. On what basis do you have to price your service i.e. 100% buy back or less?
6. What length of Service Level Agreements are being used in your authority (e.g. 1 year or 3 years)?

Your SLS Package

1. Decide whether you want to offer a core or menu service. There may be a difference in the way primaries/specials and secondaries respond.
2. Work out projected levels of income, especially from secondaries, as part of your business plan.
3. Avoid offering too many services cheaply if you are opting for a core package. You may decide some parts of your service as being too expensive.
4. You may be asked to outline in your SLA what aspects of your service you would have to drop if take-up levels are lower than expected.
5. If your service is “subsidised” by the Public Library Service a policy decision needs to be made about that continuing.
6. The prices you quote in your SLA will be based on your current budget. The amounts devolved will increase by inflation for the next financial year and so will your income. Delegated figures require different decisions.
7. Do you want to offer discounts for schools which sign up for 3 years?

The Consultation

1. Make sure you keep to deadlines for SLAs etc. and make sure you see all final drafts, especially the voting paper.
2. Make sure your schools know what is happening and what the timetable is.
3. Sell yourself at every available opportunity e.g. there may be special Heads meetings to explain the consultation.
4. Be prepared to answer queries from schools.
5. Make sure you get full information from your education department about responses.
6. Report back the outcome to Service Review Groups.

John Dunne, September 1999

Appendix E: Menu of services: edited example

LEA SCHOOLS

MENU OF SERVICES

Prices shown are for single loan or service options requested on a pay-as-you use basis.

Discounts are available for schools choosing to buy a package of services.

OPTION NUMBER	SERVICE DESCRIPTION	PRICE
1	Book and audio visual loan service Access to a large wide ranging stock of books and audio visual materials. Materials can be self selected or made up against posted or telephoned request. Cost effective way to augment your own resources. Loan period 1 term.	£X per item (discounts available on larger quantities)
2	“Red Star Selections” Prepacked topic collections, bookable in advance from our catalogue. Loan period _ term (or multiples of _ term).	£X per selection (£X per each extra half term loan)
3	“Six-of-the-Best” Sets of group readers, bookable in advance. Loan period _ term.	£X per set £X for each extra half term loan)
4	Video/film loan service Access to an extensive video and film library. Videos bookable in advance. Loan period 2 weeks. (or multiples of 2 weeks)	£X per item £X for each extra loan period
5	CD Rom loan service Short term loans of CD Roms for evaluation purposes. Loan period of 2 weeks.	£X per item, £X for each extra loan period.
6	Evaluation of library and resource provision <i>An in-depth evaluation of your overall library and resources provision and use.</i>	£X per day
7	Stock audit and report A check of your book provision against National Curriculum requirements. Shows up strengths and weaknesses.	£X per day minimum charge £Y
8	Book stock overhaul Evaluation of provision in central and classroom collections. Sets aside books to discard/replace.	£X per day

Appendix E continued

OPTION NUMBER	SERVICE DESCRIPTION	PRICE
9	<p>Practical assistance Help in maintaining and enhancing your library/resource provision (anything from putting up shelving, moving furniture and materials, tidying up, to complete overhaul and sorting out of books and resources.</p>	£X per day
10	<p>Book processing Full book processing service including fitting of jackets, classification, colour coding etc.</p>	Please ask for details
11	<p>Lamination service for posters etc. also available.</p>	Please ask for details
12	<p>Off air recording Recording service for Channel 4 and BBC 2 television broadcasts</p>	Please ask for details
13	<p>Computerisation service Advice on available software and group purchase and maintenance arrangements. Practical assistance in building up a database of your books and resources. Training and on-going support.</p>	Please ask for details
14	<p>Book promotion/exhibitions/displays Promotion packages available and also ideas, materials and help with any display or exhibition work.</p>	Please ask for details
15	<p>Training On site training of staff/students on individual or group basis in all aspects of library/resource provision.</p>	£X per day
16	<p>Professional advice/help Advice on all library/resources management and organisation matters. Includes a comprehensive design and advisory service on layout, shelving and general storage. Assistance also available for preparation of policy documents and development plans.</p>	£X per hour or quote for work required

Pay –as-you-use

All the services listed can be provided as required on a pay-as-you-use basis. Invoices will usually be sent out at the end of each term or following work carried out if that is preferred.

Delivery costs for loan items are included in the prices shown, provided a minimum of 10 items are required. For smaller orders an additional charge of £X per visit will be made or, if posted, a charge for postage/packing.

For other items, (stationery, books for processing etc.) there is a delivery/collection charge of £X per visit (or charge for postage/packing).

Services requiring staff visits to schools are subject to a travel supplement. VAT is not included in the above prices.

Appendix F: Examples of Performance indicators

A range of indicators has been identified for Service monitoring purposes. Some major ones are:

- ◆ % of LEA schools who elect to buy into the Service
- ◆ % of customers retained
- ◆ % of customers who are able to select resource items that met their specific needs when visiting the Base
- ◆ % of customers using the mail order service who say that the resource collections put together by SLS staff met their specific needs
- ◆ % success rate in hitting the target of delivering resource collections to customers within 6 working days of their being issued
- ◆ % success rate in ensuring that customers booking a visit by the mobile get either their first or second choice date
- ◆ % of customers who rate advisory support provided as being either “Excellent” or Good”
- ◆ % of customers who say the INSET provision met its stated objectives and rate course as either “Excellent” or “Good”
- ◆ Number of advisory visits per school
- ◆ % of stock supporting special needs
- ◆ % of resource collection exchanges taking longer than X