# EVALUATING THE ROLE OF THE PROFESSIONAL CHILDREN'S LIBRARIAN:

## An analysis of functions and development

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# ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the role and function of children's librarians in the United Kingdom; investigating the factors involved in the decline of both specialist posts and specialist education. An identified crisis in the specialism has culminated in a national report outlining the serious issues which need to be addressed if children's librarianship is to move forward in a strong and positive manner. The reduction of specialist foundation courses, the introduction of generalist staffing structures and an increasing tendency for heads of service to fulfil a 'portmanteau' role have contributed to the decline of the specialist area. Since the mid 1980's children's librarianship has changed direction, with a clear move from practitioner to enabler and co-ordinator. In focusing on that change this thesis considers whether services for children and their carers have been enhanced or diminished. The changing role of children's librarians raises the issues of professionalism and the research considers whether or not librarianship, in particular specialist librarians, warrant professional status. This thesis investigates the issues that decide whether an occupation is a profession or not; highlighting the public perception of librarians, the stigma attached to a largely female workforce and, in the case of specialist staff, the low public esteem for those professionals working with children. In attributing professional status to children's librarians the research identifies specific areas where specialist staff can play a strategic role in helping children develop to their full potential. The thesis suggests that children's librarians should take a proactive role in their support of children and families, developing services which emphasise the importance of libraries in terms of literacy, reading, child development and educational support.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Hypothesis and Outline

This thesis examines the widely observed phenomenon of the decline of children's librarianship as a specialist area during the last twenty years. Within the profession many senior practitioners have outlined their concerns; Parker (1) describes a *"national discrepancy of public library services for children"*; Shepherd (2) highlights the loss of direction felt by many specialist staff and Kempster (3) suggests that even amongst children's librarians themselves there is a tendency to see their role as *"unchallenging, not stretching their professional capabilities."* Several hypotheses may be advanced for this decline; new management philosophies and practices; the low public esteem of the professional librarian and the general attitude of the public towards those professionals working with children; the inadequate education and training given to those wishing to work in public libraries, and more specifically within children's librarianship. These hypotheses are inextricably related and it is the intention of this thesis to examine the current status of children's librarianship and the role of specialist staff in the United Kingdom public library system.

In examining these issues the questions of professionalism and status are focused upon in some depth. The thesis considers whether the changing role of children's librarianship has damaged or enhanced the specialist role. There is a need to explore earlier research findings for this present study which identified a feeling among specialist staff that they have moved too far into management and administrative positions, leaving the traditional role of children's librarians to non-specialist and non-professional staff, who have neither the knowledge nor the desire to provide a full range of services to children and their carers. Equally questionable, it may be argued, is the speed with which many of these specialist staff rise to senior management positions, without gaining the experience or expertise which provide a specialist foundation for their own career development and provides them with the knowledge to support and guide other staff.

Whilst investigating the professional role of librarians, specifically children's specialists, the thesis poses the question; does professionalism matter, particularly if children's librarians are not going to attain the status to play a strategic role in supporting children and their families? Further to what extent do children's librarians provide the opportunities and support to enable children to develop to their full potential in society?

The thesis considers the role and function of children's services within the framework of the United Kingdom public library system:

- Investigating the effects on children's services of changes in staffing structures and increasing 'portmanteau' posts for senior children's librarians.

- Assessing the attitude of library directors and senior management teams to the overall development of children's services and the future role of specialist staff.

- Examining the extent to which children's librarianship is viewed as a professional 'cul-de-sac', and regarded as unable to provide practitioners with transferable skills which will enable them to move into senior generalist or managerial positions.

- Investigating how far the reduction in specialist posts has changed the role of children's librarians from practitioners to enablers, who co-ordinate and plan services provided by staff working directly with children and their carers.

- Considering current basic courses and continuing professional development within the specialist area; assessing the role of Library and Information Studies departments, specialist groups, such as the Youth Libraries Group (YLG) and the implications for in-service training.

- Examining the role of public libraries in the support they offer children and their families in terms of formal and informal education. Considering issues such as the manner in which libraries deliver support for curriculum based studies and GCSE coursework; the public libraries role in developing Family Literacy and the public libraries commitment to supporting the lifelong learning process.

- Considering the public libraries role within the current political debate focusing on the family .

## 1.2. Current Developments

Over the last twenty years there has been growing concern for the future of children's librarianship. Initial concerns voiced in the 1970's by, among others, Janet Hill, were felt to have reached a crisis situation in the mid-1980's. A significant number of senior specialists recognised that children's librarianship had reached a crossroads. Shepherd (4) indicates that the specialism must change to meet the needs of a new generation of children, whilst Parker (5) implies that a certain degree of complacency amongst children's librarians has resulted in an assumption that they are doing a "good job", whilst in reality they are failing to take the specialism forward. Kempster (6) calls for a new breed of children's librarians:

*"They can remain as they are, keeping the debate amongst themselves and responding with increasing horror and despair as their services are marginalised they need to begin perceiving themselves as managers of their specialism, not only practitioners with a responsibility to plan and implement programs; train other staff in the basics of the specialism and become a voice in the political process of their organisations with a keen perception of wider professional issues and local government changes."*

In order to survive as a specialist area as well as meet the demands of a new generation of children and their carers, specialist staff have had to adopt a much broader professional approach; maintaining their specialist skills but developing promotional and managerial skills which would enable them to ensure that children's librarianship remained a clearly focused and central part of the public library service.

In 1987 the Society of County Children's and Education Librarians (SOCCEL) and the Association of Metropolitan District Education and Children's Librarians (AMDECL) expressed their concern regarding the clear deterioration of children's library services. Their joint approach to the Library and Information Services Council (LISC) resulted in the 1995 report 'Investing in Children' (7). This, coupled with the publication, also in 1995, of the first review of public library services since the 1942 McColvin Report (8), seems to indicate a growing national concern for the future of public libraries. However, the concern for the future of public libraries, particularly children's services, seems to remain an insular one; much debate takes place within the profession but there is little evidence of public concern or national political interest. It may be

that within the context of the wider debate on related issues such as educational standards, falling literacy rates and the teaching of reading, the role of the public library is considered but little written evidence of this is to be found. The significance of library services for children and the value of those staff trained to provide them is rarely acknowledged in written output from other professions. Both the Library Association Guidelines for 'Children and Young People' (9) and the LISC report emphasise the important role libraries can play in stimulating and developing children's skills; they show that libraries not only assist in developing language and literacy skills but that they also have a key role to play in extending social, emotional and intellectual skills. The LISC report emphasises the significance of library services for children, focusing on the keyword *'Investing'* in children; suggesting that in focusing on children we are investing in everyone's future. There is clear evidence of many local authorities responding positively to the recommendations that the report highlights. Elkin and Lonsdale outline some of the local authority responses to the report. They suggest that, in the main, the responses have been positive and that if nothing else the report has been seen as a *'timely stimulus for discussion'.* However, at a time when children's education, in particular literacy standards, are at the top of so many political agendas, the government response to both the LISC report and the Public Library Review has been limited. Elkin and Lonsdale (10) comment that:

*"The Public Library Review and Investing In Children have had little obvious effect on government policies..... The potential of the public library as a force to reach children and their parents/carers is still not fully recognised and the damage inherent in many of the cutbacks being experienced by public and school libraries is little understood."*

## 1.3. Background to the Study - Historical Development

The current concern over the future of children's librarianship and the role of specialist staff reflects the output of professional opinion over the last twenty years. In 1973 in 'Children Are People' (11) Janet Hill spoke critically of the manner in which children's librarians choose to remain within their specialist field; seeming to pay little, or no, attention to political or social factors affecting all aspects of librarianship. She suggested that in the struggle to create a specialism, children's librarians had come to believe that only specially trained staff could successfully carry out work with young people. In doing so they had provided other staff with the opportunity to relinquish all responsibility for the

provision of services to children and their carers. The concerns expressed by Hill focus on some of the major issues which have affected the development of children's librarianship.

Children's librarianship developed as a specialism in the 1930's and Hill pays tribute to the strength of character, determination and clarity of vision of those early librarians who ensured a firm foundation on which later specialists could build. She suggests, however, that the image that has pervaded the specialism is not one of strong conviction and dynamism but one of gentleness and concern only for bringing children and books together. Elkin and Lonsdale (12) point out that the image and status of children's librarians were firmly established at this stage:

*"The overwhelming majority of individuals responsible for children's services were women. This was something which was to characterise children's librarianship for half a century, and a factor which some believed to be detrimental to the development of their specialism."*

A further factor characterising attitudes towards children's librarianship can also be traced back to the beginnings of the specialism. Children's work was frequently regarded as intellectually less demanding than other areas of the profession. Ellis (13) suggests that the selection of specialist staff suffered from the belief that personal qualities and a sense of dedication far out-weighed professional capabilities and academic qualifications in the provision of services for children. The creation of children's areas, frequently with their own staff and their own entrance, served to ensure the sense of separateness which has pervaded children's services for many years.

Several factors helped to formulate and develop children's library services during the 1940's. Most significantly the 1944 Education Act which ensured greater opportunities for more children, leading to a real demand for enhanced library provision. The Act provided schooling for all children between the ages of 5 and 15; creating a pattern of education which was intended to educate each child according to its own needs, with no category of student being superior to another. Ellis (14 ) comments that the Act resulted in the raising of literacy standards to a far higher level than ever before witnessed in the United Kingdom. Although education still remained firmly rooted within individual schools, the increase in literacy and a greater number of students seeking further information had an impact for public library services. This can be compared with the impact of the 1988 Education Act on public libraries. In

1988 the introduction of a core national curriculum, standard attainment targets (SATS) and testing, and later testing for reading and local management of schools all had major effects on the way in which public library services developed and on the manner in which librarians focused their professional skills. Neither of the Acts considered the implications for public libraries of developments within education. Greater parental concern and pressure from schools to provide children with greater access to books and other resources for formal study purposes have influenced the way public library services have developed. The creation of schools library services to provide a specific service for schools and teachers has often been seen as detrimental to public library services for children. In broad terms the former is seen to support children's educational development whilst the latter relates to children's recreational and entertainment needs. Clearly the demarcation line is not as straightforward as that and public libraries have always supported children's educational development as well as playing a cultural role.

In professional terms the creation of The Youth Libraries Section of The Library Association in the late 1940's helped to focus attention on the growing importance of children's work. However, it was in the 1960's and early 1970's that services really began to expand. The passing of the Public Library and Museums Act (15) in 1964 marks the beginning of a time of considerable change for public library services. The act placed libraries under the supervision of the Secretary of State for Education, whose responsibility was to ensure that local authorities *'encouraged both adults and children to make full use of the library service'*. Ellis (16) suggests that direct references to library provision for children within the act were significant in that they ensured that all authorities, some of whom had previously neglected children's services, had to provide library services for young people. The new syllabus for the study of librarianship introduced by The Library Association in 1964 included two papers relating to the study of children's librarianship and children's literature, thus allowing librarians to gain a basic grounding in service provision and the literature available. A generally more prosperous economic outlook in the country overall ensured considerable development and growth within the public library system. New buildings introduced 'open plan' designs which enabled children's services to move from the isolation of a separate department. Local Government Reorganisation in 1974 brought significant changes and increased opportunities for library services. It was a time when librarians were forced to radically rethink the way they delivered library services and to reconsider what the focus of those services should be. Eyre (17) emphasises the importance of *"promotional strategies as part of the fundamental service"*.

The beginnings of community based library services were visible throughout the public library system, but children's librarianship was at the forefront of outreach development. Kempster (18) suggests that in the extensive development of outreach services, children's librarians failed to communicate their intentions and purposes to other librarians:

*"Staff left 'holding the fort' can resent the specialist going out and 'playing' at the local playgroup and getting out of the 'real' work of serving the public in the library."*

The isolation which was created by the separateness of service provision now continued in the manner in which services were delivered. Despite the move towards community librarianship, adult provision remained essentially a building-based service, whilst children's librarianship reached more dominantly beyond library walls. Shepherd (19) indicates that, in their desire to reach children outside the formality of library buildings, library staff frequently 'over-stretched' themselves and earned a reputation for being *"unrealistic in their demands"*. Kempster (20) outlines three reasons why the isolation of children's services is so deep rooted. She identifies the initial isolation leading to separate development: *"the superficial but influential 'look' of the specialism"* which appeared to concentrate on the 'fun' element of the service rather than its educational role, and the *"lack of accountability of specialist staff"*. For many librarians outside the specialism children's work has always been regarded as a separate service; a service which they can choose to ignore. In many cases children's librarians have done little to prevent such a situation, being happy to retain children's work within the specialist area. In focusing on the 'fun' element of the service, storytelling, book related promotions and holiday activities children's librarians have failed to emphasise the significance many of these activities have in terms of literacy development and information handling skills. It could be argued that children's librarians have done neither themselves nor their specialism any favours by highlighting the very visible promotional aspects of children's work. Without clear aims and objectives for individual promotions and built in performance measurement strategies then children's librarians lose credibility for themselves and their clients with colleagues in other areas of the service.

By the mid 1980's children's librarianship had reached a crisis situation; appearing to lack clear goals and unsure of its future role. A paper presented by Ann-Marie Parker (21) in 1986 identified several major issues which could be seen as a threat to specialist provision. Amongst the most significant were

the *"threat to specialist courses in library schools; the reduction in specialist posts in favour of generalist team librarians; the widening of senior children's posts to take on additional responsibilities, and the increasing pressure from education on school library services"*.

Jennifer Shepherd (22) suggested that children's librarianship had *"lost its way"*, indicating that children's services had not developed sufficiently to meet the demands of children in the 1980's and beyond.

One external factor affecting library provision for children was the reduction in funding from central government for the provision of local services and the 'rate capping' of high spending authorities who stepped outside their targeted spending. The recession hit library services hard and many would argue that children's library provision was amongst the services most severely affected. In 1980 Virginia Berkeley (23) wrote:

*"..... as the recession bites deeper and libraries tighten their belts, children are less likely these days to have access to the expert knowledge and guidance of specialist librarians. Before it is too late, the case must be made, the evidence is clear, children need the guidance and assistance of knowledgeable specialists in guiding their selection and of training them to independence in library use - to provide the bridge between the child and the book which is so often an essential part in children's reading development."*

The integration of services under the auspices of team and community librarianship provided a unity which brought adult and children's service closer together than ever before. Although in many authorities specialist posts were retained within team structures, team librarianship offered the opportunity for all professional staff to take some responsibility for providing and developing children's services. Such structures also enabled all specialisms to be considered within the total concept of the library service rather than developing as separate entities. The focus of team librarianship was on librarians performing professional duties and it freed many staff from the day-to-day routines of the library service. Shepherd (24) suggests, however, that in some authorities such action lead to the loss of specialist posts. Other authorities clearly supported the arguments put forward by Hill, which indicated that a specialist service restricted the number of librarians prepared to make a valuable contribution to the development of children's work. In 1985 Bradford removed all its children's specialist posts and gave responsibility for

such services to assistant area librarians. Wilkes (25) states that this action removed the isolation and lack of accountability which had been amongst the strongest features of specialised children's services, and ensured that more staff were involved in providing services for children. Shepherd (26) states that the Society of County Children's and Education Librarians (SOCCEL) statistics from 1979-84 show a dramatic fall in the ratio of specialist staff to child population. A survey carried out in 1988 by Diana Edmonds 'Public Library Services for Children and Young People' (27) shows that in certain areas there has been a move towards greater involvement of generalist librarians and para-professional staff in the provision of services for children.

The widening role of senior children's specialists has been commented on by both Ann-Marie Parker and Jennifer Shepherd; the latter outlining the benefits and disadvantages of such a situation:

*"Whilst the widening remit and the management group status which tends to go with it must be welcome (for unless we have people who understand the objectives at management level we shall lose out) there are dangers of over-absorption, especially if there are not appropriate specialist posts at middle management to provide the necessary support. Worse, in some authorities children's work has merely been absorbed by lending services and the specialism has been dissolved."* (28)

Throughout the 1980's educational changes played a significant role in determining the manner in which library services to children would develop. The National Curriculum, increasing demands on public libraries from General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) students, local management of schools and the 1988 Education Reform Act all had significant impact on library services. In terms of the National Curriculum the focus was placed on specific areas for study, for example in history the Tudors and the Victorians were highlighted. This placed heavy demands on specific areas of stock in public libraries, demand which they were often not able to meet. Frequent changes in certain areas of the curriculum meant that public libraries were often left with stock that was no longer required. As publishers identified a wider market for non-fiction books they increased the number of titles relating to curriculum topics and reduced the amount of materials produced on topics outside the curriculum. Librarians have witnessed a sharp decline in titles which could be described as 'popular' non-fiction, focusing on hobby rather than school related interests. The development of GCSE work has meant public librarians attempting to satisfy the individual demands of students for

items which may be ephemeral or in non-book format; information which is normally required very quickly. Public libraries have had to extend the range and format of the materials they stock in order to meet these demands. Authorities have responded in different ways to these demands. Suffolk have established homework collections which include access to CD-ROM materials; whilst Norfolk has developed a centrally based 'Curriculum Collection' to which all libraries have access and can request a specific title or a collection of books.

One of the most significant changes brought about by the 1988 Act was Local Management of Schools (LMS), this effectively delegated all financial responsibility directly to individual schools and their governors. This means that individual schools are 'juggling' their own finances and the purchase of library books and other resources must compete with school repair work and the number of teachers a school can employ. Pressure has been put on some public libraries to support schools who either cannot, or will not allocate sufficient funds to library resources. Whilst the public library must support the needs of individual children it's remit does not include the provision of materials on bulk loans to schools. In some cases this has caused considerable friction between public library services and schools library services.

The publication of the Library and Information Services Council (LISC) report 'School Libraries: The Foundations of the Curriculum' (29) clarified the role of school libraries and school library services. The report emphasised the integral role that librarians should adopt in pursuing their contribution to the educational process. It drew attention to the importance of information skills in all areas of study, and suggested that librarians and teachers should work more closely together in ensuring that students develop such skills. Shepherd (30 ) suggests that it was at this point that the skills and knowledge required to work in School Library Services changed course from those needed to work with children in Public Libraries. Traditional skills, such as in-depth stock knowledge were replaced by the need for a detailed understanding of the education process:

*"The need for specialists who can contribute positively to the educational process, recognising the tension between skills and content, transferring the techniques of information handling skills to the needs of education and able to become involved in curricular debate and to analyse and deliver in-service requirements."*

The provision of such clear guidelines for one aspect of the service ensured that children's services in public libraries suffered from even greater ambiguity.

Kempster (31) suggested that without national guidelines and clear objectives children's work would be threatened in the same manner as it had been in the United States where, in the 1970's, serious consideration was given to placing all library services for children under school library control. Many senior children's librarians retained their responsibility for school and children's services. Heeks (32) comments that such a situation could present a problem, stating that the expertise required by school library service staff was very different from that needed to occupy public library specialist posts:

*"Some heads of School Library Services, faced with growing demand from schools, began to see responsibility for children's services as an embarrassment. The expertise required of School Library Service staff moved from knowledge of children's books to knowledge of curriculum development, and this, too, lessened the community of interest between children's and school services."*

This change of emphasis created, in many authorities, a significant division between professional staff. Schools library services and public library services for young people tended to focus on different aspects of service provision. In some cases few links between the two areas of the services were preserved and even joint book selection meetings were disbanded.

Heeks also identifies several authorities who, in the 1980's, separated their school and public library services, in the belief that both sections of the service would benefit from such a division.

Within recent years there has been a serious decline of library school courses relating to children's work. The International Federation of Library Associations' (IFLA) section for children's libraries and librarianship published recommendations in 1986 which included the following:

*"The education of children's librarians must be an integral part of all library education. Courses relevant to children's work must be compulsory for those wishing to work in public libraries. Library services for children must be available as an opportunity for specialised studies within basic education courses."* (33)

In 1986 Helen Pain-Lewins conducted a survey on 'Professional Education and Children's and School Librarianship' (34) which revealed that there were very few courses available for those wishing to specialise in work with children. She suggested that in an increasingly generalist profession it was important that all public librarians had a basic grounding in the provision of services for children.

The lack of higher education courses relating directly to the study of children's librarianship and children's literature available for the continuing development of working librarians suggests that an initial grounding is essential if librarians are to understand the children they serve. Pain-Lewins comments further that although not all librarians work directly with children some will go into management and take responsibility for all aspects of the service:

*"Some students will rise to a level of public library management which will involve them in policy making. They will be making decisions affecting this important area of work, even though their experience may not have included working with children, so a basic knowledge and understanding received during professional education becomes vital."*

The demise of specialist training had serious implications for in-service training and the nature of courses organised by specialist groups. In a recent survey carried out by the Youth Libraries Group (YLG) it became clear that opportunities for the study of children's librarianship do exist. Saunders (35) indicated that the development of modular courses and flexible learning schemes had enabled the creation of more opportunities for courses relating to the specialist area. Elkin (36), however, indicates that specialist studies require a clear structure and a firm commitment to continuing professional education by all library providers:

*"First professional courses increasingly aim to provide a grounding which needs to be built on later, through professional education and development."*

Elkin further states that in a climate where courses must be financially viable core provision is becoming increasingly more generalist with an emphasis on managerial skills and information technology.

In examining the role of specialist staff it is clear that their role has changed; but how far have these changes been over-shadowed by the lingering strength of the stereotyped image of the specialism? Shepherd (37) has suggested that *"there is a credibility gap between the popular image of children's work and the real work of the children's specialist"*. The traditional skills of the children's librarian are outlined by Shepherd as *"a liking for children and their books, story-telling and craftwork abilities"*. She suggests, however, that many employers are now seeking evidence of very different skills:

*"..... evidence of teamwork, understanding of educational aims, of reading methods, of child development, good classroom management, potential as a trainer,*

*flexibility, management skills to contribute to the management of change."*

Until very recently there was strong evidence that children's librarians themselves retained the view of the specialism as the 'Cinderella' of the profession. Jennifer Shepherd (38) has commented that *"there is a tendency in children's librarians towards negativism and the unwillingness to adapt to change"*. In 1987 Grace Kempster carried out a survey of staff working with children in the London Boroughs of Bexley, Bromley and Croydon (39). Her survey results indicated that specialist staff voiced *"a general feeling that one is stereotyped and that skills learnt in children's work cannot be transposed back into general library work or even into another specialism"*. The results indicate further that many specialists believe that their work is *"unchallenging, not stretching professional capabilities, a dead end which typecasts your whole career"*. Shepherd (40) argues, however, that children's librarianship now warrants an even greater degree of specialism:

*"The nature of children's work appeared to require a greater degree of specialism than ever before, including work with parents and other adults; family reading groups; contribution to NNEB child care courses; playgroup courses; work with secondary students on child development; liaison and training for other professionals in the fields of education, social work, the voluntary sector, health care."*

It may be that children's librarians are viewed as having little expertise. This may be the fault of specialist staff themselves who have, in the past, allowed themselves to be seen as 'child-minders' who provide free 'cut and stick' activities, thus presenting a childish image which does their credibility no good. Elkin (41) suggests that although the *"craft or fun side .....* [does not reflect] *a demonstration of knowledge and skills of bringing children and their books together."* it should be recognised that within the 'enjoyment factor' of many events there are hidden implications for reading, literacy and study skills.

There has often been a general assumption that children's librarians are 'doing a good job', but there has been little documented evidence to support such a belief. Some individual authorities have introduced performance measurements which collects statistical data relating to children's book issues, number of children attending events and so on. However, many specialist staff feel that such data does not adequately reflect the quality and value of their work, nor does it reveal the true impact of services on individual children and their carers. This suggests that specialist staff themselves need to find more effective ways of measuring the services they provide which include the quality factors. The demand for more accountability of specialist staff has provided children's librarians with the

opportunity to view the services they provide in a more professional and objective manner. The initial research for this thesis showed that many authorities were still lead by external factors; they had neither a policy document nor a service development plan and were thus unable to measure their services effectively. Later research evidence indicated that the creation of national guidelines for children's services had provided the impetus for many authorities to review their own service delivery using the guidelines as a basis for measuring their own provision. Philip Marshall (42) suggests that it is time to promote a new image to colleagues and customers:

*"As a profession we must project a positive image. We must define our priorities, target our services and evaluate them critically. We must create a wider awareness of what we do so that our 'clients', be they children, parents, teachers, politicians or colleagues in other areas of the profession, have a very clear perception of the contribution children's librarians make to society."*

## 1.4. Current Situation

Recent national initiatives suggest that the specialism is now ready to move forward in a positive manner. National guidelines for children's services were compiled by a working party consisting of senior practitioners from a range of authorities and professional organisations and were published in 1991 by The Library Association. These were not prescriptive but sought *"to highlight key issues which should form the basis for clear and objective policy at a local level"*. (43)

The guidelines emphasise the special needs of children as a client group but stress the importance of seeing such services within the total context of the library service:

*"Children's needs are important enough to require specialist posts, children's needs are too important to be left to specialist posts."*

A revised edition of these guidelines is to be produced in 1997. All the sections in the guidelines will be updated and emphasis will be placed on the demarcation between schools library services and public library services for children. The updated guidelines will also include sections on information technology, performance indicators - both qualitative and quantitative, surveying children, working in partnership, literacy, the role of the library in a civil emergency, staffing and training, study in the library, equality of access and early years.

In 1992 the Library and Information Services Council (LISC) established a working party to examine existing library services for children and to make recommendations as to how these services might be improved. Their executive summary outlined the key areas for concern:

*"Problems in public and education library services for children and young people are evident in inequality of access to facilities and services; wide disparities in standards of provision across the country; lack of integration of services; failure to accord proper priority to children and their needs; inadequate or no research into reading and information needs:*

*The role, function and mission of library services for children and young people have to be seen in the round, with integration of the major channels of delivery - the public library service for children and young people, and the schools library service and libraries in individual schools - at strategic level;*

*The potential of the public library service as a force in support of reading and information literacy cannot be too strongly emphasised."* (44)

The 1995 Public Library Review (45) makes little direct reference to children's services. This may be because it did not want to go over ground already covered in the LISC Report. However, one of the major 'core' functions of the library service was identified as:

*"to enlighten children, by enabling and encouraging them to discover information and the advantages of reading."*

Of the sample of users and non-users of the public library service, three-quarters identified enlightening children as a key function of libraries, emphasising the importance of the role of specialist staff and the significance of investing quality service delivery for children to ensure the full development of future generations.

The focus of much that has been written is the need to work more closely with other areas of the public library service and with colleagues outside the profession in a cross-disciplinary manner. The research for this thesis found many examples of such work including the Birmingham Bookstart Project. In recent years there has been a marked change between the principle channels of delivery in the provision of services to children. This has created unnecessary rifts which have not helped to provide better services; future developments must redress this situation. Public libraries need to be placed on a wider national agenda if they

are to be taken seriously by both local and national politicians and other decision makers:

*"We try to be a stand-alone discipline rather than an integral part of a greater endeavour. We ..... define the discipline narrowly, happily burden it with our own rules and theories. We can be a bit paranoid, a bit protective."* (46)

## 2. Methodology

The purpose of this research is to investigate the current state of children's librarianship within the public library system of the United Kingdom. Considering whether gaining managerial status has reduced the level of specialist skills within the specialism. The thesis considers whether children's librarianship is still regarded as a professional 'cul-de-sac' and asks how far children's librarians themselves ensure children's work is seen as a significant part of mainstream librarianship. It examines the changes that have taken place within the specialism and assesses the factors which have been most influential in creating such change. It considers the decline of specialist posts in favour of generalist staffing structures and asks whether this has damaged the specialism or not. The thesis investigates whether or not librarianship is a profession and asks how far children's librarians use their professional status to play a strategic role in enabling the child to develop and progress in society.

The methodology selected for this study comprises three inter-linked elements.

- An initial literature search provided background material and an overview of existing material in the specialist area. A second extensive literature search considered what was meant by the term 'professional'. Concentrating on the professional status of librarianship and focusing specifically on the work carried out by children's librarians.

- A questionnaire provided data outlining the current state of the specialism within the library service. This also enabled a comparison of service delivery and staffing structures in different types of authority.

- Follow-up interviews enabled detailed data gathering regarding the operation of children's services in different types of authority. The interviews also presented the opportunity to obtain the views of 'dedicated' senior children's librarians regarding the changing role of specialist staff; and to test the hypothesis that children's librarians are becoming an extinct species, or have evolved into generalist management roles.

It is recognised that no methodology is perfect and the strengths and weaknesses of the selected research methods for this thesis are discussed later in this chapter.

## 2.1. Literature Search

An initial literature search provided the background for the research programme. It considered the existence and availability of material relating to the changing managerial role of children's librarians; assessing the contributory factors in the formation of the specialist area. Margaret Kinnell (1) suggests that there is a tendency within librarianship for researchers to limit their searches to a specific subject area, thereby failing to look at studies outside the subject field which may affect our perceptions and future development. Whilst concentrating on significant developments within the profession the literature search also focused on wider issues which may have had considerable influence on the manner in which the specialist role has developed. These included:

- Child development
- Educational trends
- Literacy
- The role of women in society
- The management of change
- Children in society

To set children's librarianship within an historical context an overview of service development and the role of specialist staff formed the basis of the search. This in-depth search provided the background of the specialism and an analysis of current trends. The initial literature search focused on issues and developments within the last twenty years. Inevitably this period could not be studied in isolation and thus earlier items of particular relevance to the investigation were also consulted. Particular attention was placed on items relating to the management of services and the role of training within the specialism. The evidence suggests that although much has been written about children's librarianship in the United Kingdom the bulk of that work pertains to the 'techniques' of the specialism rather than the management and development of the service.

An investigation of Aslib Index to Theses shows little or no research relating directly to the subject area. The main focus within the specialism are on children's literature or practicalities such as storytelling and promotional activities. In recent years some attempt has been made to rectify this situation. The annual Library and Information Statistics Unit (LISU) report (2) provides a statistical summary of information relating directly to the subject area, but

gives little in-depth analysis of its findings. In 1993/94 this report concentrated almost solely on School Library Services. The British Library report "Public Library Services for Children and Young People" by Edmonds and Miller (3) recognises the need for an overview of service provision. Their report, however, is limited in its approach, concentrating as it does on a statistical survey of service provision in England and Wales and an in-depth study of only six English authorities. Kinnell (4) points out that ultimately the value of such research is limited, citing the fact that so few authorities carry out in-depth research into their own services that an overall picture is difficult to obtain. She further suggests that a statistical approach is limited as it only looks at 'what is' and fails to explore the nature of the system or provide an analysis of what focus the service should have. In my opinion such research provides a basis, a starting point for further and more detailed study. However, the research for this thesis shows that many authorities cannot provide analytical data relating to issues such as staffing structures and service provision. Measuring the success or failure of service industries with quantitative measures only limits the value of such research; we need to find methods of developing qualitative research measures which clearly focus on taking the service forward.

The consistent lack of material relating directly to the management of children's services in the United Kingdom indicated the need to widen the search to include the United States and Canada. Research and trends in certain European countries were also relevant to this study. These were used on an informational basis to support evidence relating to developments in the United Kingdom. Specific developments relate to particular needs in each country and do not always provide a clear comparison. A comparison with public library development in the United States is, perhaps, the most useful comparison to make. Such a study does, however, need to take account of issues such as historical development, different forms of government and control and public attitude to library provision. In the United States there appears to be more research activity. This was made evident by a survey of Library Literature which lists United States thesis material. American researchers are themselves critical of the lack of material relating directly to public library services for children. There has, however, been a steady growth of coverage since the mid-1970's. Shontz (5) suggests that one of the reasons for this development was the 1970 proposal by the Committee of Library Development in New York to transfer all library services for children to elementary school media centres. Under such circumstances the providers of public library services for children had to be able to justify their work to outside

bodies. In the United Kingdom Kempster (6) has drawn attention to the need for a national survey of available research on children's librarianship. She draws attention to the value of an American survey produced by Sheila Fitzgibbon. Fitzgibbon (7) has provided an overview of research on children's librarianship in America, thus bringing together studies of all types and levels and providing a clear indication of areas for further study. In Canada, Adele Fasick (8) has researched various areas of the specialism and has played a significant role in developing national policies and guidelines.

As the research progressed it became more focused on the nature of professionalism and professional identity within the specialist area. It became clear that specialist librarians' attitude to their own professional status had a significant impact on the way they delivered services and the role they played in their own authority and in the profession generally. This seemed to provide an important focus for the research as it seemed pivotal to the discussion on the specialist role. A further extensive literature search was undertaken. This second search concentrated on four main areas:-

- The general history and development of 'professions' in the United Kingdom, focusing particularly on a period since the beginning of the 1970's to the current day, which has witnessed significant changes in the public perception and government attitude towards professionalism.

- Professional status within local government, concentrating on factors which have affected the role of local government officers. Examples of this are the changing emphasis in the partnership between officers and elected members and the role which central government plays in deciding how local government operates.

- Librarianship as a profession; exploring the status of librarians with regard to their professional image.

- Children's librarianship as one area of that profession; with particular emphasis on whether the professional focus has changed in recent years and the extent to which specialist staff play a significant role in the lives of children and their carers.

The history and development of the 'professions' within the United States and the United Kingdom is well documented. Perkin (9) provides a clear account of

the rise and decline of professional society since the middle of the nineteenth century. More recently Friedson (10) has explored the role of the professional in modern society. By their nature the professions are a limited elite and none of the major studies included librarianship as part of that elite. An American study by Etzioni (11) includes librarianship in a group of semi-professionals which also included teaching and nursing.

Local government restructuring, severe financial constraints and pressure from central government are some of the reasons why the role of the professional local government officer is well researched. Laffin and Young (12) and Stokes (13) trace the history of professionalism within local government and outline the reasons why professionals must develop and change their role if they are to survive. Neither of these titles, or others on the subject, made more than a passing reference to librarianship.

It quickly became clear that within the literature relating directly to librarianship there were difficulties in relationship to this study. Initially there is disagreement amongst librarians themselves as to whether librarianship should be termed a profession or not. Both Reeves (14) and Flanagan (15) suggest that librarianship fails to meet the measures that constitute a profession. Whilst Durrance (16) proposes that whilst libraries are regarded as important, those who run them are not. The literature supporting the professional status of librarianship did not produce a consensus of opinion as to what was meant by the term 'professional'. Galler (17) suggests that in the library world professionalism is not limited to qualified librarians, indicating that providing a public service calls upon all staff to perform their duties in a professional manner. In 1985 Adams (18) stated that within librarianship professionalism could not be judged by paper qualifications alone and stressed that a distinction needed to be made between *"professional ability and professional attitude"*. The Aslib 'Review of Public Library Services' (19) in 1995 states that it is the attitude of librarians themselves that has coloured perceptions outside the profession:

*"Librarians have undersold themselves where they are seen to concentrate on everyday clerical routines in libraries, instead of developing and promoting their skills and knowledge of the materials with which they work. Librarians have a professional role in the provision, promotion, exploitation and development of the materials available in a library."*

In focusing on children's librarianship it was difficult to find any literature

relating directly to the topic of professionalism. The slow development of librarianship as a profession is witnessed most clearly in children's work. In an area of the profession which was initially seen as the province of women, and given the lowly status frequently associated with working with children, staff have had to work hard to promote their professional image. Kempster (20) stresses that professional expertise lies in the knowledge of literature and bringing that literature and the child together. A view echoed in the LISC report 'Investing in Children' (21) which voices concern about the lack of specialist training resulting in the provision of poor quality services for children. In their review of the LISC report, Elkin and Denham (22) note that there is a *"decline of professional posts, allied to a lack of recognition of children's librarianship as requiring high level professional ability and knowledge at all levels".*

## 2.2. Data Collection and Interpretation

A questionnaire was designed which concentrated on three significant areas of study; the role of the head of children's services, the role of specialist staff and current levels and standards of training and education. It was felt that these three areas reflected current areas of concern and change within the specialism. Until this point the research had concentrated on existing literature and it was considered important at this stage to review current practises; reflecting how far the current literature output actually represented current working practises. The questionnaire called for respondents to provide quantitative data relating to a specific specialism within their own authority. The data was to be used to provide an overview of existing provision. Inevitably the data could only reflect the nature of those authorities who responded in sufficient depth to provide analytical data. The majority of questions were posed within a structured framework providing respondents with a choice of answers, whilst retaining the possibility of making individual comments regarding their own authority. A limited number of questions asked for a qualitative response on behalf of individuals as well as making reference to their own authority. It was estimated that the respondents would be able to complete the questionnaire within a thirty minute period. (Respondents were asked to supply, where appropriate, material relating to the study, such as training programmes, policy documents and examples of publicity materials.) Although the questionnaire was not formally 'piloted' in advance of the initial mail-drop, the feasibility and relevance of its content was discussed with colleagues and fellow professionals with a detailed knowledge of the specialist area. These colleagues were also asked to complete a questionnaire, which presented the opportunity to reassess the questionnaire before it was sent out.

It was felt that these measures removed the necessity for formally 'piloting' the questionnaire. The results suggest that an initial 'pilot' outside a localised area might have identified problems of terminology .

The questionnaire was sent to all 170 Library Authorities in the United Kingdom. It was sent, via the Director of Library Services, to the 'Head of Children's Service'. An explanatory letter outlining the nature of the project was also included. The questionnaires were distributed in April 1991, allowing approximately ten weeks response time before follow-up interviews were due to take place. Approximately 78% of the questionnaires were returned, the majority before the end of June 1991, thus enabling the careful selection of follow-up interview venues. The results of the questionnaire, discussed in tandem with data from the transcribed follow-up interviews provided a clear outline of the current state of children's librarianship in the United Kingdom. The three 'key' areas featured in the questionnaire were:-

### 2.2.1. The Role of the 'Head of Children's Services'

An examination of the role of the 'Head of Children's Services' outlining the responsibilities that lie within their specialist function and their management status within their own authority. Considering the effect on children's services of four factors:

- The increasing demands placed on senior staff from the education sector in the 'Head of Services' dual role as co-ordinator of services to schools and public libraries.

- The growing tendency to find services for children and young people represented at an authority level on the senior management team.

- The move towards senior staff occupying more generalist posts with a wider brief than services for children.

- The changing pattern of managing local government services by incorporating several departments into larger directorates.

### 2.2.2. The Role of Specialist Staff

A consideration of the manner in which specialist services are delivered and a study of the role that children's librarians play in the provision of such services.

Taking into account three major issues:

- The number of specialists within an authority.

- The amount of time available for specialist duties.

- The skills or tasks which are regarded as requiring specialist input, rather than those which can be performed by generalist librarians or non-professional staff.

An examination of whether the traditional roles of specialist staff have been replaced by a new co-ordinating role, which has been responsible for changing children's librarians from 'practitioners' to 'advisors'. An understanding of the extent to which work with children is governed by a policy document which sets clear guidelines and provides a flexible set of aims and objectives.

### 2.2.3. The Current Levels and Standard of Education and Training

An examination of three major forms of education and training:

- **In Service Training**

Considering the frequency, subject content and the level of staff such training is intended for. The nature of regional and inter-authority training groups; their effect on the provision of in-service training.

- **National Training**

Taking into account the provision of training by organisations such as the Youth Libraries Group (YLG); its value to individuals and its significance to their colleagues and the local authorities they serve.

- **Library and Information Departments : Education Policies**

An overview of the quantity and quality of current courses relating directly to the specialist area. Considering liaison with in-service training projects and other links with local authorities.

## 2.3. Follow-up Interviews

In order to support the statistical data gathered from the questionnaire a series of 'follow-up' interviews were organised. These sought to gain more qualitative information on areas which related to issues raised in the questionnaire. The interviews were designed within a relatively structured framework . Prior to each interview the interviewee was sent a list of 'core' questions (listed in Appendix 2) and an individual set which generated from their response to the questionnaire and related directly to their own authority. The interviews took place over a three month period (July - September 1991). Each interview lasted from between 45 minutes and 2 hours. The time variation reflects, to a large extent, interviewees experience and depth of knowledge. Those librarians with wider experience tended to have more views on issues than newly appointed staff. Several of the interviewees were members of their local branch or national YLG committee or were members of SOCCEL or AMDECL and therefore were able to give a wider perspective of the specialism. In the majority of cases the interviews were held with the Head of Children's Services or their deputy. Some authorities, however, did not have the equivalent of such a post and interviews were held with the occupant of the most senior children's post within the authority. This resulted in interviewing people with varying degrees of professional experience. To some extent this could be regarded as a problem as, inevitably, those interviewees with greater experience were able to give more articulate answers supported by examples from their own experience and as such may have had a greater influence on the interviewer. The staffing situation appears to support comments made by Alec Williams (23). He indicated that in Metropolitan Districts Heads of Children's Services are frequently paid on scales of SO1 or less, thereby showing the relatively low status of the postholders within their authority. In all but one case the interviews were held with only one member of staff. This ensured a fairly formal structure to the interviews but the familiarity of interviewer and interviewee with the subject matter enabled an easy rapport. In several cases interviewees had already discuss the questions with other specialist staff in their authority and were representing group views. It would be fair to say that in the one instance where two people were present the interview became more of a three way discussion with views being exchanged and ideas developed. Such a method could, perhaps, have been developed to enable cross-authority discussion and to allow staff with different experiences to discuss issues and thereby present a more balanced picture.

It was not possible to carry out 'follow-up' interviews with every authority so a 25% sample of positive respondents was selected. Some authorities returned

completed questionnaires but did not want to take part in a follow-up interview. To avoid a sample bias authorities were selected on the following grounds:

- The need to include library services representing all types of local authority. Also a reflection of inner-city and urban conurbation's and county or rural areas.

- An attempt to reflect issues and trends over the country as a whole rather than a 'localised' area. Due to time limitations and cost it was not possible to consider visiting the Channel Isles, the North of Scotland or Northern Ireland.

- An attempt to ensure that the sample reflected those authorities who represented current 'good practice' in the specialism, as well as those with less national prestige. This selection was made on personal knowledge and information from current professional journals.

- The sample to some extent reflects the availability of possible 'interviewees'. The absence of Inner London Boroughs from the sample is, unfortunately, due to the inability to contact relevant Heads of Service.

## 2.4. Strengths and Weaknesses of Methodology

The problems associated with this thesis in regard to the selected methodology were:

- In some cases interpretation of the questionnaire differed; particularly in those sections relating to staffing levels and training. It proved difficult, if not impossible, for staff to approximate how much time was spent on particular areas of the service and what staffing levels were involved. Although the questionnaire was piloted informally it would, perhaps, have proved more effective to send it to authorities outside a specific area with staff who were less familiar with the research project.

- Follow-up interviews were limited to a specific number of authorities; not all questionnaire respondents had indicated a willingness to take part in interviews. A small number of interviewees were uncomfortable with the fact that the interviews were being recorded and responded in much more detail once the formal interview was over. More experienced, longer serving staff were able to give a clearer picture of developments in their

authority in relationship to the national arena. This may have created a biased view in favour of some areas.

- Sample Interviews can themselves be regarded as a weakness. The lack of Inner-London Boroughs in the follow-up interview process automatically excludes a significant number of innovative authorities and slants the results in a different direction.

- The follow-up interviews were perhaps not held at the most appropriate time for many specialist staff. The period selected, July - September, is one of the busiest in terms of summer programmes and promotional activities and this may have limited the number of authorities who agreed to take part in the interviews.

- No discussion took place with staff outside the specialist area so there was no opportunity to identify perceived problems and attitudes of generalist librarians. It would, however, be fair to say that several of the interviewees were in authorities who operated a generalist system and, therefore, were both ready and able to view children's library provision outside the specialist area.

- There were difficulties associated with trying to compare specialist service delivery and development in one country with another without making an in-depth study of other issues such as social and political development.

The strengths of the methodology lie in:

- The high response rate enabled a detailed comparative study of service developments throughout the country and provided a clear over-view of specialist service developments.

- The interviews were conducted with very professional, dedicated librarians who displayed a considerable knowledge of their specialist area and presented a very positive image of the specialism.

- The interview timescale ensured a focused response; presenting a clear snapshot of children's library services at a given time.

- The research considered areas outside the specialism and sought to look at children's services in a wider context.

## 2.5. Hypothesis Reformulated

This research was carried out during a period from 1989 to early 1997 and the issues raised relate to that time frame. The thesis suggests that for many senior and middle management children's librarians their role has moved from practitioner to manager. In the process they have accepted a wider remit which limits the amount of time they have available for the specialism. However, such a move does ensure that children's services are moved more clearly into mainstream librarianship. In theory this means that all librarians accept responsibility for developing services for children. It also provides an opportunity for specialist staff to effectively transfer skills learnt within the specialism to general librarianship and in doing so raise the profile of children's librarians. The reduction of specialist posts has meant that the remaining children's librarians have had to focus more clearly on the role they should play and provide more specialist training and support for generalist librarians and library assistants. The transition from practitioner to enabler has not been an easy one and many librarians feel that the specialism has suffered through reducing the amount of time children's librarians spend in direct contact with their young clientele. Others, however, feel that in developing a new role children's librarians have been removed from day to day practicalities and forced to focus on wider issues relating not just to the specialism but to children and their carers in general. The reduction in specialist options at a first professional qualification level has significantly reduced the number of librarians entering public libraries with the knowledge and expertise to deliver effective library services for children and young people. This is not only worrying for the future of children's librarianship but also a concern to children and their carers who will witness a decline of specialist knowledge. The professional status of children's librarians has a key role to play in the manner in which the specialism and services themselves will develop. In accepting a wider community role children's librarians must learn to value the services they give and the specialist knowledge they possess or they will fail to play a significant role in supporting children and their carers.

## 3. Research Findings

This research was carried out within the timeframe 1989 to early 1997 and, therefore, reflects issues and terminology of that period. The research ran alongside a full time practitioner's role thus enabling the investigative role to be underpinned by practical background knowledge. Throughout the period of the research there was considerable national focus on the future of the children's librarianship and the development of specialist services which are reflected in this thesis.

As outlined in the methodology section the research undertaken focused on a questionnaire sent to all library authorities in the United Kingdom. This considered three 'key' areas:

- The role of the 'Head of Children's Services'.
- The role of specialist staff.
- The current level and standard of education and training.

A series of 'follow-up' interviews were carried out with a 25% sample of the respondents, providing the opportunity to develop issues relating directly to individual authorities. Comments from particular authorities are identified by an alphabetical reference listed in Appendix 1.

There is some comparison in the findings with other statistical sources. Particularly Edmunds and Miller's 'Public Library Services for Children and Young People' (1), and two of the Library and Information Statistics Unit (LISU) surveys of library services to schools and children in the United Kingdom, that by Fossey, Marriot and Sumison (2) for 1992 and by Creaser (3) for 1995/96. The results were also revisited in the light of recent publications, most notably the LISC report 'Investing in Children' (4) and 'Focus on the Child: Libraries, Literacy and Learning' by Elkin and Lonsdale (5).

### 3.1.1. The Role of the Head of Children's Services

In considering the role of the Head of Children's Services it is important to acknowledge the diversity of post titles and job responsibilities that exist across the country. This could be seen as a reflection of the organisation and management of library services themselves. Within local authority provision libraries may be part of a larger directorate such as Education or Leisure; they may form part of an extended service which could include the arts, culture or

museums; or they may have retained their independent status and function as a separate directorate. Very occasionally parts of the service are divided within two directorates. In Cambridgeshire, Schools Library Service and Public Library Services are now within the same directorate, Education, but are both in different divisions. Such a situation offers little opportunity for the two areas of the service to work in liaison for the benefit of service development and local children. The reorganisation of local government and the creation of several unitary authorities will, in my opinion, only add to the confusion. In creating smaller authorities the chances of there being more than one specialist post are very limited. Where a unitary authority has been part of a much larger authority with several children's librarians this will create a sense of isolation within the specialism and an inability to share and exchange ideas. Discussions with staff from one such authority indicated that children's services could become marginalised if the management board in the new authority did not include effective representation from children's services. It was also felt that there would be less opportunities to discuss developments with other specialist staff. Experience in Wales has shown that library departments have become part of bigger directorates such as education. Some librarians have retained their chief officer status but more frequently they are responsible to a non-librarian. In such cases there is increasingly less likelihood of management board status for the senior children's post. Thus management boards lack regular input from a librarian with a detailed knowledge and understanding of the specialist area.

Children's services themselves are organised in an equally diverse manner. In some cases authorities have retained service provision within the specialist area and employ a number of children's librarians. Others have discarded the specialism altogether in favour of generalist posts whose responsibilities include children's work. Whilst others retain specialist knowledge in one or two centralised posts which are frequently seen in a co-ordinating and developmental role. No clear pattern emerges to indicate that larger county authorities have more specialist posts than metropolitan or London boroughs. In a comparison of specialist staffing figures of 1990/91 and 1995/96 the LISU survey (6) records a decline in county authorities and London Boroughs of 6.1% and 17.3% respectively, but shows a considerable increase in Metropolitan Boroughs of 22.6%. Over the country as a whole this represents a fall of 5.6% of specialist posts. The reasons for such diversity remain unclear. Elkin (7) suggests a combination of "*the historical profile and status of children's library services, local leadership, local politics (and) central government policies affecting different areas of the country unevenly*".

Within children's services the role of staff in different authorities is often confused by terminology. In some authorities the Youth Librarian or Children's Librarian covers both public and school library services. In others it relates strictly to public library services. Teenagers may fall within the remit of children's services or they may be the responsibility of adult services, or a combination of both. In a very limited number of authorities it has been recognised that in order for teenage services to develop fully they require the total attention of identified , dedicated staff. Bradford's Xchange and Yoker Youth Library are excellent examples of creating specific services to meet needs. What has become increasingly clear in both the literature review and the questionnaire results is the increasing impact on the specialism of 'Dual Posts', i.e. responsibility for schools and public library children's services, and 'Portmanteau Posts' where responsibilities include a far wider area than children's and schools librarianship.

### 3.1.1.1. Dual Role (responsibility for services to schools and children)

Since local government reorganisation in 1974 there appears to have been a gradual move to unite services for children under one departmental head. The creation of a single post with overall responsibility for services to schools and children has tended to ensure senior management team membership at the expense of the removal of two middle management posts. Pain-Lewins (8) outlines comments made by Ann-Marie Parker regarding the lack of middle management posts, which she suggests has contributed to the demise of the specialism. Whilst the Library Association Guidelines (9) state that a senior specialist post requires sufficient support from other specialist librarians if the service is to develop to its full potential. 'Investing in Children' (10) reports a total of 88 joint posts nationally and the 1995/96 LISU survey states that about half the posts in the country are dual posts. The questionnaire data gathered for this study (Appendix 9 - Figure a) support their findings. Approximately 60% of the respondents held dual responsibility, broadly in alignment with the results of an earlier survey by Edmonds (11) of a dual role figure of some 82%.

Since the publication of the LISC report "School Libraries: the Foundations of the Curriculum" in 1985, school library services have had a clear sense of purpose and direction which, until recently, has been sadly lacking in public library services for children. Hence pressure from schools and teachers has ensured that the balance of work in dual-role posts has been weighted in favour of the education sector. "Investing in Children" (12) reports that in 1992/93 of 88 dual posts 44 spent more

time on work with schools as compared to 21 in 1990/91. LISU survey statistics (13) for 1995/96 show that, despite changes in the focus of public library services for children, joint post holders still spent a higher percentage of their time on school library service work. The delegation of budgets is, in part, responsible for this situation. Emphasis has to be placed on ensuring the service continues to be financially viable. However, the fact remains that teachers and governors are extremely vociferous in ensuring that their views are heard and their needs met. Children and, frequently, their carers are less aware of the alternatives available from the public library and many do not like to criticise the service.

The implications of this issue were raised during the follow-up interviews for this present study. All the senior librarians with dual responsibility acknowledged that the influx of changes and development in education had had a significant impact on their role. Several respondents suggested that this did not present a problem, indicating that whereas school library services might take a priority in one year, the next year would revert to public library services:

*"The balance of work shifts all the time. There can be years when time is given totally to public or schools services."* (a)

Certain authorities also indicated the need to reassess the individual roles of children's and schools library services. As schools library services develop along more entrepreneurial lines the split between them and the traditionally run public library service can only become more apparent. Heeks (14) remarks that recent restructuring in Birmingham and Lancashire has led to the separation of schools and children's services with the hope that this would lead to an improvement in the provision of services for children. During the interviews many authorities expressed concern over the lack of time available for public library children's work. Indicating that although their time was supposed to be split 50/50, in reality it tended to be 60/40 or 70/30 in favour of school library services.

There are obviously advantages and disadvantages in both integrated and separated public library and education library service provision. The Library Association Guidelines (15) outline the benefits of integration as:

- cost effective use of facilities and resources,
- flexibility of staffing and a co-ordinated service development responding to the needs of children on a total basis;

They list benefits of split provision as:

- avoiding split line-management and conflicting service demands,
- the ability to clearly define the roles of both public and education library provision,
- the assurance that one area of provision does not develop at the expense of the other.

In my opinion if the service is separated it is essential to ensure that strong links and contacts are maintained between the two areas. An understanding of the services provided and the expertise available in both departments is required by all staff. Both areas are serving the same children and should liaise to ensure services develop along similar lines. It may be necessary to introduce formal meetings where the two departments can discuss common ground. One of the key recommendations of the LISC report "Investing in Children" was to focus on an integrated strategy which related to all library provision for children:

*"Each local authority should publish an integrated strategy for delivering library and information services to meet the identified needs of children and young people throughout its area, taking into account the roles, relationships and responsibilities of the major elements in the service - the public library, the schools library service, and libraries in individual schools - and involving other agencies as appropriate ."* (16)

LISC expressed grave concern at the limited number of examples the report was able to present which indicated the development of joint strategies. In many cases there is evidence of a move towards closer liaison and joint planning between public library services for children and school library services. Several authorities have produced protocol or service level agreements outlining the individual responsibilities of both schools library services and the public library service. In Norfolk links between the two areas of the service are maintained on a formal level by:

- The Senior Librarian(Young People's Services) and The Schools Library Services Manager report to the same Assistant Director.

- A member of the Schools Library Service Staff is on the County Young People's Services Team.

- A series of quarterly meetings are held between the Senior Tutor Librarian (SLS), the Senior Librarian (Young People's Services) and the Schools Library Services Manager to discuss developments, liaison and cross-over.

- A protocol agreement between the two areas of the service is reviewed annually.

- A joint book selection meeting is held.

- Expertise from both departments is used in the provision of Inset courses and training for public library staff.

- Areas of common interest, such as fiction categorisation and the production of booklists, are discussed at a strategic level and worked upon jointly by staff from both areas of the service.

Nationally, however, as yet there appears to be very little evidence of integrated strategies involving all providers of library services for children and young people. There is even less evidence of local authority strategies taking a wider approach and including a greater range of services and departments than those linked by library provision. Norfolk Children's Services Plan is an example of inter-departmental co-operation, including representatives from Social Services, Education, Health and Libraries, which draws together many aspects of work with children and reflects the authority's commitment to children.

### 3.1.1.2. 'Portmanteau' Posts

The steady increase of 'Portmanteau' posts has given some cause for concern. Both Parker (17) and Shepherd (18) suggest that the absorption of children's services with other responsibilities may well *"negate the senior management post by diluting time and energy"*. Although Shepherd goes on to outline some of the benefits for the specialism gained from a widening role:

*"The widening range of responsibilities* [may well provide] *improved perceptions of specialisms overall, better profile for children's work, a place on the management team and other specialisms benefiting from children's work."*

Edmonds (19) reports that in 38 authorities the senior children's librarian has responsibility for other aspects of the service. LISU statistics for 1995/96 (20) indicate that in several authorities the main responsibility for children's work

falls to a middle management post who reports to a senior manager; the holder of this latter post may allocate as little as 5% of their time on work relating to schools and children. The Library Association Guidelines (21) emphasise the importance of seeing library services for children and young people within the context of the whole library service. They suggest that whether this is a portmanteau post or a specialist post the postholder needs to widen their area of responsibility:

*"Its contribution at this level is not simply to represent the specialism; it should take its share of involvement in collective policy-making and discussion."*

Equally the role of the senior specialist should be to ensure that the full management team considers how their decisions and policies will relate to, and affect children and young people.

The results from this research show that 41 respondents, almost 40% of the total returns, indicated additional responsibilities. These areas of responsibility varied considerably, ranging from arts activities, to adult education and capital planning. Thirteen authorities, some 10%, stated that they had responsibility for 'special services'; a concept which covered a range of services, including multi-cultural and prison services. Two authorities with 'portmanteau' roles were chosen for follow-up interviews.

Both respondents agreed that there could be difficulties fulfilling the job requirements of such diverse roles. One suggested that there was a tendency to concentrate on those areas of the service that provided the most personal satisfaction or that dominated the profession:

*"Children's and schools side tends to dominate and can swamp other things."* (b)

"[I am] *not able to get involved operationally as much as I would like, but that's not really* [my] *job* [any more] *Finding time for each thing and giving the proper balance for each thing is a major problem* [I am] *not single-minded about schools and children's service any more."* (c)

Whilst it remains vital that a senior specialist should be a fully participating member of management board with an input into the development of all library services, it is worrying to many children's librarians that there are an increasing number of senior specialists with a wider remit than the direct specialist area.

The reality of career progression means that higher level posts tend to be of a more general nature. As library services have been absorbed by bigger directorates heads of service have been expected to take on a wider role and this has, in many cases, permeated throughout the profession. At the moment it appears that the majority of existing post holders are from a background of children's and schools librarianship, and therefore have the knowledge and skills to develop services and enthuse others. The concern is that new appointments will more heavily reflect the move to generalist posts and lack background knowledge. In such cases it is important that emphasis is placed on children's and schools library knowledge at an interview stage and that these areas are recognised as being as important as other areas of a generalist post. It is essential that authorities who have more generalist senior staffing structures retain appropriate specialist staff to support senior management:

*"This post must be supported by sufficient other specialist posts to enable full and consistent delivery of services to children."* (22)

Although most authorities appear to recognise the importance of specialist posts there is clear evidence that in many authorities that knowledge is being concentrated into one or two posts, which lack sufficient support staff to enable them to adequately 'share' their knowledge with other staff.

### 3.1.1.3. Specialist Duties

For the purposes of this questionnaire respondents were provided with a list of 'core' duties and asked to indicate which tasks fell within their current remit. The responses (outlined in Appendix 6 - Figure b) indicate that the 'core' activities form a significant part of the senior specialist role. Further comments on the questionnaire and in follow-up interviews revealed the managerial role which senior specialists have now adopted. Although the majority of senior staff had overall responsibility for 'core' duties they had, in fact, delegated the functional responsibility for these duties to another member of staff. In doing so they had clearly shown that the management of children's services warranted a senior specialist who had distanced themselves from the day to day operation of services. The Library Association Guidelines (23) suggest a pattern of work operation which divides specific duties by levels of staff. It is important that senior children's librarians relinquish much of the 'hands-on' role of the specialist area if they are to develop an authority wide responsibility for co-ordinating and developing services. It is recognised that many specialists find it difficult to delegate completely all 'hands-on' delivery of the service and

many retain specific duties or allocate themselves time which ensures direct contact with children and their carers.

### 3.1.1.4. Senior Management Team Membership

*"If children's services are to continue in the future, librarians who understand and appreciate the objectives of this service must be in positions of power to fight for its goals and to make its needs known."* (24)

Statistics indicate that the rise to senior management status for children's librarians has been a slow process, with a sudden and dramatic increase in the last ten years. Shepherd (25) reports that in 1979 only 28 authorities included representation from children's services on their senior management team; a figure which had risen by only three some five years later. By 1987 that figure had risen significantly. Edmonds and Miller's survey of 108 English authorities (26) shows that 76 senior librarians were management team members. Fossey (27) states that of the 88 authorities with dual responsibility posts, only 13 are not members of their local management team. Creaser (28) supports this evidence showing that joint post holders are more likely to be a member of the management board than individual post holders. The recent Public Library Review (29) comments on the short-sightedness of removing children's posts from senior management teams; whilst the LISC report (30) states categorically:

*"..... it is essential that issues relating to services for children and young people continue to be properly represented and debated in senior management teams through a team member having a specific brief for this sector ....."*

The evidence produced for this study revealed that of the 126 respondents, 83 (65%) said they were members of their senior management team. The percentage response by type of authority (Appendix 5 - Figure b) reveals a marked similarity, with three groups indicating approximately 70% membership and two 60%. All the research shows that there are a growing number of senior specialists with management team status. Whilst this may reflect a greater awareness of children's issues at senior staff level it may also be seen as an indication of the increasing number of 'portmanteau' posts where children's services are just one of many responsibilities. This research argues that membership of the senior management team is not merely a matter of status. It enables informed contribution regarding the needs of children and young people at the highest level of decision making and recognises that

specialist staff have a significant role to play in developing all areas of the library service.

Those interviewees who were not members of the management team stressed that informal discussions, and a formal structure of meetings with senior staff, ensured that children's services were well represented at the highest level. Several librarians indicated that they were regularly invited to attend management team meetings when matters concerning their specialism were under discussion. They also stressed that they in turn could ask to attend meetings if they wished to raise pertinent issues.

The follow-up interviews concluded that, despite often very able and concerned representation at senior level, non-management team membership was an indication of lower status:

*"Any senior management team without representation from children's services* [is] *a dangerous thing, a retrograde step. When children's matters are raised there isn't anybody there to give an informed perspective." (d)*

### 3.1.1.5. Direct Line Management

One of the major concerns expressed in follow-up interviews regarding the role of the senior children's specialist was their frequent lack of direct line management. Specialist line management can create an aura of separatism and may instigate difficulties with field management. Equally it often provides strong, positive leadership with clearly defined aims and objectives. Shepherd (31) outlines the two sides of the argument:

*"Without line management the county specialist cannot be accountable, but with it there are the problems of separatism and resentment of field managers losing control."*

Several senior children's librarians said that such a situation could be difficult in that they had no control over the day to day work of specialist staff. Equally it could be a problem for specialist staff in the field who felt that they had two line managers to whom they must report. In effect it appears that many of the initial problems have been resolved. Many authorities indicated that a formal structure of meetings between senior specialists and service managers coupled with informal communications had ensured adequate liaison between all staff. Senior children's librarians saw their role as an advisory one, providing

specialist support and a clear overview of the development of the specialism over the authority as a whole:

"[Having no direct line management is] *a problem only insofar as I can't say 'you must do this'. However* [the] *plus side is we work as a team, meeting three times a year to discuss training, policy, etc.....* [The] *system works well because we have support from divisional librarians,* [and in this authority] *children's services have a very high profile."* (e)

Other authorities stated that their senior staff had overcome the problem of having no direct line management. They found that a regular pattern of meetings, site visits and informal appraisals with specialist staff helped to break down any barriers that existed.

Clearly there are problems for senior specialists without direct line management, but this is a problem which affects all other specialisms in the same manner. It is important that area managers accept responsibility for children's work and do not regard it as an 'add-on' service which is nothing to do with them. In developing a wider 'portmanteau' role it is difficult to envisage a senior specialist taking a line management responsibility for all the staff within their brief. However, it is vital that children's services develop on an authority-wide basis, lead by a specialist who has the knowledge and enthusiasm required to ensure services develop fully; a generalist area manager may have limited expectations of what children's services can deliver or lack any real interest at all.

Many interviewees expressed the view that a formal solution to the problem was the production of a policy document. They stated that this was one way of achieving some control over service developments and in ensuring that standards were met and adhered to. It was felt that such a document should relate to the overall development of the entire library service, of which children's services should be an integral part.

### 3.1.1.6. Policy Document

Despite the recognised need for clear guidelines and established policies the results of this study record that over 50% of respondents did not have a policy document (Appendix 10 - Figure b). Respondents indicated that it was difficult for a specialist group to set aims and objectives in isolation from the total service. Where field managers were responsible for a particular geographical

area then children's services were unable to enforce guidelines and could only offer support in an advisory capacity. Reservations were expressed over the enforcement of an over-prescriptive policy document which allowed little response at a local level. Despite such reservations it was felt that a policy document provided definite aims and objectives and a framework for all staff to work from. It was suggested that without guidelines staff tended to respond totally to demand and could feel frustrated at their apparent failure to achieve a specific goal. Equally library services could be seen to be responding totally to the initiatives of other departments and in doing so present no clear service identity:

*"There is far too much responding to crisis, responding to legislation, responding to other managers' needs and demands, responding to council objectives without feeding into the process ourselves."* (f)

The publication in 1991 of National Guidelines for children's services was a major step forward in the evaluation and management of the specialism. Many authorities have used the guidelines as a focus for their own children's services and sought to establish local guidelines based on national policies. It is important to remember that although these national guidelines were welcomed and endorsed by many authorities they are not prescriptive, they do not seek to offer a national overview and can only be seen as presenting an example of *"service philosophy"* (32). The LISC report 'Investing in Children' (33) discussed the variety of service standards throughout the country and called for national standards to be seen as more than a benchmark.

### 3.1.2. The Role of Specialist Staff

The role of specialist staff considers image and status, although the professional profile of specialist librarians is discussed in more detail in section 4. Within specialist staffing structures the thesis considers the duties and responsibilities of children's librarians. It also looks at the role of library assistants or para-professionals and examines whether their role has developed to encompass many of the duties that were traditionally regarded as requiring specialist librarians.

#### 3.1.2.1. Image

As a profession librarianship suffers from considerable stereotyping and children's specialists are no exception to this. The image of specialist staff is

governed by people's perception of the profession in general. The majority of people retain a very traditional view of librarianship. Within the profession itself children's librarianship often has a poor reputation. Criticisms of specialist staff 'playing' at librarianship, reading children's books and providing 'free' entertainment for their young clientele is well documented. In 1973 Janet Hill (34) described the popular image of children's librarians as:

*"Pleasant, mild-mannered, gentle, good-tempered, unwilling to offend, extremely hard working, dedicated to the profession, and almost totally unaware of the world outside children and books."*

Some twelve years later, Elkin (35) suggested that such an image still pervaded the specialism:

*"A slightly precious, eccentric childminder, peripheral to mainstream librarianship, an unnecessary frippery, not central in the preparation of children to take their place in society."*

Clearly there is a disparity between the perceived image of children's librarians and the professional role they really do play within the library service. Much of this confusion is instigated by specialists themselves who choose to highlight the very visible promotional activities they undertake. The professional press is littered with images of children's librarians face painting, badge making, dressed up in costumes and encouraging children to participate in craft activities. Much of this is viewed by those outside the specialist area as an 'add on' service requiring neither high level professional skills or specialist training. Elkin (36) suggests that *"little attempt was made to justify such work: how did it contribute to the individual child's development or imaginative stimulus."*

In a female dominated specialism the traditional nurturing role associated with women has long persisted. The qualities attributed to children's librarians are frequently those attributed to women. Somerville (37) encompassed this view by describing the popular image of children's librarians as people possessing creative flair and dramatic performance skills, with an inbuilt 'cosy' love of the children they serve, but lacking the management skills to enable them to progress further up the career ladder. Van Vliet (38) supports this view by suggesting that the traditional image of children's librarian is someone capable of holding an audience of children spellbound by stories rather than someone establishing aims and objectives and drawing up a policy document.

Equally important in establishing a profile of specialist librarians is the commonly held attitude to the clientele they serve. Despite recent legislation, such as the 1988 Children Act and the 1996 Education Act, focusing on the rights of the child and political commitment to raising educational standards there is still a tendency to see children as less important than adults. Thus those who work with children are frequently branded with the same lack of status. Kempster (39) suggests that this view of children's services is reflected in the education system, where primary school teachers do not have equivalent status with those who teach secondary level. She states that to see children's librarianship as 'Kid's Stuff' is to promote the wrong image of a highly professional service:

*"The image we are often branded with wrongly associates children's materials with the importance of the service."*

For the purpose of this thesis interviewees were asked to consider the perception other professionals held of the role children's librarians played in the education and development of children and young people. To a large extent practitioners' views reflected the image of the specialism lacking credibility outside the profession:

*"Library services are not vital in the sense that a medical examination is, but* [they are] *vital in the terms of producing a better quality of life. Sometimes* [services are seen] *in this way but generally* [they are] *regarded as an 'add-on' service" (g).*

*"No they are not seen as having any significance, it has a lot to do with the kind of profile the profession has. The public, in general, and other professionals find it difficult to get a true definition of what a librarian is, let alone a specialist in the field." (h)*

Initially pessimistic replies were, almost always, accompanied by examples of community liaison and library promotion which has raised public awareness of the specialism. The increasingly professional packaging of Schools Library Services has helped to raise the profile of public library services. Parental concerns over issues such as the National Curriculum, statutory testing and the teaching of reading has provided librarians with the opportunity of sharing their knowledge and skills. The Children Act , 1988 (40) has focused attention on the child as an individual and this, coupled with national concerns over pre-

school education, has provided the ideal opportunity for children's librarians to raise the profile of their specialism. Several interviewees quoted examples of cross-departmental working parties which had been established to examine the implications of issues such as the Children Act. One particular example of cross-directorate co-ordination is the Children's Book Foundation 'Bookstart' project. Initially established as a pilot project in Birmingham, where it was jointly administered by Birmingham Library Service's Children's Team and South Birmingham Health Authority, it has proved so successful that it is now being operated in several other authorities through similar partnerships.

Questionnaire respondents for this thesis emphasised the significance of the image that librarians themselves have created, stressing the need for children's librarians to recognise the importance of their work:

*"It is down to us to sell our professional skills. If they can see you are able to give them something in a practical way they respect you more,* [and see that you are] *not just the person who doles out the books." ((l)*

### 3.1.2.2. Status

Shepherd (41) suggests that the low status experienced by children's librarians is a reflection of their own perception of the role they play. She indicates that there is a tendency for children's librarians to want to remain with their clientele and their specialism rather than take senior generalist or management posts, thereby reinforcing the belief that children's librarianship is a cul-de-sac, a service staffed by librarians who have no interest in other areas of the profession.

It may be that many children's librarians do choose to remain within their specialism; finding total satisfaction and a clear sense of purpose in the job they are doing. Kempster (42) outlines possible reasons for this decision:

*"..... there is a high level of job satisfaction in being in direct contact with their* [children's librarians] *young clientele and their carers ..... children's work has a clear focus and varied, challenging tasks ..... one of the attractions of children's work is the high level of responsibility and autonomy associated with it, which would make a move to a generalist assistant librarian post less attractive."*

In choosing this course of action it may be that an elitist and 'cosy' image of children's work is perpetuated. Within the specialism there is an understanding of the need to promote a new image. There is a call for librarians who are articulate, assertive and talented in a variety of skills. Hertfordshire, like many authorities, outlines the skills which are required by those staff working with children:

> *"* *an understanding of child development;*
>
> * *detailed knowledge of children's books and related materials;*
>
> * *knowledge of education trends;*
>
> * *knowledge of, and ability to work with, child related groups;*
>
> * *familiarity with contemporary child culture;*
>
> * *storytelling and other performance skills;*
>
> * *presentation skills;*
>
> * *understanding of parents' expectations;*
>
> * *personal qualities including empathy with children and young people."* (43)

In listing such detailed requirements a library authority acknowledges the value and status not only of its own staff but also of the clientele they serve.

Raising awareness nationally through events such as the Carnegie/Greenaway Awards has also focused attention on the role of children's librarians. Faced by increased media-hype the panel of judges have had to ensure their selection criteria and judging is of a high professional standard; a practise that is reflected through the country as YLG branches go through their selection process.

Some twenty five years ago Heeks (44) suggested that the route to senior management was not to be found through specialisation. A Canadian survey carried out in 1988 by Adele Fasick (45) indicated that children's librarians had less chance of being promoted than those working with adults. Fortunately in many authorities this is no longer the case. In recent years several librarians, such as Pearl Valentine, Catherine Blanshard, Grace Kempster and Linda Hopkins, noted nationally for their work with children and young people, have risen through children's services to the posts of library director and assistant director. By doing this they raise the general awareness of children's librarianship and this can only be good for the future of the specialism.

### 3.1.2.3. Staffing

#### 3.1.2.3.1. Staffing Levels

Edmonds' (46) survey attempted to ascertain the numbers of full-time posts designated for work with children. The results indicate the difficulties in assembling such information. Some authorities suggested that all professional staff were involved in work with children and young people, while others stated that their children's librarians had responsibilities outside their specialist role. Although the number of posts varied from area to area Edmonds was able to itemise the number of specialist posts in England:

| | |
|---|---|
| County Councils | 214 posts |
| London Boroughs | 215 posts |
| Metropolitan Boroughs | 89 posts |

Creaser (47) records that in 1995 there were only 691 professional children's librarians employed throughout the United Kingdom.

For the purposes of this thesis the questionnaire was not designed to find out how many specialist staff there were in individual authorities, but several respondents commented that they were the only children's librarian in their authority.

Respondents were asked to indicate the percentage of work relating to children and young people that was carried out by three clearly identified levels of staff:

Generalist librarians
Specialist librarians
Library Assistants or para-professional staff

Several authorities suggested that it was impossible to provide hard data regarding staffing levels, adding that it was difficult to assess actual daily contact with children and their carers, stating that this level of work was frequently carried out by library assistants or para-professional staff. In authorities where specialist staff were relatively few in number, children's librarians were regarded as the instigators and co-ordinators of services. Several authorities had only one children's librarian based at their largest or central library, suggesting perhaps that those libraries and their clientele outside that area would not have benefited from specialist input. Such posts

had no responsibility for service delivery outside their library and their expertise was not utilised by the rest of the authority. The questionnaire results suggested that in a minimal number of authorities the only work relating to children was carried out by specialist staff.

#### 3.1.2.3.2. Specialist Duties

Since the beginning of the 1980's there has been a reduction in the funding of library services and a call for more public service accountability; this has led to the deletion of posts and a considerable number of staffing restructures within library authorities. Specialist posts have been deleted in favour of generalist posts, enabling staff to take on wider responsibilities and for librarians to be moved more easily from one post to another. This being so the role of the children's librarian has had to change. The reduction of posts has meant that children and their carers are less likely to see a specialist librarian on their visit to the library. It has also meant that activities which have traditionally fallen within the remit of specialist staff, such as storytimes, playgroup visits and liaison with schools, have had to be shared amongst generalist and para-professional staff. Children's librarians have had to take a dispassionate look at the work they do and ask themselves if services could be delivered as effectively or better in other ways. There can be no doubt that for many specialist staff the excitement and pleasure of their work comes from their daily contact with children; but would they be better employed if at least part of their brief was to encourage and enthuse other staff to work with children. Equally specialist staff enjoy working with playgroups, but are they really fulfilling their specialist role by visiting an individual playgroup for half an hour once a term to tell stories? Wouldn't their skills be better concentrated on training playgroup leaders in storytelling skills, thus in the long run reaching far more children? The introduction of the nursery voucher scheme may ensure that librarians are more clearly focused on the service they provide for pre-school groups. In the four areas currently 'trialling' the voucher project there has been much discussion over whether groups taking in voucher children, whether they be from the voluntary or statutory sector, should be expected to pay for library provision. Schools with nursery classes buying in resources from schools library services are surely at a disadvantage from playgroups and private day nurseries who currently receive a free service.

Whereas the Nursery Voucher scheme met with a very negative response from many providers its replacement with the Early Years Development Plan offers an opportunity for a wide range of individuals, departments and agencies to be involved in deciding how nursery provision will be developed in their authority. It is

the responsibility of specialist librarians to ensure that they play a key role in deciding the future of early years education.

The Library Association Guidelines (48) suggest that a range of skills, knowledge and expertise are required to provide an effective library service for children and their carers. Their matrix outline gives some indication of which specialist duties actually require specialist input. They suggest, for example, that counter routines, shelving, storytelling and holiday activities fall within the remit of library assistants. Whilst playgroup and school visits and readers' enquiry work can be carried out by both specialist and generalist librarians. Specialists, however, are seen as the instigators, planners and co-ordinators of work with children.

For the purpose of this thesis questionnaire respondents were provided with a list of 'core' duties and asked to indicate the level of staff responsible for carrying out specific jobs. The results (Appendix 10 – figure a) indicate that in the majority of authorities all the 'core' duties were carried out by more than one level of staff. The responses showed that, even in authorities where there are comparatively few children's librarians, a high level of duties still remain within the remit of specialist staff. In all but two of the areas listed (Craft Activities and Teenage Services) specialist input was well over 80%. In all but one area (Craft Activities) specialist input was the highest percentage. The increasing shift towards the generalisation of the profession was evident in the responses. Clearly overall control and co-ordination of children's work remains in specialist hands but there is a growing tendency to involve generalist librarians in all aspects of the work. The responses also indicate a growth in the involvement of library assistants or para-professionals in children's services. This involvement appeared to relate directly to the 'technical' aspects of the service, such as storytelling, craft activities and class visits. It appeared that areas which, in the past, children's librarians would have regarded as sacrosanct to their specialism are now open to input from other staff. It is difficult to know whether this change is by design or out of necessity. As specialist posts have declined the desire to develop and extend the service has resulted in involvement from a much wider range of staff. Nevertheless there remains a high level of specialist input into specialist services. The in-depth knowledge required to organise and co-ordinate children's services is reflected in the high percentage of specialist staff involved in the management of services, stock selection, work relating to specialist groups and library design.

### 3.1.2.3.3. Specialist Career Structure

We have seen already that although the notion of children's librarianship as a professional cul-de-sac still persists in many areas, in practice there are positive moves towards full recognition of the variety of skills that children's librarians can bring to a wide range of posts. For those wishing to remain within the specialism the picture is, perhaps, not so bright. Librarians recognise that by choosing to remain within a particular type of job they reduce their career options and limit their opportunity for further progression. The move towards generalist librarianship and the reduction of specialist posts has severely disadvantaged those wishing to remain within the specialism. As first level professional courses have dropped the children's options from their syllabus fewer librarians are emerging from university with the background knowledge to enable them to provide and develop a range of services. Newly qualified librarians need the support and mentoring of other specialist staff if they are to develop the skills, knowledge and enthusiasm required to function fully as a children's librarian. Since many authorities only have one dedicated specialist post many new staff are unlikely to receive the support they need. Without this support there is a tendency for staff to cling to the familiar, 'safe, technical' routines, such as stock maintenance and reader's advisory work; duties which can be time consuming but which do not develop the specialism. When children's librarians are seen to spend their time on mundane and routine tasks it appears to the outsider that such posts require less professional expertise than other areas of librarianship.

Within many authorities the career structure for those wishing to remain within the specialism is very limited or non-existent. Elkin (49) outlines some of the staffing structures that exist throughout the country and some do provide a number of steps for specialist career development.

Elkin's research also shows the range of staffing structures that exist across the country. For example, Nottinghamshire has a Principal Libraries Officer who spends 60% of his time on work relating to children and schools. A centralised public library children's post is based at headquarters; this is supported by eight 'field based' district posts and three area children's co-ordinators. Until recently Cornwall had two children's services librarians covering four districts between them, a recent re-structuring has reduced this to one post. . The picture is much the same in Metropolitan and London Boroughs where some, such as Liverpool and Croydon, have several specialist staff, compared to Bradford, Stockport, Ealing and Brent where there are one or two dedicated posts supported by a range of 'interested' staff.

A recent re-structuring in Norfolk has retained a centralised co-ordinating post for children's services and placed an identified post for children's services into each of four areas; the latter posts will spend approximately 50% of their time on children's work and take some responsibility for developing county children's services. All generalist team librarians will be expected to take some responsibility for delivering services to children and their carers. The central library still retains its specialist professional librarian and supporting clerical posts. Management team membership is retained in an assistant director who has overall responsibility for the specialism but in a generalist post can only give a small percentage of her time to work with children's and schools.

For the purposes of this thesis interviewees were asked to indicate whether or not their authority provided a clear career structure for those librarians who chose to remain within the specialism. Hereford & Worcester and Hertfordshire were among the authorities who outlined clear structures for specialist development; the former indicating a positive effort to create 'stepping stones' within a recent staff restructure. Several respondents suggested that in theory a short specialist career structure existed. Frequently this was limited to two stages; a head of children's services and maybe several posts on a much lower or, possibly, middle management grade. In practical terms, however, it was unlikely that the lower graded librarians would be able to gain the experience and skills necessary for them to move into a senior management position. Although many authorities did not provide a specialist career structure, respondents indicated that a sideways move into a generalist post often resulted in children's librarians rising further up the career structure. It was suggested that children's librarians develop specific skills early in their professional life which equipped them for career progression; skills such as budget control and staff management which were transferable to other areas of the service:

*"Children's librarians are not regarded as being committed for ..... life to a specialism by management ..... their applications for other posts are regarded on equal terms by management. if they do have the potential ..... and working on the children's team singles you out, you can list your developments, much more effectively."* (j)

Several respondents suggested that, in some authorities, the traditional image of children's librarians still persisted. It was, therefore, difficult for a specialist librarian to transfer to other areas of the service. This attitude was considered to be declining as children's librarians themselves sought management positions:

*"The genuinely able candidate will always succeed."* (a)

### 3.1.2.3.4. Specialist versus Generalist

The special needs of children and their carers are recognised in the Library Association Guidelines for children's services (50). They emphasise the need to view the specific needs of a particular client group within the context of the library service as a whole. The guidelines draw attention to the need for children's services to be the responsibility, not merely of specialist staff, but of all librarians:

*"Children's needs are important enough to require specialist posts .....* [but] *are too important to be left to specialist posts."*

Pain-Lewins (51) comments on the library requirements of children and their carers and asks if a move towards generalist staffing actually benefits their needs. She suggests that for the librarian the advantages of generalisation, a wider professional outlook, greater staff involvement in children's work and a decrease of isolation, far outweigh the disadvantages; but reflects that such a move may result in a lack of specialist knowledge about issues such as child development, literacy and reading development, children's literature and children's learning patterns.

Janet Hill was one of the first people to raise the issue of generalist posts. In her book 'Children are People' (52) she expressed concern over the intensity with which children's librarians often regarded their young clientele. She suggested that in the struggle to develop children's librarianship as a specialism staff had deliberately isolated themselves from the rest of the profession. Hill indicated that the creation of a separate children's department frequently resulted in specialist staff spending a large percentage of their time on 'housekeeping' duties such as shelving and tidying. She further stated that the creation of children's librarianship as a specialism had put forward the belief that only specially trained staff could successfully carry out work with children; thus enabling all non-specialists the opportunity to reject all responsibility for the provision of services to children. Hill's belief that children and their carers would be presented with a better library service with all library staff playing a role in an active provision is a fundamental issue of the specialist versus generalist debate:

*"Should we any more have librarians who only work with children? If children's librarians come back into the mainstream of librarianship, and if we expect all librarians to accept children as people, and to participate in providing a library service for them, shouldn't children's librarians accept that adults are people too, and possibly even work with them? ..... If librarians have the opportunity of working with children from time to time, many of them would be able to contribute a great deal."*

More recently Shepherd (53) has indicated that the specialist role has changed, suggesting that it is neither feasible, nor desirable, for children's librarians to provide the 'total' input into specialist services. She states that the integration of staff has provided the opportunity for more staff involvement in work with children and the chance for specialist staff to widen their own professional role. While welcoming the input from all staff Shepherd also calls for a *'greater degree of specialisation'*, concentrating on those issues which require specific knowledge and training:

*"No-one expects or even wants to ensure specialist contact for every child using the library, but it is another matter when there are talks on children's reading, work with schools or major holiday activities."*

Whilst recognising the importance of all staff being involved in the provision of library services for children and young people, it is essential to remember the significance of children's special needs and the value of specialist input in meeting these needs. The Library Association Guidelines suggest that:

*"..... the detailed knowledge of child development, children's literature, and educational matters necessarily implies a specialist element within the staffing structure."* (54)

The range of skills and expertise that the guidelines suggest is required to provide an effective library service for children imply a more detailed specialist knowledge than could ever be gained through a generalist post:

*"an understanding of child development .....*
*a detailed knowledge of children's books and related materials*
*a knowledge of educational trends, developments .....*
*a knowledge of, and ability to work with, child related groups and organisations,*
*a familiarity with contemporary child culture,*
*storytelling and other performance skills,*

*public speaking to groups of children, teachers, parents and carers,*
*teaching skills .....*
*promotional skills with regard to book promotion,*
*an understanding of parents' expectations and demands on behalf of children.*
*These require a level of information and advice beyond a passing 'product knowledge',*
*personal qualities including empathy with children and confidence in relating with and to them."*

'Investing in Children' (55) acknowledges the increase in generalist posts at all levels of staffing throughout the country and recommends that the specialism must be represented at a senior management level. The Public Library Review (56) also highlighted the problems associated with the removal of specialist posts:

*"Many library services have dispensed with specialist children's librarians in favour of generalists, removed children's posts from senior management structures and economised on training in the area of work with children and young people. Such policies may well appear ill advised in the light of our findings."*

Interviewees for this study were asked to consider the implications of the reduction of specialist posts in favour of generalist staff. In doing so they were also asked to outline their views on the relative merits and weaknesses of specialist and generalist posts. The initial response from interviewees suggested that they welcomed the increasing commitment by all staff in the provision of services for children and young people. Several commented that in the past the separation of children's services from 'mainstream' librarianship has resulted in the marginalisation of a major aspect of the library service. They stated that children's librarians often failed to view their specialism in the wider context of the entire library service; their failure to do so ensured their isolation from colleagues and reinforced their entrenched and elitist attitudes:

*"If* [librarians] *remain specialists and regard themselves as specialists then there is a danger of elitism being brought in, there is a danger of being blinkered, a danger of being disassociated with other staff in the service, there is a danger that they will lose sight of what they set out to do." (k)*

[There is] *a tendency to underplay the librarian's role in serving the whole reader* [we] *should be in the business of making adult readers, providing a continual service to a person."* (l)

However, concern was expressed over the loss of specialist posts, particularly if those posts were at a senior level:

*"If the specialist role at senior level has been cut then there is a danger that there isn't anybody in that authority who has experience of children's services."* (m)

Several authorities who operated a generalist structure suggested that because they had retained a senior specialist post to co-ordinate the specialism then the system worked well. The knowledge and expertise of such post holders was highly valued, but no indication was given as to how librarians in a generalist structure could gain such experience themselves. Some respondents suggested that in theory a generalist structure provided the best opportunity to develop a community based service; in specialist terms, however, the success of provision to children and their carers relied totally on the commitment and ability of all librarians:

*"Generalist structures give opportunity for particular individuals to provide good practice, but there is a lack of overall co-ordination of the specialism."* (n)

Some respondents revealed that they did feel that the specialism had suffered because of the reduction of specialist posts. Suggesting that the commitment, enthusiasm and, more importantly, the ability to enthuse others, was often lacking within a generalist structure. Expressing the view that specialist services overall were bound to suffer if posts for children's librarians were removed:

"[The reduction of specialist roles] *has reduced* [the] *impact of services for children and lessened quality of services."* (b)

*"There are certain aspects of children's librarianship that have got undermined as a result of a shift towards a more generalist position ..... An in-depth expertise which someone with a firm specialist training and experience can bring to the job, cannot be replaced by the generalist."* (h)

Concern was expressed over the continuing lack of research into children's services which might provide hard evidence relating to the effect generalist staffing structures have had on the specialism. We may think that children's services have suffered but can we support that belief? How, in fact, do we measure the success of children's services? Edmonds (57) suggests that very few authorities have a detailed system for evaluating services, indicating that many authorities still rely on numerical statistics to measure the success or failure of the services they provide. Walker's (58) comments relate directly to the United States but her remarks are in my opinion valid in this country also:

*"Good intentions are not enough when it comes to delivering quality public library services to children. Resources are declining and demands are increasing. Children and their care givers need more information in more formats than they ever have before. They need more guidance and motivation from librarians who specialise in the reading interests and information needs of children."*

John Dunne of Hampshire emphasises the validity of retaining a specialist approach:

*"If you have a children's specialist the degree and time that a person can devote in developing a service will lead to a much better service ..... the generalist ..... without the specialist knowledge can only do so much, the specialist can take a service beyond that."* (e)

### 3.1.2.3.5. Attitudes and Qualities

The 'crisis of confidence' experienced by many specialist staff in the last ten or fifteen years has been well documented by writers such as Shepherd (59), Parker (60) and Pain-Lewins (61). Shepherd suggested that children's librarians had *"lost* [their] *way"* and no longer had the clarity of vision experienced by their fellow specialists some forty years earlier. She acknowledges the fact that the growth of other areas of the service may have resulted in children's work appearing to have lost some professional ground. The structural changes in staffing systems in many authorities has called for specialist staff to reassess their roles. Shepherd indicates that many children's librarians have found this a very difficult process:

*"There's a tendency in children's librarians towards negativism and the unwillingness to adapt to change and a lack of positive self-image, and insecurity."*

The publication of national guidelines in 1991, and in 1995 of the LISC Report 'Investing In Children' reveal a specialism at the forefront of professional development. The LISC Report emphasises the extent of children's library provision throughout the country; and highlights a range of service initiatives designed to meet the needs of children and young people. Whilst there are still problems to be addressed the indications are that the specialism is now over a difficult period of transition and is moving towards a new and stronger role within the library service.

The commitment and dedication of children's librarians has been commented on many times. Janet Hill (62) described children's librarians as *"extremely hardworking and conscientious"*, and Judith Elkin (63) states that:

*"In practice children's and schools librarians are amongst the best informed, most effective, capable managers, extremely knowledgeable about both stock and clientele."*

For the purposes of this study interviewees were asked to comment on the general attitude of children's librarians in relation to their specific specialist duties and their concern for overall service development. Respondents suggested that the majority of children's librarians frequently presented a more positive image than librarians in other areas of the profession. The opportunity to develop managerial skills relatively early in a specialist's career provides a good basis for further development. Many children's librarians have recognised the need to extend their skills beyond technical expertise and positively seek management training. In doing so they recognise the value of the transferable skills that they are able to develop within their specialist role:

*"The practitioner part of their* [children's librarians] *activity has got to be fitted very clearly into a management structure ..... to maintain their professional input on a level commensurate with other specialist professionals they have got to work within a firm management ambience."* (h)

It was suggested that the professional content of a specialist post was often far greater than that to be found in a more senior generalist post. This being so many children's librarians choose to remain within the specialism, finding the challenges and opportunities it presents both satisfying and rewarding. Despite the tendency for librarians to retain their specialist interest there has been a significant move by specialists to widen their professional interest. It would be fair to say that children's librarians now regard themselves as librarians first and specialists second.

Interviewees were asked to outline the personal qualities and professional expertise they sought when appointing staff. At a first professional level personal qualities far outweighed professional knowledge. Many respondents indicated that they no longer expected more than a general understanding of the basics of working with children and felt that enthusiasm and a desire to learn were the important factors. Personal qualities aside, respondents sought candidates who were able to keep their view of children in perspective and who could demonstrate a commitment to the broader context of librarianship. Interestingly few respondents related specialist knowledge to information technology and non-book materials. The qualities described by interviewees closely supported those outlined in the Library Association Guidelines (64):

*"Enjoyment in working directly with children and young people.*
*Enthusiasm for the materials involved.*
*Energy in bringing the two together."*

At a more senior level staff were expected to demonstrate organisational abilities. Outside the specialist area staff were expected to be able to motivate others and to demonstrate marketing, evaluation and targeting skills. Many of the skills required related to interpersonal and training abilities. The technical knowledge required related to all aspects of children's work including child development, detailed stock knowledge and educational trends and initiatives. Personal qualities were still viewed as important. Staff were required to show the leadership, enthusiasm and knowledge to be able to ensure that children's work formed an important part of the total concept of the library service. One authority stated that they no longer asked for a chartered librarian to fill such a position, and considered that two years working in a specialist post provided adequate time to gain such skills.

### 3.1.2.3.6. Library Assistants / Para-professional Staff

Authorities differ considerably in the manner in which they organise and deliver services to children and their carers.

For the purposes of this research respondents were asked to outline the role that library assistants played in delivering children's services. Results from the questionnaire and follow-up interviews indicate that they are regarded as having a very important part to play in the provision of services for children and their carers. The national guidelines for children's services (65) emphasise the significant role library assistants play in helping to deliver specialist services:

*"Library assistants at public service points have the majority of contacts with individual children and should be expected to develop knowledge of readers and an awareness of stock. They should not be expected to undertake professional work, but their importance should be recognised."*

Results from the questionnaire (Appendix 10 - figure a) show the extent to which library assistants are involved in the technical aspects of specialist service provision. Their participation is often to be found in those activities which relate directly to children; storytelling, class visits, holiday activities and work with under five's. In such activities personality and the ability to communicate well with children are important factors when assessing the success of an event. In authorities where there are very few specialist librarians it was considered better to use library assistants to provide such activities, rather than generalist librarians who were clearly not interested in, or are unable to relate well, to children.

Interviewees were asked to consider how far they felt that the use of library assistants devalued the role of specialist librarians. It was suggested that in the past anyone who had expressed a liking for children was able to find an outlet in providing specialist services, whereas in other specialisms library assistants were used to a much lesser degree. Authorities suggested that in a library service where there were only one or two specialist staff then without input from library assistants they would be unable to deliver a quality service:

*"Where there are a few dedicated professionals working directly with children then ..... it is quite legitimate to regard the role of the professional as an enabler in organising the activity, and that professional is taking the leading part in that ..... there is a huge amount of potential in the skills and experience of non-professional staff."* (h)

Although the respondents emphasised the value of the skills and experience of many library assistants, they also stressed the need for there to be a clear definition of the extent to which para-professional involvement was expected. They indicated that there needed to be a clear dividing line between the input of specialist staff and the work of library assistants:

*"The substitution of non-professional staff for what would otherwise have been professional library work is clearly something which would devalue* [children's services]. *The greater involvement of non-professional staff and the valuing of non-professional staff I am very positive towards."* (l)

*"If all the organisation and execution of the work is totally left to non-professional staff* [then children's services suffer] *but if professional staff set up a situation, organise content, give a lead and involve non-professional staff to actually put* [things] *into practice then it doesn't devalue the role."* (n)

Where library assistants play a significant role in providing library services for children their skills should be valued and recognised . Many authorities have created posts which ensure 'identified' library assistants are acknowledged as having a specific role within children's services delivery. It may be that NVQ's can be developed that will formerly recognise that role, but this should not be at the expense of specialist training for professional librarians.

### 3.1.3. Education and Training

Since the beginning of the 1980's personal experience and evidence collected for this research suggest that the emphasis in Library and Information Departments (LIS) courses has been on developing skills relating to information technology and management skills. In drawing back from the provision of courses relating directly to basic public library skills many LIS departments have deleted specialist courses. Children's librarianship has not been unaffected by this course of action. Pain-Lewins (66) outlines the reduction of courses relating to children's librarianship. She suggests that now, more than ever before, there is a need for all students to receive a basic grounding in all aspects of public library work. As the profession moves towards an increasingly 'generalist' approach to staffing then it is essential that all librarians have general knowledge of children's librarianship and children's literature. Parker (67) indicates that there is a downward trend in those wishing to take specialist courses. This may simply be a reflection of the general downward spiral of those wishing to follow a career in public libraries. Pain, however, suggests that the interest in children's work and other related fields remains high, but states that the reduction in specialist modules has caused a drop in suitably knowledgeable lecturers.

Within the last five years LIS departments have moved more closely into the 'information' market, reflecting the fact that the vast majority of their students do not go into public library work. This has very much changed the nature and emphasis of current courses. Elkin states that:

*"The LIS departments aim to provide generic courses which emphasise the principles, theories and skills which are common to all occupational sub-groups, and which make students aware of the range of environments in which library and*

*information services can be provided."* (68)

Most LIS courses provide a range of 'core' topics which include 'information retrieval and storage', 'information technology' and 'human resource management'. Work with children and young people and schools librarianship fall outside the 'core' provision as a specialist option. Although the LISC Report (69) suggests that there are few specialist courses available the reality is perhaps slightly brighter. In the early 1990's Elkin (70) produced two studies outlining the current opportunities for specialist training. Her findings indicated that despite the reduction of taught specialisms an interest in schools and children's librarianship remained high amongst lecturers and students. Elkin and Lonsdale's recent book 'Focus on the Child' (71) outlines some of the modules available for those wanting to pursue a career in children's librarianship. The majority of these have a much wider focus that children's librarianship and children's literature. Examples of such courses are 'The Child in Society', 'Children, Learning and the Media', 'Information Services for Young People' and 'Management of Children's and Popular Reading'. Such postgraduate courses can also be used to support dissertation research.

### 3.1.3.1. First Professional Qualifications

It is generally observed that courses for first professional qualifications now lack an in-depth study of children's librarianship and children's literature. Both the LISC Report (72) and Elkin and Lonsdale (73) acknowledge that foundation courses are intended to provide a range of generic courses which can be applied to all occupations in the library and information market. Whilst accepting that LIS departments have to be financially viable and they must meet the 'core' demands of an increasingly diverse profession, the reduction of specialist courses has had severe implications for children's librarianship.

Respondents to this thesis were asked to indicate how they perceived the quantity and quality of first level specialist training. The majority, 65%, considered specialist training to be inadequate, whilst only 13% felt that current training fell within the acceptable to good range (Appendix 7 - figure a). Several interviewees stated that librarians entering the specialism needed much more support and in-service training than had been required in the past:

*"New staff straight from library school tend to need a lot of training and support before they can begin to reach the level of knowledge that would have been expected some years ago."* (c)

When asked to specify the major gaps in current specialist education the respondents indicated many areas ranging from specific issues such as 'how children learn to read' and 'teaching methods' to the very general 'children's work'. Their responses (Appendix 7 - figure b) indicate a perceived need for students to be provided with general courses relating directly to the study of children's librarianship and children's literature.

During the follow-up interviews specific items relating to current education were raised. Participants outlined the essential need for LIS departments to provide a balanced 'core' of studies which would prepare students for working in all types of library situation. Many expressed the view that LIS departments had concentrated their energy and resources on information technology and management skills at the expense of a broader and more professional skills based curriculum:

*"We would prefer to see library schools concentrating more on professional skills and knowledge, stock selection, stock knowledge, enquiry techniques, etc., and less on management training. We would rather identify those with management potential at a later stage and develop them in-house"* (o)

For those staff employed by a large organisation and authorities who display a 'real' commitment to training by funding and enabling staff to attend courses there is clearly an opportunity for development 'in-house'; but staff in other authorities are seriously disadvantaged in terms of job prospects and self-development. At a time when local authority budgets are being cut training departments are frequently unable to provide the necessary support for staff requiring specialist courses.

While stressing the need for the provision of specialist courses, interviewees were only too well aware of the danger of entering a specialist 'cul-de-sac' at such an early stage in a student's career. They suggested that there was a need to create a broader 'general' curriculum, in which children's work was firmly based within the total concept of librarianship. They indicated that it was the responsibility of individual authorities to provide in-depth specialist training which new children's librarians would require:

*"Specialist knowledge about things like children's materials can be developed when people actually join us."* (p)

The indication that students were not encouraged to enter the public library field, let alone a specialist area, was outlined as a major failure on behalf of local authorities to keep LIS departments aware of the positive developments within the public

sector. Several authorities questioned the validity of the criteria LIS departments used to select candidates for courses of study. The view being that academic criteria did not take account of personal qualities. Interviewees suggested that LIS departments did not liaise closely enough with local authorities and therefore were unsure as to the type of staff that public libraries now require. Griffiths outlined her involvement with selecting candidates from her own authority, Birmingham, to take the part-time degree course. She stated that her own criteria were very different from those of the LIS department lecturers:

"[Library school lecturers seemed to feel that if people were] *academically capable of passing the exams they were all right, we were looking at them as future managers in our library service and saying this person isn't capable of ever being a valuable manager in our library service."* (q)

Liaison between local authorities and LIS departments was considered to be of paramount importance if suitable courses were to be provided. The significance of student placement was mentioned on several occasions. If public libraries are to attract staff of a high calibre then they must ensure that the impression a student receives is of a positive, challenging and rewarding profession. The indication from several LIS departments was that finding public library placements in certain areas of the country was very difficult. The University of North London (UNL) find public library placements the most difficult to arrange; stating that many authorities simply will not take students because of the pressure of existing work. Interviewees were critical of those authorities who presented a negative image of the library service to students. The close liaison between authorities and LIS departments is present in several authorities, not least Birmingham where several 'skills-swapping' programmes are underway. Vivien Griffiths described how easily students can be presented with the wrong impression of public libraries and went on to say we owe it to public library services to present a positive image:

"[The students can be] *dumped in a library somewhere* [sometimes] *for a whole year doing the most menial jobs and* [are] *not given the opportunities for development at all and, therefore, come away with an abiding hatred of public library services ..... when they had spent a couple of days with members of my team they were saying "We didn't know it was like this, we're enjoying it, why didn't anybody tell us"."* (q)

### 3.1.3.2. Continuing Education / Professional Development

The indication that more and more librarians are now entering the specialism without even a basic grounding in the fundamentals of children's librarianship

has serious implications for in-service training and continuing education programmes. Kempster (74) demonstrates that a survey carried out in three London boroughs revealed that of those librarians working in children's services, only 28% had deliberately chosen to work within the specialism. This, coupled with the ever-growing demand to develop new skills and gain further qualifications, has created a significant demand for further education courses. In 1979 Ray (75) stated that:

*"There should be provision for additional training later in a librarian's career, to equip a children's librarian moving towards a senior position with the skills in management which will be required to undertake responsibilities. There should also be provision for short courses to refresh a librarian's skills, and to add on or reinforce skills needed as the services or responsibilities increase."*

The importance of maintaining and developing new skills is recognised by the Library Association; their framework for 'Continuing Professional Development' actively encourages members to seek further training opportunities. As LIS departments have moved more clearly into modular designed courses they have created more opportunities for part time and distance learning. Elkin (76) states that although the range of university based short courses has increased the majority remain within the award bearing programme. This factor may discourage some librarians. The LISC Report (77) emphasises the need for more co-operation between practitioners and LIS departments if education and training for the specialism is to move forward nationally in a positive manner:

*"The major under-developed area in which LIS schools could usefully join with practitioners is that of continuing professional development. Whilst some of the courses run by specialist groups are well received, there is overall a lack of structure and consistent quality that belies the very strong professional commitment we have observed among children's and education librarians. A partnership between practitioners and LIS schools with interest and experience in this sector could assess needs and examine mechanisms for promoting a more structured, high quality continuing professional development programme targeted at those already working with, or interested in working with, children and young people."*

In many ways the specialism is fortunate in the number of opportunities presented for continuing education and professional development. Many of the LIS departments include modules relating to work with children that can be studied on a part-time basis. Outside of the universities there are many other

agencies who present relevant training packages. The Youth Libraries Group (YLG), and its regional branches, is, perhaps, one of the most prolific of all the Library Association's sub groups in its provision of training. Children's librarians themselves have shown an enthusiasm to progress further in their chosen profession and regularly attend courses. A British Library research paper (78) relating to courses attended between November 1987 and October 1988 shows that 14% of organised training was relevant to librarians working with children and young people. The report suggests that the provision of training courses relating to children's work is perhaps greater than any other aspect of the service, quoting the need to provide current awareness courses on developments such as the 'National Curriculum', 'the Education Reform Act', and the 'Children Act' as a reason for this fact. It may also be true to say that many children's librarians limit their opportunities by limiting the range of courses they attend to those directly relating to the specialism. It might be more beneficial for individual librarians and the specialism to look at wider issues such as management. Although there seems to be a range of opportunities for development and progression in the specialism, the lack of management courses and the inability to attract non-specialist staff may have added to the poor professional image of children's librarians. Elkin (79) has criticised the quality and depth of some of the training and professional development offered; she stated:

*"Too much ongoing professional development within the area of work with children and young people has been piecemeal, unstructured and not always of the best quality. Subsequently the picture presented to the profession and the outside world has often been low grade and unprofessional. This belies one of the most professionally committed groups. A partnership between LIS schools and practitioners is required to assess research needs within the sector and look at mechanisms for promoting a more structured, high quality professional continuing education programme targeted at those already working with, or interested in working with, children and young people."*

Interviewees for this study were asked to consider the role of continuing education within the specialism. First professional courses were seen as the providers of general practical grounding in children's librarianship; with continuing education providing the opportunity for further development in specialist areas or in library management. The theoretical notion of such courses was welcome, particularly with regard to the generalisation of the profession. Departments of Library and Information Studies would need to ensure that such courses were financially viable and seek accreditation:

*"If suitable training is not going to be provided then it may be that a series of courses, specialist diplomas or some kind of courses could be arranged. A long distance module which gave people the opportunity to find out about children's librarianship, child development, education, etc., would be very useful, and could be a bolt-on to the library qualification already gained."* (e)

*"If specialist papers* [are] *disappearing then* [the provision of short courses] *is perhaps a step further in the specialisation. Big authorities can provide this in-house but some people like the idea of a paper qualification which they can transfer to other authorities."* (q)

Indications from the responses for this thesis suggested that many authorities did recognise that staff were the most important and most expensive resource of any library service. This has ensured that training and professional development remains high on the agenda of many authorities. In reality, however, in financially stringent times, it is difficult for employers to be totally committed to the continuing career development of their staff. Local experience suggests that the focus of much training is on functional issues, such as IT training to enable staff to perform more effectively, rather than on broader issues relating to professional development. Interviewees commented on the cost of courses run by educational establishments. They recognised the need for courses to be financially viable but suggested that unless an employer was prepared to take responsibility for financial support then staff could not afford to participate. Local authorities, such as Birmingham, have retained a high training budget and are able to send several members of staff on the locally run part-time degree course. Other authorities with smaller training budgets and no easy access to University facilities find it more difficult to support staff in further education:

*"Short courses are probably one way forward. There is a lot of knowledge needed and a lot of up-dating. People do get stale and out of date. It's very easy not to read things It would have to be open learning, distance learning. There is no point in trying to organise things where people are expected to trot to Glasgow, etc., they are simply not going to get the time to do that ..... Employers need to pay for* [such] *courses."* (g)

The introduction of part-time degree courses and the distance learning package at Aberystwyth University are a significant step forward in recognising the value of library assistants. Both the employing authority and the student

involved have made a heavy commitment to staff development. The former financially, the latter through a commitment of time and study. This pattern of study may benefit local authorities; employers already know the staff involved and are aware of their capabilities; the staff themselves have a good basic grounding in library routines and retain that practical input throughout their course of study. Distance study is not an easy way of gaining a qualification and staff have shown an enthusiasm and desire to progress further in librarianship; the opportunity to carry out some professional tasks before qualifying with the assistance and support of qualified librarians is readily available. Concentrating on developing library assistants should not be achieved at the expense of professional librarians. All staff need to be able to develop their skills and extend their knowledge as they progress in their career. In providing opportunities for career development, employing authorities, are showing staff that they are seen to be a valuable asset.

Although there clearly are opportunities for specialist development one of the major stumbling blocks for practitioners is finding out just what courses are available and where. There is a great need for national co-ordination of the training opportunities available and for that information to be made available to practising librarians. Many agencies provide training on similar themes and in many cases there appears to be considerable duplication of effort. Kempster (80) outlines the unpublished results of the 1987 forum of library school lecturers and practitioners in the specialism; among other comments she states:

*"The forum also emphasised the importance of ongoing communication between the library schools and the employers, who need to know what is being covered in qualifying courses in order to assess training requirements."*

### 3.1.3.3. External Course Attendance and Feedback

In considering the range of courses and opportunities available for professional development we need to investigate whether or not those attending are the most appropriate staff and whether knowledge is being shared with other staff. Many courses relating to children's librarianship seem, from personal experience, to attract similar audiences and frequently seem to be those staff who already have a good grasp of the subject matter under discussion. Which raised the question are course organisers targeting the right audience and do many local authorities benefit directly from staff participation?

Respondents for this thesis were asked to indicate whether they were encouraged to attend external courses on a frequent or infrequent basis. The initial response suggests a significant commitment to professional development. 81 (64%) reported that they were encouraged to attend training courses on a regular basis, and a further 44 (35%) indicated that they attended training courses infrequently. This, however, is not a true picture of the current situation. Several authorities suggested that although they were encouraged to attend external training courses, financial restrictions prevented them from attending on a regular basis. It appeared that the number of staff attending a particular course had been greatly reduced; whereas in the past four or six people might attend a course, numbers were now limited to one.

The reduction in the numbers attending courses from individual authorities means their feedback to colleagues is of even more importance now. 81% of respondents indicated that they were expected to pass information from courses back to their colleagues. Many suggested that this was a fairly informal process, which might only consist of a short verbal report. Other respondents indicated that information from specialist courses was not circulated widely enough and tended to be limited to a small group of people. Despite the apparent widening of the specialism there seems to be an assumption that only those with a specific and clearly identifiable specialist role will be interested in related courses. In many cases managers and generalist librarians would benefit from the enthusiasm and knowledge generated on such courses. Closer 'targeting' of appropriate staff and more effective feedback procedures would help to increase the value of specialist training courses.

### 3.1.3.4. Training Courses: Specialist Groups

The decline in first professional courses and the increasing generalisation of the profession has significant implications for all local authorities. Many authorities have neither the financial nor the manpower resources to produce adequate training in all specialist areas. Thus the work of specialist groups has an important role to play in the provision of training courses. For the purposes of this study the questionnaire and follow-up interviews sought to provide an overview of the training role of all specialist groups. It is perhaps an indication of the current situation that the majority of replies referred to the work of the Youth Libraries Group (YLG).

### 3.1.3.4.1. Questionnaire and Interview Results

The questionnaire called for respondents to indicate who they felt was in the best position to provide specialist training. The results (Appendix 8 - figure b) suggests that specialist training should be provided by those with a knowledge and affinity for the specialist area. Over 50% of the respondents considered that training should be retained within the specialist area; provided either by specialist groups or working librarians. The perceived view of current specialist first professional courses as poor is reflected in the low percentage, approximately 17%, suggesting that library schools would provide the best quality specialist training. The criticism of specialist courses may relate to the perceived notion that all specialist courses have been removed. Little value or recognition was given to existing modules on wider issues such as 'child development' and 'children in education'. In my opinion the profession would gain from closer links with child psychology courses and departments of education which would emphasise the holistic approach to developing services for children. There was a clear demand for courses relating to what were seen to be the basic specialist skills and identified as 'children's literature' and 'children's librarianship'. It was suggested that there were very few lecturers with the background knowledge to deliver such courses any more; if this is so then it presents an opportunity for academics and practitioners to work together to decide what is needed and find the most appropriate ways of delivering it. A further 17% of respondents suggested that the Library Association and its sub-groups should take responsibility for specialist training. The Library Association's series of courses relating to management and personnel skills were considered to be an important step forward in the provision of professional development for working librarians. Criticisms levelled at such courses related to both their location and their cost. The majority of the courses are held in London and the cost may be outside local authority expenditure and equally may deter individuals from funding themselves. On the other hand, courses organised by YLG, particularly the regional branches, were praised for their quality and low cost. Despite the fact that many authorities successfully organise their own inter-authority training packages, the Youth Libraries Group were still seen as having a significant role to play:

*"There are never enough resources to put on all the children's training you want in your own authority, certainly we're too small to do that. There are lots of areas I feel people should be trained in and we just can't put the courses on that quickly to meet all those needs. Things like the 'Children Act', work with*

*under 5's and services to teenagers, these are courses that our children's services panel members have been able to go on outside the county and they've brought all that they've found back to everybody else."* (d)

A number of interviewees commented on the need for co-ordination of training; indicating that specific themes tended to reappear at Youth Libraries Group branch courses. They suggested that the national committee had perhaps a stronger role to play in ensuring that branch committees were not simply duplicating each other's training packages. Although, overall, Youth Libraries Group courses were highly regarded, some respondents suggested that the steady increase of in-service training had lessened the demand for input from specialist groups. Concluding that it was perhaps time for such groups to re-define their role:

*"I don't know if the Youth Libraries Group has ever defined its role in training ... In the past in more traditional library authority regimes very little in-service training was provided. Because the Youth Libraries Group represented a group of interested enthusiasts they were able to put on courses which perhaps ought to have been put on by authorities themselves. The Youth Libraries Group are still trying to continue that and at the same time lots of other bodies are providing training as well."* (n)

The growing number of groups and professional bodies providing training in various forms has created considerable overlap and many authorities recognised the need for central co-ordination:

*"There is too much training being offered by too many different bodies. There are considerable overlaps and it would be a much more effective use of staff time if there were some sort of regional co-ordination .....* [It would be very foolish if the] *Schools Library Association, Youth Libraries Group and, in some cases,* [the local branch of] *the Library Association, were all putting on different courses on similar things." (n)*

Training provided by the Youth Libraries Group has wider implications for group membership. Two specific training roles were identified:

### 3.1.3.4.2. Individual Training

Traditionally Youth Library Group branch committees are seen as the province of fairly new professionals and middle management staff. If this is the case

then committee membership presents new professionals with the opportunity to develop, fairly early on in their careers, skills which in their 'base' authority would probably be regarded as the function of a senior children's specialist. The chance to help organise and design training packages on a regional and national basis; to chair meetings; to represent the region on the Carnegie/ Greenaway panel and to participate in group decision making are surely all part of the 'learning experience' and help individuals develop to their full potential.

### 3.1.3.4.3. Group Training

One of the major qualities of the Youth Libraries Group branch training was identified as being the manner in which it brought national concerns and local needs together. Areas where the close proximity of participating authorities has ensured committee membership represents all local areas (such as the West Midlands) were singled out as being particularly successful in targeting a specific audience. Respondents indicated that they considered the themes of branch training days to reflect current concerns within the specialism. Many expressed the view that 'targeted audiences' were now much wider than specialist librarians. Courses such as 'Special Needs', 'The Children Act', 'Educational Developments' and 'Work with Teenagers' were not considered as being the province of children's librarians alone.

Whereas branch courses were regarded quite highly, respondents were more critical of the training provided by the national committee of the Youth Libraries Group. It was felt that in the past the annual weekend school had not been clear enough in its aims and objectives and had, therefore, failed to target its audience. It was suggested that the crisis in the specialism had called for the group to focus more clearly on the significant issues affecting children's work.

Thus the more recent courses have focused on issues relevant to the whole profession. In the last few years the weekend school has considered such issues as 'the management of services', 'service delivery' and 'literacy'. Despite this some interviewees expressed the view that the major drawback of the weekend school lay in the fact that it tried to reach too diverse an audience. It was suggested that the formal training sessions should be aimed at a specific group and level of staff rather than a whole range of professionals.

### 3.1.3.5. In-Service Training

The removal of specialist options from first professional courses has had serious implications for in-service training provision. 'Investing in Children' (81) highlights this issue and states that:

*"Every library authority should have a strategy for specialist training of staff engaged in work with children and young people."*

The report also emphasises, as do the Library Association Guidelines (82) that quality service requires quality training.

*"To provide good quality services for children and young people, all staff who encounter children in the delivery of library services and all specialists working in those services must be committed to, and motivated by, the requirements of those clients, and should have adequate opportunities for specialist in-house training."*

The recognition that in-service training is a significant feature of staff development, and thereby improves the library service, is emphasised by the increasingly professional approach to the packaging and provision of training. Several authorities operate co-operative training ventures which enables a wider range of courses and allows cross-fertilisation of thoughts and ideas. 'Investing in Children' (83) highlights a sample of these ventures, specifically those which relate to children's librarianship and related topics. The Yorkshire Children's Services Group is a group of the heads of children's and education services in South and West Yorkshire; the group meets approximately every six weeks to exchange information and ideas and discuss ventures which benefit from co-operative resourcing. Between them the group plan at least one training day each year. In several authorities the corporate nature of training is reflected in the establishment of a group which produces a training plan for several departments. This centrally based group with representatives from each department acts in an advisory capacity and co-ordinates training throughout the authority. Pearl Valentine outlined the significance such a group has on the library service as a whole, and on specialist training needs:

*"Each year we have to provide a training plan for them* [the training group], *so that once a year we have to sit down and think about what our training needs are."* (c)

In many authorities children's services have traditionally led the way in establishing regular in-service training programmes. Birmingham, for example, described a specialist training programme which had been well established for over twenty years. The extension of training programmes throughout the profession has, to some extent, been detrimental to children's services, as they now have to compete for time and resources with other areas of the service. However, the importance of specialist training for all levels of staff is stressed by the Library Association Guidelines (84) which state:

*"training in work with children should form an integral part of both induction and cyclical programmes for all levels of staff."*

Being in competition with other areas of the service for in-service training has meant the demise of ad-hoc training in favour of clearly focused training courses which relate to the needs of staff and reflect the overall training policies of individual authorities:

"[Our] *training policy is usually decided up to twelve months in advance by the libraries management team. They will be responding to staff and staff demands they will take the overview and decide what training is needed.* [They] *may* [also] *be responding to demands such as the 'Children Act'."* (v)

Hertfordshire, Shropshire and Norfolk are among the authorities who retain a definite number of specialist training days a year. The content of these days may reflect a regular event, such as the selection of Carnegie/Greenaway nominations. Other courses relate to the voiced needs of members of staff:

" [Our courses] *relate to what is current, what is needed and what people want."* (s)

*"If enough people are telling us there is a particular area they are interested in, then we try and run a course, but we also look at training needs in what community librarians are trying to achieve, what their priorities are ..... As a unit we have our own priorities and targets."* (t)

Performance management and staff appraisals provide a system for staff to indicate their training needs. Within children's services regular weekly or monthly meetings provide a forum for brief training or updating sessions and an opportunity for informal suggestions for longer training courses. Training is an expression of commitment to staff and it is important that training

departments are seen to be responding to individual requirements. The provision of training within a specialist area indicates to staff that the authority regards that specialism as important. It is also important that staff recognise the importance of one-to-one training within the workplace; not all training involves attending a formal course at a venue outside work and the value of such training needs to be emphasised:

"[It is a process] *of self evaluation.* [We] *need to look at our training needs positively and for those needs to be reflected in other avenues for them to pursue training objectives."* (h)

### 3.1.3.6. Training Provision

One of the important issues investigated by this study was how frequently authorities provided formal in-service training courses; it also considered the level of staff that were included in in-service training programmes. These particular issues were raised because it was felt that responses would provide a clear picture of the emphasis and importance authorities placed on training; provide an indication of their on-going commitment to staff training and highlight the level of staff the majority of training was organised for. Respondents were asked to indicate whether their authority provided in-service training or not. No attempt was made initially to ascertain whether specialist training formed part of an induction course for all new staff, or whether it represented a cyclical pattern of children's services training. A high percentage of authorities replied that they did organise training in some form (Appendix Z - figure 9a); of the total responding 79% provided training relating directly to children's services.

An attempt to ascertain the levels of staffing that authorities provided training for (Appendix 11 - figure b) merely indicated that courses were organised for all staff. This, perhaps, reflects an increase in induction courses relating to all areas of the service for all new members of staff. The provision of specialist courses for library assistants also represented a significantly high percentage of training provision. The latter perhaps reflects the move towards involving more library assistants in the delivery of many of the practical aspects of the service.

### 3.1.3.7. Specialist Training Areas

With regards to specialist training this study considered the range of subject areas covered. Since, in many cases, in-house training forms the basic introduction to children's work for both professional staff and library assistants core elements of the service were identified. Respondents were provided with a 'core' list of topics and asked to identify items not included on the list; the latter were then categorised and put under 'core' items or classified under broad subject headings.

The results (Appendix 8 - figure a) indicates the current concerns for librarians working with children and young people. 38% indicated training relating to educational developments, these ranged from 'the implications of GCSE for public libraries', 'reading development', 'The Education Reform Act' and 'Local Management of Schools'. Services to pre-school children and their carers was another area of concern; 32% indicated training in this field, with topics ranging from 'service development' to 'The Children Act'. The majority of course provision related to 'technical' skills, such as storytelling and book promotion, which may reflect the increase of specialist input into the training of generalist librarians and library assistants.

## 3.2. Conclusions and Moving Forward

The publication of the Library Association Guidelines for Services to Children and Young People (85) , and the LISC Report 'Investing in Children' (86) have focused professional attention on the role of libraries for children and young people and on those staff who deliver the services. Such major publications suggest an area of the service with a very clear focus and sense of direction. The 'crisis of confidence' acknowledged amongst specialist staff in the 1980's seems to have been addressed with many staff emerging with a very positive image of the role of children's librarians. Many have recognised the need to move into managerial positions, maintaining some of their practitioner skills, but taking a much more definite role in managing and developing the specialism and providing support and training for other library staff. Some have also acknowledged the wider role that libraries play in the community and are working much more closely with community groups and other local authority departments to extend the influence that librarians can have in society.

This move towards managerial status has not been an easy one for many children's librarians, who have found it difficult to limit their practitioner tasks and actively dislike seeing other, non-specialist, staff taking over that role. In developing a managerial role, senior children's staff are acknowledging that caring about quality service provision and ensuring development within the specialism does not require daily contact with children. In ensuring a voice for children's services in the adult world they are destroying the pre-conceived perceptions of many non-specialist librarians that children's librarians are 'childish' and only interested in one area of the service. It is hoped that such a move will encourage all staff to recognise the true value of children and young people in terms of library clientele.

Despite these very positive developments within the specialism, there are clearly still many problems to overcome. Both the LISC Report (87) and the Public Library Review (88) voice concerns over the removal of specialist staff in many authorities, and the apparent shortage of specialist courses at a first professional level. LISC has called for a more integrated strategy for the delivery of library services to children and young people; linking the role of the public library, school library services and individual schools, thus providing a library service for the whole child. Research shows that there is little evidence of any such development throughout the country. This call comes at a time when public library services for children and schools library services are, probably, more clearly divided than ever before. Even in those authorities where the two areas of service remain under the control of one department head it is clear that schools library services are more demanding and require a greater input of time. Teachers and governors have more political standing than children and will ensure that their voices are heard to get what they want but children as individuals have no political voice.

There is grave concern that as senior management posts become, by nature, more generalist, the voice of children's services will not be represented by someone with the knowledge and skills to fully understand the complexities of the specialism. However, the value of such posts perhaps lies in the fresh eye they bring to the specialism and in their obvious ability to see children's work within the overall context of the library service. If these posts are not supported by appropriate middle-management staff who do retain the detailed specialist knowledge there is a danger that children's services will lose ground. There needs to be recognition from outside the specialism that children's work requires, not only, the commitment of all library staff, but also the detailed knowledge and skills that only specialist librarians can bring.

Among many children's librarians there still seems to be a belief that specialist work is not of key importance in helping children develop and progress in society. Too much time can be given to the 'fun' elements of the job, such as storytelling and craft activities, without any real conviction that there is a deeper purpose behind such events. If children's librarians themselves are not convinced of the value of the work they do then they cannot expect others to value their input. Librarians appear to lack any real power in ensuring children develop to their full potential and many are content to play a passive role in children's education and development. In essence librarians try to be all things to all people and do not provide the depth of service that is required to make a real difference. It may be that generalist management has failed to grasp the underpinning philosophy of children's services and thereby sets specialist staff too broader series of targets and objectives. Whilst these can be measured in quantitative terms they fail to address quality issues. The role of the librarian in the community is of paramount importance; children's librarian's need to look for issues, such as parenting skills and literacy projects, where they can play a key role in supporting children and their carers.

The professional status of librarians is frequently questioned, not least by those in the profession. Within the specialism the traditional image of children's librarians does not lead to an obvious professional status. The status of children in society, and therefore by default those who work with them, is very low. Despite a recognition within the profession that the specialist input is important if services to children are to develop in an effective manner, there is no indication that the number of specialist posts nationally is likely to increase. Equally it appears that many of the existing specialist posts are at a low level within staffing structures, indicating that although children's librarians are thought to be worthwhile they are not considered important enough to pay very highly. For many children's librarians the move into management has not brought with it direct line management of staff. In management terms this reduces the person-power and control that the specialist librarian can exert over the development of their service area. It may also be seen as a reduction of their status as librarianship moves more closely into management concepts. In reality the control that specialist librarians operate is through their professional expertise; recognition of this expertise by other staff brings with it a certain amount of control over the manner in which staff perform and deliver services.

In the training of professional librarians it may be that we have gone too far down the management and information technology road. Whilst recognising

that students need to possess numerous skills to work in a range of fields within the library and information world and that students need the skills to enable them to move easily from one area of the service to another, it is still worrying that basic specialist skills are being neglected. The call for more awareness of existing opportunities in specialist education and a clearer definition of the role of continuing education and professional development should be recognised. At the moment specialist training relies too heavily on in-house provision and thus on the quality and quantity provided by individual authorities. Whilst practitioners have been dismissive of current LIS courses there needs to be a recognition that the focus of much library education has now changed. LIS departments are now equipping students to work in a range of library settings and it may be that specialist groups and local authorities need to pick up on the provision of in-depth specialist training. Closer liaison between practitioners and academics would perhaps help to redress the subject balance of library education and training and provide a basis for establishing specialist courses and training. Greater credence also needs to be given to courses outside the direct specialist area; if librarians want to play a greater role in the community and develop more inter-departmental links then they need to show a knowledge of issues such as child development and educational trends.

In considering the issues of professionalism within the specialist area we need to consider whether changes within the specialism have damaged or enhanced the professional status of children's librarians. Moving into a managerial role increases status in that it recognises the need for children's services to be represented at a senior management level. However, it may be that in emphasising the management role we further detract from the professional expertise and skills of the work. We have already seen that working with children and young people is regarded as unchallenging and lacking of any real professional input; children's librarians also have the added disadvantage that the majority of them are women and thus it is much harder to gain professional recognition. In taking this research forward it examines the professional nature of children's librarianship and concentrates on the child in society and explores whether the current status of the specialist area provides them with any real role in supporting and developing children.

## 4. Professionalism

The history of the 'professions' is well documented. Some professions such as medicine, law and the church have a long history in British society. Others, such as teaching and librarianship, have found it harder to establish themselves as recognised and valued professions. What determines which occupations are given the status of profession? Initially there were a small group of professions which were regarded as having similar institutional and ideological traits which produced distinctive, occupational identities. Perkins (1) suggests a *"professional society based on trained expertise and selection by merit"*, whilst Friedson (2) identifies the concept of a handful of occupations which have similar ideals and institutional training which binds them together. He describes professions as having *"a naturally created social label applied by lay people to a limited number of occupations that are considered in some way superior to ordinary occupations"*.

### 4.1. Professional Attributes

What constitutes a profession? Why are some occupations regarded with greater public esteem than others? Hogget (3) outlines the attributes that all the professions have in common. He emphasises the high public esteem in which many professionals are held, which is reinforced by both professional and personal codes of conduct. The altruistic nature of working within a profession means that work is seen as a career rather than an occupation or a means of earning a living. This frequently results in a blurring of personal and professional life. Entry into a profession must be gained through a programme of education and study resulting in the acquisition of specialist knowledge which is regulated by a professional institution. Such study is normally at university level. A lengthy period of study is regarded as members making a long term commitment to their profession. The longer the period of study the greater the esteem in which the lay person holds members of the profession.

Within their working life members of a profession will expect to have a high level of autonomy. They will judge how, and what, tasks are to be carried out and enforce basic standards to ensure these tasks are carried out adequately and to a level required by their profession. Monitoring of professional output is carried out by someone within the profession with a high level of specialist knowledge; those outside the profession are judged as technically unable to judge professional skills. Within the profession there is an assumption that, within their own specialist area, the professionals know what is best for their

clients and that their advice will be taken. A professional will retain a certain loyalty to the profession he is part of and will look to that professional body to offer support and guidance on a national basis. Friedson (4) provides an overview which draws all these concepts together:

*"Professionalism might be determined as a process by which an organised occupation, usually but not always by virtue of making a claim to special esoteric competency and to concern for the quality of its work and its benefits to society, obtains the exclusive rights to perform a particular kind of work, control training and access to it, and to control the way work is performed."*

## 4.2. The 'Semi-professions'

Outside the traditionally recognised 'major' professions stands a group of occupations which are sometimes termed the 'semi-professions'. These frequently include occupations such as teaching (particularly at primary school level), nursing and librarianship. Etzioni (5) describes the semi-professions as lacking an identifiable body of knowledge which the lay person cannot access for themselves. Formal education and training tends to be much shorter than in the 'major' professions and practical 'on-the-job' training forms a significant part of the final qualification. In many cases it appears that the semi-professionals have less autonomy than the professionals; working within a hierarchical structure which accords prestige on the basis of official position. There are those, however, who believe that the semi-professions do have the same attributes and significance as the 'major' professions. In his 1986 study on nursing, Allen (6) describes nurses as:

*"practitioners whose practise is based on a body of theoretical and highly valued knowledge. The profession masters and employs this knowledge within a commitment to service, an altruistic devotion to helping others. Work must be autonomous, guided only by the ethics and standards of those who share the expertise and not be interfered with by those who do not have similar training."*

Many of the so-called semi-professions employ a high percentage of women workers. Etzioni (7) records that in 1968 in the United States of America 86% of elementary school teachers and librarians were women. Thus the semi-professions may be seen to be granted the same status in society as women.

Traditionally women are granted less autonomy than men and there is an accepted view that women have less commitment to their profession than their male counterparts:

*"A woman's primary attachment is to the family role; women are therefore less intrinsically committed to work than men and less likely to maintain a high level of specialist knowledge."*

## 4.3. The Decline of the Professions

Since the middle of the twentieth century there has been a gradual decline in the power and status of all the professions. Hogget (8) suggests that as far back as the 1960's and 70's communities were uniting to decide for themselves what services they wanted and how they wanted those services provided. The traditional belief that the professionals always knew what was best for their clientele was being questioned and many of the professions were being regarded with a certain degree of scepticism and antagonism. Perkin (9) outlines a 1980's backlash against the professions:

*"Not merely from an economic sense but against the power, privilege and pretensions of special interest groups, particularly organised professions."*

Individual freedom and the freedom of the market place became even more evident in the 1980's under the Conservative Government of Margaret Thatcher. The professions clinging to their belief that only they had the skills, knowledge and right to carry out certain services, coupled with their equally firm belief that they know what was best for their clientele, were regarded as a threat to this freedom. Friedson (10) describes the professions as barriers to the *"individual freedom of workers in the market place to offer whatever goods and services they desire and of customers to decide to buy whatever they wish"*.

The government attitude to the professions was most evident in their dealings with state-supported professions. Perkins (11) states that these professions were frequently regarded as unproductive and parasitic upon the wealth creating private sector. In seeking to reduce the power and status of the professions the government introduced monitoring by non-professional bodies. Brint (12) points out that by doing this they effectively eroded many of the attributes which make an occupation a profession. The professions had to be seen to justify and measure their output, often to people who had no specialist

knowledge who were judging them on a financial basis. In many professions senior posts were awarded to those with marketing and financial skills rather than those with specialist professional skills. In short financial accountability had become more important than professional ethics.

The status of the professions was also threatened by the reduction in resources made available to develop services. Many in professions such as medicine and teaching saw this gradual reduction of funding as a real threat to the quality of the services they provided. The power of the private sector enabled them to pay their senior staff at a much higher level that equivalent staff in the professions or the public sector. The power and status of the professions fell with their salaries.

## 4.4. Local Authority Professionalism

The history of local authorities can be traced back to the middle of the nineteenth century; then, as now, their key role was to provide a range of local public services under the supervision of democratically elected councillors. Following the second world war local authorities took on new significance when they acquired responsibility for such public services as Education, Planning, Public Health, Housing, Transport, Social Services and Leisure Provision. Laffin (13) examines how the acquisition of such major services ensured local authorities rise to political power. The essence of local authority provision, local services meeting the needs of local people, remains unchanged, but as services have been abolished and new functions added local government officers have had to seek new ways of providing the essential services. Not only have services and functions changed so too have local authority structures. Some authorities have disappeared altogether, others have merged and new ones have been created. It would be wrong to suggest that central and local government have not always worked closely together. In recent years, however, central government has called for local authorities to review both the services they provide and the manner in which those services are delivered. Since the beginning of the 1980's the government has sought to limit the powers of local authorities by constraining their expenditure whilst retaining and improving the services that people really need. Ridley (14) states:

*"In order to reconcile these two objectives it is essential for local authorities to concentrate on what is really wanted and needed by local people, to improve accountability, to eliminate waste, duplication and unnecessary functions and to improve value for money."*

The Widdicombe Report (15) published in 1986 looked at the framework within which local authorities operate and emphasised once again their key role of meeting the needs of local people. It stressed, however, that local government needed to be more responsive and accountable to their local electorate. The report also looked at the functions of local government and considered whether they were the most appropriate people to provide certain services, suggesting that some of those services could, perhaps, be better delivered on a national basis or by private enterprise. It recognised that many services provided by local authorities also have a significant national interest and that central government initiatives might be seen to conflict with local authority service delivery. Local authorities were called upon to ensure they tailored service provision to what could be afforded.

### 4.4.1. Local Government Officers: Professionalism

Against this background of change and uncertainty is set the role of local government officers. Like other professionals they have a particular view of their professional role; they consider that they possess a unique body of knowledge and the skills which enable them to effectively manage that knowledge for the practical benefits of their clients. Local government officers also believe that their professionalism goes beyond the claim to a set of competencies and job related skills to a deeply held commitment to a set of public service ideals. Stokes (16) outlines the main attributes of the local government officer as having *"access to a special problem-solving skills or knowledge"* and *"a value system which prioritises concern for the best interests of the client"*. Officers expect their skills and expertise to be recognised by their employers, elected members and the public. In terms of public recognition it is difficult for the layman to fully understand the role of local government officers. Since the term encompasses such a range of skills and expertise there is not a distinctive identify which the public can recognise. Equally officers are associated with the bureaucracy and hierarchy surrounding local councils and their professional role is often disregarded in favour of their administrative role. There is also a tendency to dismiss officers as mere public servants, responding only to public demand, a role which is often seen as requiring no professional expertise. Within the sphere of local government staff are recruited to a specific profession and their loyalty to that profession may be greater than their loyalty to a particular authority or to public service in general. Although it is recognised that professional training in these areas also reinforces a commitment to public services:

*"A professional officer is trained not only in certain skills but also to hold a particular set of beliefs to make certain assumptions and to hold certain values."* (17)

However, the commitment to public service is through the profession rather than the organisation. Officers frequently lack any real knowledge of professions or departments outside their own. A large number of local authorities have citizen's charters or mission statements outlining what the public can expect from them, but in reality their own staff have little training which fully explains the work of individual council departments. The further commitment to a particular profession is reinforced, in most cases, by promotion being gained by moving within the profession from one authority to another. Membership of a professional association which frequently supplies standards and guidelines further strengthens professional ties. Since many officers belong to a professional association they often have a national role which is seen by many to have the same importance (if not a greater importance) as their local role. It might be said that local government officers have, and display, an accountability to their clients and their profession rather than their employing organisation.

Officers have now realised that management skills are an essential attribute if the professional is to survive. Stokes (18) suggests that as management skills have become more important professionals have moved into that area to stress the legitimacy of their role. Senior officers have now moved away from the actual practice of their profession to become managers of other public service professionals. The creation of multi-disciplinary departments has meant that professional staff are often managed by somebody who has no knowledge of their particular profession.

### 4.4.2. Local Government Officers: Professional Decline

As with other professions, local government officers have witnessed a decline in their power and status. In a society which places great importance on income it is clear that salary levels in the public sector have fallen well below equivalent posts in the private sector. Perkin (19) records that since 1981 all public sector workers (other than the police and fire services) have witnessed an average decline in income of 5% compared with an 11.1% rise in the private sector. One of the most significant reasons for the decline of professional status is the changing relationship between central and local

government. Since the beginning of the 1980's central government has sought to reduce the power of local authorities. They have emphasised the need for local authorities to be financially accountable to the clientele they serve and challenged the right of local government to be the only service providers. In a period of severe financial cutbacks and restraints on spending the role of local government officers was questioned:

*"Local authorities are often dominated by a culture of 'professionalism' ..... knowledge and skill are believed to be confined to the professional people involved in any situation, to the exclusion of the client."* (20)

The changing ethos in service delivery has meant that officers are expected to think of the services they provide in much the same way as colleagues in the private sector. Local services have witnessed the introduction of performance measurement, compulsory competitive tendering and sweeping reductions in manpower and funding. Officers can see their role changing. Many feel they are no longer planning developments but rather managing cutbacks. Laffin (21) suggests that in such austere circumstances *"service development has been replaced by a more limited obligation simply to defend certain minimal standards".* Government interference in professional output was experienced by many officers. In education the establishment of the national curriculum and the choice for schools to 'opt-out' of local authority control was regarded by many as a threat to professional development and local authority powers.

The partnership between officers and elected members has also changed. The political objectives of members and the professional objectives of officers now seem to be conflicting rather than complementary. In a period of severe cutbacks and changes in service provision officers often consider themselves to be representing their clientele against changes proposed by members. Elected members are no longer content with relying on officers' professional judgement alone. Members consider that they have a significant role to play in deciding what is best for local people. In recent years local politicians have become much more assertive and confident in their own abilities and now will frequently question professional judgement:

*Professionalism is challenged politically as Councillors begin to question the validity of professional judgement. There is a public challenge, as the authority for professional decisions is increasingly questioned."* (22)

Elected Members question the right of professionals to lay down standards and their duty to judge the best interests of local people. The conflict could be seen as members' local experience versus professional moral credentials. It is often difficult for members to realise that officers have no political agenda; many officers can stand outside their own beliefs and look to what is best for their clientele. New political realities have created considerable divergence between the values of officers and members. Although officers have a political accountability and are answerable to elected representatives they consider it their role and professional duty to represent and protect their clientele when the politicians are proposing changes.

The relationship between officers and their clientele has also witnessed significant changes. Hoggett (23) describes the initial assumption amongst professionals that they had the right to advise their clients on matters within their sphere of expertise and the expectation that that advice would be taken. Increasingly this is no longer the case. The role and status of professionals in all walks of life is being questioned and this is most evident in those professions associated with the Welfare State. There is increasing public scepticism about professional expertise and advice and a perceived gap between social problems and available professional solutions. This is particularly evident in professions such as social work and teaching. The development of community councils, residents associations and other community groups has emphasised the rights of local people. The ideology of the citizen as a customer has given the right to local people to choose for themselves the services they require and the manner in which those services are delivered. Officers can no longer assume that they know what is best for their clientele. They must be seen to be 'getting close to their public' to find out what is really required. Many authorities produce guidelines and in-house performance measurement indicators which allow the professional to judge his performance but now 'customer charters' are being produced which enable clientele to judge professional output. Stokes (24), however, indicates that in reality the majority of citizens do not possess the skills or sufficient background knowledge to judge professional accountability:

*"Citizens lack basic knowledge, information and resources to bring professionals directly to account. In many instances their 'loyalty' to the profession is greater than any desire to challenge or question their decisions, let alone an option to choose another provider."*

It is clear that many officers have moved away from professional to managerial roles. In the case of Chief Officers they have totally removed themselves from the actual practice of their profession into a role which can be seen as managing other public service professionals. Management structures are often seen as a threat to professionalism, regarded as overriding professional judgement in favour of an ethos of service provision which relates more closely to the private sector. In practice it may be that management has merely seen to incorporate professional skills within the new management structures. Hoggett (25) states that *"rather than attempt to strengthen 'management' in order to control 'professionals' the strategy shifts towards creating managers out of professionals."*

Stokes (26) identifies five relationships between professional and management structures which have developed within local government. The De-Skilled professional whose role has become subservient by simplifying and down-grading their job; the Constrained professional who retains some autonomy but who has been forced to accept the imposition of guidelines and codes of good practice from outside his profession; the Contracting professional who has moved much closer towards the private sector, offering services on a contract basis; the Technocratic professional who acts as an advisor to the business people appointed to oversee his work; and the Management professional who now considers himself a manager rather than a professional. In this new system of local government it seems likely that all professionals will fall into one or more of the categories identified by Stokes. The emerging pattern appears to suggest that professionals will become increasingly more accountable to managers and the influence of management ideas:

*"This phenomenon is strongest in both aspects in the case of the de-skilled professional but also plainly applies in the case of the constrained and the contracting professional. The technocratic and managerial professionals have integrated much management thinking into their role orientations. Although driven by professional values the technocratic elite accept that their work will be assessed by their output and performance over a financial year or some longer time period. The managerial professionals are likely to be even more fully committed to management values because of the way they have come to define their role."*

## 4.5. Librarianship: Professionalism

In considering librarianship as a profession we are faced with two problems. In the first instance the public do not generally recognise librarianship as a science; in the eyes of most observers operating a library successfully requires administrative and clerical skills rather than higher education qualifications. For the majority of people their understanding of library services is gained through visiting their local public library. There they will see the routines of library work; shelving and issuing and discharging books. Tasks which are probably being carried out by library assistants or para-professionals. The public, however, regard anybody they see working in a library as a librarian and it is difficult to associate such routine tasks with professional status. This brings into play the second problem which concerns the attitude of librarians themselves to their profession. Many librarians do nothing to promote their professional skills and knowledge, appearing to remain content to be seen as library administrators. In the recent Review of Public Library Services, Aslib (27) suggests that librarians have done little to ensure public recognition of their professional capabilities:

*"Librarians have undersold themselves where they are seen to concentrate on everyday clerical routines in libraries, instead of developing and promoting their skills and knowledge of the materials with which they work. Librarians have a professional role in the provision, promotion, exploitation and development of the materials available in a library."*

Within the profession there are those librarians who do not regard librarianship as a profession. Flanagan (28) states that librarianship is not a profession *"because it has no reasonable or scientific justification"*. Whilst Goode (29) remarks that *"librarianship is not a profession because library and information science is not a well defined field of enquiry"*. Equally there is much confusion amongst librarians regarding the difference between being a member of a profession and acting in a professional manner. The latter, of course, is not merely the prerogative of qualified staff. Adams (30) indicates that there is a difference between *"professional ability and professional attitude"* and states that professional ability is not judged solely by a paper qualification.

### 4.5.1. Professional Image and Status of Librarianship

If we consider librarianship specifically does it meet with any or all of the criteria which determines whether an occupation becomes a profession? We

have already seen that librarianship is not regarded as a highly skilled occupation by the majority of the public. There is often a strong regard for the public library as an institution; library and information services are frequently quoted as the most appreciated of local government services. A Comedia Report on the Future of Public Librarians (31) reinforces the high value placed on library services, the library was considered important because *"it was a focal point for children and parents, and for school use."*

Librarians themselves, however, are not regarded with the same high esteem as people in many other professions such as teachers, doctors or lawyers. The role of the professional librarian is neither understood nor deemed to be important. Librarians are seen as serving public demand and therefore their role is often regarded as demeaning. Flanagan (32) suggests that since librarianship is not a profession that wields any real power over people, in the same way as doctors or lawyers do, it will never be regarded as being one of the major professions:

*"The librarian exercises no real authority with his clients; his judgement could never command the respect of a client that a doctor's or lawyer's would."*

It may be that as Information Technology becomes an even greater force in modern society then the information providers will have an increased public status. If librarians are going to benefit from the rapidly increasing information market then they need to move now. In many cases libraries already lag behind schools and information brokers in providing access to new technology. There is also a tendency amongst many librarians to distance themselves from new ways of delivering information. However, this may be one way in which the public will recognise the significance of librarians.

Librarians have a poor media image which affects public perception of the role they play. There is still a pervading image of libraries as places for silent study with a stern-faced librarian ensuing that silence is maintained. Since the public have no idea of the professional nature of much of the work that is carried out by librarians they do not see them as having any real importance or status. Some of the blame for this situation rests with librarians themselves; some libraries are clearly designed for library staff rather than their clients. There is often the tendency for librarians to concentrate on the minute details of their job rather than looking at the wider role libraries have in local government and in the community:

*"(librarians) attempt to become invisible, using language that reinforces a poor image; creating an environment that does not foster carrying out information functions; earnestly confusing the public about who is a 'trained' librarian, and persistently eschewing the creating of a strong relationship with clients."* (33)

The status of librarianship is also governed by the fact that the majority of its workforce is female. Comedia (34) records that 75% of professional posts in public libraries are held by women and that 90% of library assistants are female. Thus librarianship is accorded the same status in society as women and it has been harder to establish a recognised profession. Many of the skills associated with librarianship, such as nurturing, are traditionally seen as feminine, thus enforcing the view that it is an appropriate occupation for women:

*"Librarianship, like nursing, teaching, social work, air hostessing, doctors' receptionists and, more recently, bank counter work, are commonly thought of as suitable jobs for women."* (35)

Librarianship fulfils the expectations of a male dominated society. Despite being a predominantly female profession its senior elite consists almost totally of men. The Library Association records that only 20% of their members earning over £20,000 are women. Equally the number of women on the Library Association Council is very small compared to the number of women within the profession. Gill Burrington (36) observes that she was only the third woman to be elected President of the Library Association. As few women are appointed to senior posts there is little evidence of the role they play when library authorities are publicised. The concept of men controlling the workforce and being responsible for developing the service is perpetuated as the majority of women librarians are seen to defer to men:

*"At the level of work where they predominate they* {women} *can be seen to be extending their traditional role by carrying out the decisions made by men, rather than by taking their own decisions."* *(37)*

### 4.5.2. Codes of Conduct

If we consider the professional and personal codes of conduct within librarianship and the altruistic nature of librarians it is possible to see a very high level of commitment. The Library Association has produced a code of professional conduct (38) which has recently been reviewed. The code sets

out the standards of professional conduct expected by members of the Association. Much of the code relates to members facilitating the public's right to freedom of information and it emphasises that the materials within a library should not *"encourage discrimination on the grounds of race, colour, creed, gender or sexual orientation."* It also highlights the members' commitment to their clientele and states:

*"Members' primary duty is to their clients In all professional considerations the interests of the clients take precedence over all other interests."*

and,

*"Members must fulfil to the best of their ability the contractual obligations owed to their employer ..... Circumstances may arise when the public interest or the reputation of the profession itself may be at variance with the narrower interests of an employer. If it is found to be impossible to reconcile such differences then the public interest and the maintenance of professional standards must be the primary consideration."*

It also refers to personal codes of conduct, stating that members' conduct should in no way damage the reputation of the Library Association. In relationship to professional activities it highlights the importance of maintaining a detailed knowledge of developments relating to librarianship and emphasises the importance of professional development.

Since the documentation from the Library Association is not prescriptive there is no clear evidence to suggest that either local authorities or individual members acknowledge their content. The Library Association recognises that, in many cases, the goals they set are merely an academic, paper exercise and that competence and quality vary from institution to institution and from authority to authority. In respect of individuals the Library Association has even less authority; the manner in which individuals interpret the code of conduct is as much a personal as a professional matter. There is strong evidence to suggest that principles gained in training are abandoned in practice. Speaking of the American Library Association, Reeves (39) states:

*"The Library Association establish goals for library services knowing that existing guidelines are ignored in many libraries. Librarians imbued with the principles of librarianship whilst in training may abandon these precepts in practice."*

Outside the Library Association's 'Code of Conduct' there is clear evidence to show that public libraries are responding to the demands and needs of their clientele. Many library authorities frequently survey their customers and respond to identified needs; several authorities operate 'Friends Groups' in libraries, enabling the public to take a part in the way their library service develops; Most authorities operate a comments and suggestions scheme, enabling the public to comment on specific issues relating to the library and to gain feedback on the libraries reaction. The production of guidelines and charters not only enables the public to know what they can expect from their library service, but also provides the opportunity for staff to monitor their own performance by constantly reviewing aims and objectives and reviewing what is done. The evidence collected in this way suggests that the public remain very appreciative of their library services. Since, however, much of the evidence is anecdotal it needs to be assessed in a much more clinical light than currently seems to be the practice. To date librarians have been very wary of having their services and staff assessed in terms of quality and competence by outside assessors, although there is some indication that this is changing in the light of the Chartermark and Investors In People; libraries who apply for these awards are using external quality standards to assess their internal performance. The Audit Commission also provides performance indicators on practical issues, such as the speed with which a telephone should be answered and the number of days that can elapse before a letter is answered, which enable libraries to establish some basic standards. Whilst librarians may have valid concerns about outside bodies having the knowledge and expertise to assess their work such wariness seems to suggest concern about the findings.

There can be no doubt that the majority of librarians are dedicated to both their clientele and the service they provide. Many work long hours, frequently taking work home with them for very little financial reward. We have seen from the Library Association Code of Conduct that loyalty to their clientele is of paramount importance and may override loyalty to their employers. Many librarians devote a large amount of their spare time to input into their professional organisation, either on a national or local level. . Librarians have long enjoyed a reputation for their neutrality and non-judgmental nature. In this they are unlike members of other professions who tend to adopt certain beliefs and principles which colour their relationship with their clientele. A recent Comedia Report (40) stated:

*"The organisation and culture of libraries and librarianship as a profession promotes certain values and characteristics of service: neutrality, facilitation, mediation, appeasement, nurturing, tending and providing in a non-authoritarian way, and a sense of service - characteristics played out in the behaviour of librarians."*

Although surveys frequently show librarianship as one of the jobs with the least stress factor this is, in reality, not the case. The stress of managing a large organisation or being responsible for a group of people does not lessen simply because that place is a library or a group of libraries. This attitude is, however, another indication of how librarians are viewed outside the profession. Etzioni (41) suggests that librarianship *"attracts people who want to work with people and be of service"*, and this is perhaps the overriding image of librarians in society; people who care and want the best for their clientele. It may be that outside influences have limited the librarian's ability to provide the best quality service and that too much has been conceded in the name of cost-effectiveness. Roberts (42) suggests that the move from librarian to manager may bear some responsibility for this:

*"..... it marks the robbing of professionality in the higher reaches of the profession and acceptance of the meretricious values of unenlightened cost-accountancy."*

For librarians professionalism goes beyond the direct provision of services. Professionalism also includes the way in which they interact with colleagues and the impact they have on both the organisation they work for and on the profession as a whole. Despite this there is still a remarkable number of librarians who appear to be embarrassed by the job they do. Whilst this remains the case neither professional or personal codes of conduct, nor dedication for the service provided can ensure recognition of the professional status of librarians:

*"Every librarian has an obligation to promote their profession and what it achieves. This is not done by apologising for being part of it. It is done by naming and claiming what professional librarians do, and by letting others know of the contribution of the profession to the wider world, and of the profession's successes."* (43)

### 4.5.3. Professional Qualifications

We have seen that for an occupation to be accorded professional status its members must go through a lengthy period of study, specifically at university level. Such a period of education results in acquiring a specialist knowledge which is regulated by a professional institution.

Initially we need to consider whether librarianship constitutes a specialist body of knowledge. Clearly there are those both inside and outside the profession who believe that librarianship fails to meet this criteria. Reeves (44) suggests that librarians have systematically failed to *"establish control over an esoteric body of knowledge"* whilst Goode (45) states that librarians have *"no special sanctions over the use of library and information science in the same way as doctors or lawyers have over the use of medical or legal knowledge."* The Library Association's account of the role of librarianship gives some credence to the call for the professional status, but their emphasis is on technical skills and abilities rather than a body of esoteric knowledge:

*"Professional librarians formulate, plan, direct and deliver library and information services by identifying the needs and demands of actual and potential library users, collecting, retrieving and organising knowledge and ideas in a variety of forms, from books and manuscripts to computerised databases, and disseminating and marketing library and information services to clients."* (46)

However, it may be that practising public librarians do not recognise the need for a diverse range of courses which equip students for work in all areas of the profession as well as public librarianship. Within society it is likely that people will change jobs, and even careers, on a much more regular basis in the future. Universities have to take some responsibility for preparing students to meet these demands. It may be that the professional strength of librarians lies in their ability to change. To recognise that in a constantly and quickly changing information market they have a role to play in enabling others to find and use that information.

In considering the courses of study themselves, it is possible to see that the academic study of librarianship grew out of a body of practical knowledge rather than a band of theoretical knowledge. Many practising librarians feel that today's courses do little to meet the practical demands of public library work. However, it is important to realise that only a minority of LIS students

will pursue careers in public libraries and current courses must reflect the demands from all areas of the profession:

*"Schools should be training students for the world as it is, not the world as it might be."* (47)

In the 1960's and 70's students entering librarianship could do so through taking a two year diploma course. The diploma course called for specific educational achievements; at the time entry was awarded through five GCE passes, two of which were at 'A' level standard. This requirement has not changed. The content of the diploma course concentrated very heavily on practicalities such as cataloguing and classification and the study of bibliography. It was not until the mid 1960's that librarianship began its move to be a graduate profession. This was not fully achieved until 1986 when the Library Association withdrew approval from the last remaining two year course at Loughborough Technical College.

The creation of a three year degree course by the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) enabled a much wider course content, allowing students to incorporate other disciplines within the study of librarianship; perhaps suggesting for the first time that librarianship touched upon a range of other areas. Postgraduate studies are now also available; here students are able to study a year long librarianship course after gaining a degree in another subject. First professional level courses are now totally the responsibility of Library and Information Studies (LIS) Units within universities. Individual universities are responsible for developing their own courses and have the power to award their own degrees and post-graduate qualifications. These courses are validated by the Library Association and the Institute of Information Scientists. The basic courses still retain the core elements including information retrieval, information sources and services and basic information handling skills. Although courses are now university based they clearly do not require the same initial long term study which is a feature of some of the other professions, particularly the medical profession.

Part time degree courses and distance learning have created opportunities for library assistants who may not possess the initial academic qualifications required to enter a course of full time professional study, but are able to bring considerable practical experience to the course programme. The proposed introduction of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) as an alternative route to a professional qualification has caused much concern within the profession.

In a recent article Kinnell Evans (48) suggested that NVQ's were a threat to maintaining a graduate status. She suggested that the emphasis of NVQ's was on competencies rather than encouraging the deep questioning and intellectual vigour of a degree education. Evans asks the question which other profession would accept this as an alternative route to a professional qualification.

### 4.5.4. Professional Association

If we consider then the role of the Library Association in establishing librarianship as a profession some significant factors emerge. The Library Association was established in 1877 and stated its main purpose as being *"to raise librarianship standards and improve services to the public"*. Membership of the Association is gained through Chartership; Chartership is granted by the Association after candidates have successfully completed a librarianship qualification and gained practical experience for a period of at least a year. Associateship is usually gained two or three years after graduation; a period which serves to recognise the candidate's professional competence and commitment. The value of associate membership is one which is questioned by many librarians. Some regard it as an important expression of professional commitment and a way in which they can contribute to the field of librarianship:

*"The award of the associateship should mean something, an acknowledgement by one's peers of a level of professional competence."* 49)

Others, however, do not maintain their chartered status and allow their membership of the association to drop. The Library Association does not have the power to determine who can and cannot practice as librarians. Since the majority of the public have difficulty in distinguishing a qualified librarian from a library assistant they are not, I would argue, going to attach any significance as to whether a practising librarian is chartered or not. A Canadian survey showed that only 30% of practising librarians belonged to their national institution. Insofar as professional status requires membership of a professional association this clearly diminishes librarianship's case:

*"Only a profession that has a strong professional association can and will receive the respect of other professions and professionals."* *(50)*

The role of the Library Association then is not, on the basis of the evidence I have found, a strong one in establishing and reinforcing a professional status. In terms of a professional body it encourages and supports its

members in a variety of ways; it provides a range of opportunities for continuing professional development; it encourages and funds research in relevant areas; in recent years it has had a fairly high profile in contributing to political debate regarding the future of libraries; it attempts to raise the profile of libraries and librarians on a national basis by organising events such as National Library Week and the Library Power campaign. Despite all this it is fair to say that many of its own members question its role and validity. Reeves (51) questions the whole structure of the library organisation and suggests that without a stronger link to the centre librarianship will never be regarded as a profession:

*"The librarian occupation lacks the structural power of an established profession. While librarians are corporately organised by library associations and schools, they do not have the right to licence practitioners, enforce standards of practice, or enter into contractual negotiations on behalf of librarians."*

The failure of the Library Association to ensure that all practising librarians are members of the association is a vital issue when we look at the status of librarians. In practice it seems that not all information providers need to be librarians and those that are need not be part of the national body. This weakens the case for professional status:

*"Not all professions are equally successful in controlling the market for their services, but all try. The profession's boundaries are established by specifying what it takes to be a member of the group - who is in and who is out."* (52)

### 4.5.5. Professional Autonomy

A profession demands autonomy, freedom for its members to judge how and what work will be carried out and the right to establish basic guidelines and standards for their own output. Within the last twenty years there has been a significant decline, in even the most well established professions, of freedom from outside influence. In the case of public librarianship it cannot be said that they have ever been free of influences from outside the profession. Within local authorities librarians have to meet the demands of both local people and local politicians; these may often conflict with professional commitment. The funding of local government may mean that a library directorate will undergo severe financial cutbacks which limit the way in which professional librarians can operate. The move to a graduate profession implies better trained staff

able to give higher quality service. Local authorities may be prepared to sacrifice some of the quality in favour of lower costs by employing para-professionals in the place of qualified librarians.

As library services move into other directorates, such as Education and Cultural Services, it is becoming increasingly likely that the director of services will not be a librarian. By losing directorate status there is an assumption that public library services are not as important as other local government services. This raises the question of the image of librarians outside the profession. There is frequently little understanding of what the job entails or what the role of the professional librarian is. Drake (53) states that there is an *"assumption that jobs are neither very complicated nor very important; and so libraries are perceived as mere repositories and librarians as mere attendants"*.

As this situation develops it is likely that the role of librarians will continue to be underplayed and undervalued.

Intervention from Central Government also has a major effect on public library services. Issues such as the introduction of the National Curriculum, Local Management of Schools, the introduction of the Nursery Voucher Scheme, and GCSE and NVQ examinations have serious implications for libraries. Yet these are all issues where librarians have not been consulted and the effect on libraries has not been taken into consideration.

### 4.5.6. Does Librarianship Constitute a Profession?

Can librarianship then be termed a profession? It clearly does not meet with all of the criteria which identify the major professions. For many commentators there is no significant body of knowledge for which librarians can claim responsibility. Additionally amongst the majority of the public there is no real understanding of the librarians' role in society and little value is placed on the work they do. The greatest contributors to this lack of status and poor public image has been librarians themselves. Surely no other profession undergoes such 'soul-searching' in determining whether or not they deserve professional status. Many librarians concentrate so intensely on routines and the day-to-day running of the library that they fail to see the bigger picture and are unable to see how the library service could develop its role. The Librarians' professional body lacks some of the power of many other professional institutions, essentially failing to ensure that all practising librarians are chartered and working to the same national standards. Although in recent years the Library

Association has raised it's political profile and is now able to 'lobby' more effectively in the national political arena it still lacks the strength and credibility of other professions and departments. There are also concerns over the education and training of librarians. Does librarianship need to be a graduate profession and does the introduction of qualifications such as the NVQ lower the status of a graduate profession.

In its favour librarianship has maintained a neutral service delivery, providing the same quality service for all people. Librarians are committed, dedicated people who display a remarkable loyalty to their clientele and the profession they serve. They frequently have, and display, personal and professional codes of conduct which determine the manner in which they perform their job. The recent review of public library services in England and Wales (54) suggests that it is up to librarians to develop and promote their professional role:

*"Librarians have roles as innovators, as people who recognise needs and develop new services to meet those needs, and to ensure that the library profession is seen as a respected and authoritative sources of knowledge."*

## 4.6. Children's Librarianship: Professional Status

The professional status of children's librarians is affected by many of the issues we have already considered in a general view of librarianship; not least the public perception of an occupation that lacks any real knowledge and power. Overall children's librarianship has been slow to develop a significant standing, even within its own profession. Colleagues frequently attribute working with children and children's literature as somewhat less academic and less important that other areas of the profession. Children's librarians have consistently failed or been unable to explain the value of their work to non-specialist staff. As a result colleagues frequently only witness the 'fun' element of the work and having fun does not constitute serious learning. As librarianship was slow to develop as a profession then children's librarianship was even slower. Kempster (55) suggests that the reasons for this lie in the separateness of service delivery for adult and children's services and in the tendency of children's librarians to carry out the most routine of tasks:

*"..... slow process if professionalism of librarianship is an aspect which has affected children's work in libraries. Early children's librarians were expected to do routine work of a clerical nature but with the evolution of an all graduate*

*profession, such expectations are no longer sufficient. The physical isolation of some children's services meant that the impact of such changes are still to be felt."*

It would also be true to say that even today many children's librarians are still expected to, and many still do, carry out many daily routines in the library. Routines which colleagues in adult services have long since left to library assistants.

Two further factors affecting the professional status of children's librarians are that the majority of them are women; few men appear to enter this area of the profession, although within the senior echelons of the specialism there are several notable exceptions. In the eyes of the public at large this automatically lowers their professional status. Equally working with children is given less value and status than other areas; the 'childminding' role frequently associated with children's librarianship is given greater public credence by some children's librarians. They neither emphasise the significance of their role in supporting literacy development nor do they attempt to develop the skills and expertise they can use to support parents and carers. There is also the assumption that children can be viewed as a homogeneous whole and, therefore, those professionals providing a service for them will require very little knowledge. In the terms of children's librarians exactly the opposite is true. Children's librarians are required to have knowledge of children's literature and information needs for an increasingly wide range of library users. Elkin (56) suggests that no other specialist has to have such a wide knowledge:

*"..... in reality no other specialist has such a wide range of abilities and interests to meet among clients, across the whole spectrum from the bright pre-school child to the semi-literate teenager as well as to their intermediaries: parents, carers, teachers, childminders, playgroup leaders, social workers, community workers, youth leaders, religious leaders."*

The 'crisis of confidence' experienced by many children's librarians during the 1980's has been well documented both in earlier chapters in this study and by other writers such as Shepherd, Parker and Kempster. The reduction of specialist posts and the need to justify actions and services has led to clearer and better defined aims and objectives and the instigation of performance measurements which suggest a much more professional approach to the delivery and development of children's services.

### 4.6.1. Specialist Knowledge

It may be that children's librarianship is one of the most professional aspects of the library service. As a specialist area it can more clearly define the body of knowledge that is required by its specialist members. The Library Association Guidelines (57) list the skills and knowledge required to successfully deliver services for children and young people. They include within a basic body of knowledge an understanding of child development, a knowledge of education and educational trends, an awareness of child culture and an in-depth knowledge of children's literature and other related materials. It is fair to say that many children's librarians do possess this kind of knowledge but frequently they fail to ensure that others are aware of the knowledge they possess. It is interesting to note that in recent political discussions about homework centres no mention was made of the role public libraries could play in this development. All too often national literacy initiatives fail to involve librarians or even acknowledge the role that libraries can play in developing a literate society. Therefore it is vital that children's librarians see their professional role in a proactive manner, which ensures their skills are valued by colleagues within their own profession and in other sectors of the community.

### 4.6.2. Specialist Education

Specialist education no longer forms a major part of librarianship first level courses. Opportunities do exist for the study of children's librarianship but these tend to relate to specific areas of the specialism or to focus on more general issues such as the child in society. The gaining of specialist knowledge is much harder to come by now and relies heavily on in-house training and continuing professional development. The LISC Report 'Investing in Children' (58) acknowledges the removal of specialist courses as a problem in developing specialist skills and maintaining professional status. It calls for more liaison between Library and Information Studies Departments and Local Authorities in order to maintain the quality of children's librarianship and service delivery. The reduction of children's courses may be akin to the decline in specialist posts. It may be that there is a belief that children's librarians require neither a high standard of education nor a high level of ability and professional status. Elkin and Denham (59) state:

*"A decline in professional posts, allied to a lack of recognition of children's librarianship as requiring high level professional ability and knowledge at all levels."*

The LISC report also identifies particular skills which should be included in specialist training; these include stock knowledge, effective communication skills, ability to handle groups of children and promotional skills. Of these they emphasise stock knowledge as being the most significant. Children's librarians display a remarkable knowledge of children's literature and information books; this can sometimes be developed in an academic way which bears little relationship to children's interests and reading habits:

*"Of these, knowledge of children's books is the critical issue. Staff must be motivated to read, know and enthuse about books. If the knowledge of, and enthusiasm for, books is not there, the service will assuredly dwindle."* (60)

### 4.6.3. Standards and Guidelines

In looking at standards and guidelines for library services it is possible to see that children's librarianship often leads the way. National Guidelines for library services to children and young people were drawn up in 1991. These were the work of several senior practitioners and, therefore, seen by many as representing good practice. As with other Library Association standards and guidelines these are not prescriptive but have been used by many authorities as the basis for in-house standards. The LISC Report calls for model standards which could be adapted by local authorities but would be regarded as part of their statutory responsibility in library provision for children and young people:

*"There should be model standards for services for children and young people, specifying minimum levels of provision and entitlement."* (61)

It is an indication of professional calibre and status that the LISC Report came into being through concerns expressed by children's specialists, and through the work of specialist groups including sub-groups of the Library Association. In terms of personal and professional conduct children's librarians display a remarkable commitment to their specialism and their clientele. They frequently work long hours and take work home, particularly where the reading and reviewing of children's materials are concerned. The basis of that commitment is centred round the clientele themselves; children's librarians display a genuine desire to achieve the best for children and young people:

*"To provide good quality services for children and young people, all staff who encounter children in the delivery of library services and all specialists working in those services must be committed to, and motivated by, the requirements of those clients."* (62)

### 4.6.4. Do Children's Librarians Merit Professional Status?

Despite all these shortcomings this thesis will argue that librarians, children's specialists in particular, warrant professional status. In terms of children's librarianship the major factors against professional status are the lack of specialist options at first degree level, which suggests that the specialism is not particularly significant within the study of librarianship as a whole. This, coupled with the lack of public recognition for the work of specialist staff, undermines the role of the children's librarian. The question of recognition is even more of an issue in this specialist area because it frequently relates to colleagues in other disciplines. The majority of teachers, social workers, youth and community and adult and further education workers are not aware of the role of specialist librarians; if they see them as having any significance at all it is as the providers of books.

In support of professional status, within children's librarianship it is possible to identify a recognised body of knowledge, relating not only to the specialist area and to children's literature but also to wider issues such as education and child development. Problems remain over membership of a national professional association. However, the sub-group of the Library Association which is most closely associated with public library services for children, the Youth Libraries Group (YLG), is a particularly strong and vocal group. The group has played a significant role in developing national initiatives such as the Library Association Guidelines and has contributed towards the work carried out by the LISC working party. Both the national committee and the regional branches take a major role in the provision of appropriate training for all levels of staff. There is evidence of strong leadership within the specialist area with groups such as the Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians (ASCEL) taking a firm lead in ensuring national commitment to library services for children.

The specialist commitment to its client group cannot be denied. Sometimes this commitment may appear to be misguided and verging on the precious, but in the majority of cases there is a real belief in, and an obvious desire to provide children with the best possible library service; to offer children the opportunity to enjoy books and to meet their information needs. Once

regarded as a separate and unchallenging area of librarianship, children's work now, I would argue, leads the way in many areas and can be regarded as maintaining a high professional status:

*"Children's librarians developed management skills to a high level: they tended to have a very clear view of what they were doing and why; they respected their clients, children and their carers; they were knowledgeable about children's book, child development and educational issues; they understood children's information needs and the value of information handling skills at various stages of their development. In most library authorities it was the children's services that had published selection criteria and multicultural policies way ahead of their colleagues in adult services."* (63)

## 5. The Librarian and the Child

This thesis has considered the current position of children's librarianship and examined the role of specialist staff within the professional and managerial structure. It has identified changes which have affected the role and status of children's librarians and considered whether their role clearly identifies them as befitting the term professional. In putting forward the underpinning thesis that children's librarianship warrants professional status we need to consider just what this fact means to the practitioners themselves and their clientele. Can children's librarians validate their professional status by making a real difference in the lives of children and their parents and carers? Is their specialist role valued outside the profession, particularly in terms of political decision makers? If they cannot achieve these aims then, this thesis will argue professional status is, in itself, of no real value. Further we need to ask whether public libraries and children's librarians have a role to play in the lives of children and their carers in a modern society.

Within the profession itself there has been much discussion about what the role of public libraries should be in the next century and beyond. The Department of National Heritage (DNH) has recently carried out a policy review of public libraries (1) which emphasises that if libraries are to maintain their significant social role they will need to adapt to new ways of delivering services and work more closely with other national bodies. If it is not to be superseded by other private sector providers the public library system needs to clearly identify its role and purpose. Social changes have altered people's perceptions of public institutions and called for services to become much more responsive to public demand; institutions, such as libraries, now find themselves becoming much more market-led than in the past. The growth of new commercialised information providers and the development of the home-based leisure market have seriously affected the role of the public library. Whereas, in the past, public libraries have had a clearly defined market place with little competition from the private sector, they are now having to face competitive pressures from many different sources. Indications within the profession itself are that the public library remains one of Britain's most popular cultural institutions. The recent Public Library Review (2) emphasised the importance of libraries to the community they serve; public responses to the review stressed how much the library enhanced the local community and played a particularly important role in supporting literacy and numeracy and facilitating lifelong learning. The Comedia Report "Borrowed Time? The Future of Public Libraries in the U.K." (3) presented a much more critical examination of public library services, giving , it might be argued, a critical analysis of the problems facing the future of public libraries. The report emphasises the political invisibility of libraries in the context of national

decision makers and in the wider cultural debate. Consequently they are frequently overlooked when decisions are made which will have significant effect upon the way libraries operate:

*"Public libraries have suffered a loss of visibility in the political realm through having no national body to represent their interests. As a result they have often been on the receiving end of policy developments such as Local Management of Schools (LMS) or Care in the Community - which have had major impacts on them, but with little or no advance consultation."*

The staff in public libraries remain one of its greatest strengths and its greatest weaknesses. It has been my experience that some staff respond well to change, and are eager to see the service develop and expand and for libraries to take a strategic role within the local community and as part of a national network. Others, however, present a negative image and tend to focus on what has been lost rather than what has been gained. It is no longer possible to stand back and hope people will see and value the work that is done; librarians need to adopt a much more assertive and proactive role in ensuring their case is heard:

*"Librarians themselves have admitted that they not only had not realised the full extent of the strategic importance of the library service to the quality of urban life, but also had failed to convince or inspire the outside world to take their work seriously." (4)*

One of the strengths of librarianship remains it's neutrality. The Library Association 'Code of Conduct' (5) emphasises the role of professional judgement in the choice of stock:

*"Members shall not knowingly promote materials the prime purpose of which is to encourage discrimination on the grounds of race, colour, creed gender or sexual orientation."*

The Comedia Report (6) also recognises the neutrality of the library as a significant factor in encouraging use of the library:

*"It* [the library] *was perceived as being 'neutral' or democratic territory, open to all, where people could experience their identity as citizens rather than as consumers."*

It may be, however, that this neutrality has tended to get in the way of involvement with political issues or other people's affairs; this may be why librarians themselves are frequently ignored in strategic planning.

Since 1964 local authorities have had a statutory obligation to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service. The public library system has, quite rightly, changed and developed through it's history, adding to its role until now it is difficult to distinguish 'core' services from the periphery activities. The introduction of video libraries and sound recording collections may be, to some extent, self financing but they divert staff time and energy from other areas of the service. For too long the public library service has tried to be all things to all people. It is fair to say, however, that once services are introduced elected members are unlikely to cut them in the future; political credibility relies on maintaining a wide range of high level services. The increasing number and level of services means that many of the functions of the public library are carried out in an unfocused and often unprofessional manner. The public library policy review suggests that libraries have moved too far from their initial high literary, serious status to fulfilling an entertainment role. It is often difficult to separate education and entertainment. Ross Shimmon states:

*"...libraries can educate, inform, inspire and entertain and these functions can weave productively in and out of each other." (7)*

The Comedia Report (8) identifies five main areas of public policy or spheres of influence within which the modern library service operates. These are education, social policy, information, cultural enrichment and economic development and it may be through these that the public library system can more clearly identify it's future role.

In considering the Comedia Report in terms of Public Library services for children and young people the key areas identified are:

- The increasing effect of education reform on public libraries as more children turn to them to resource their curriculum studies; coupled with the libraries' support for independent learning.

- The development of lifelong learning which may include packages relating to children and their needs.

- The potential and emerging role of the library as a 'Homework Centre'.

- The role of the library in terms of access to a wider community; as a place in which children learn about citizenship and develop an understanding of how society works.

- In an information based society the public library has a key role to play in ensuring that children and young people are empowered to locate and use that information.

- The provision of a wide range of books and resources giving children access to their cultural heritage.

In focusing on children's librarianship it is possible to note the emergence of a deep concern amongst all areas of the profession regarding the importance of library services for children and young people. In the past many non-specialist librarians have appeared to view children's work as tolerable because it was producing the adult readers of tomorrow. The value of children and young people as library users with specific needs and rights of their own was frequently undervalued. The importance of providing a library service for children and young people is recognised in the Public Library Review (9) when it states:

*"The role of the public library in meeting the needs of children and young people is of paramount importance in the future economic and cultural health of this country. Continuation of its service to them, untrammelled by barriers to access such as charging, is a critical factor in the future development of the public library service as a whole."*

On the national stage children's librarianship has proved to be a strong and clearly focused specialism. The Library Association Guidelines (10) and the LISC Report 'Investing in Children' (11) have ensured a wider understanding of the role of children's services. In 1995 the Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians (ASCEL) was formed, uniting the three existing senior specialist groups with an overview of services for children and young people. The value of such a group is perhaps best summed up by quoting their aim and objectives:

*"The aim of the association is to provide a pro-active forum in order to stimulate developments and respond to initiatives so that quality services for children and young people through public libraries and education services are offered for all.*

*The objectives are:*

*To work actively with all governmental, professional and other appropriate organisations and individuals in order to promote the value and awareness of library and information services for young people.*

*To formulate consensus policies and strategies to develop and sustain library services for children and young people, for their effective management and co-operation.*

*To promote discussion and exchange of ideas on issues of interest and to provide a means by which views may be formulated and expressed.*

*To collect and disseminate information to members, and others where appropriate, in order to provide mutual support and enhance the knowledge and skills base of the membership as a whole, and safeguard library services to young people." (12)*

In order to ensure that public library services for children are prioritised there is a need to reach an adult audience also. As concern for educational standards and literacy levels grows parents and carers are eager to find ways to support and help their children; this provides specialist staff with an opportunity to identify, promote and develop ways in which public library services can fulfil this role. In many ways this support for both formal and informal education is little removed from the traditional role of libraries and its value is often not sufficiently recognised nor supported financially; for example as communication and information technologies become even more of a focus for the way children seek and find information, to be credible public libraries need to have wider access to computer resources, CD-Rom and the Internet. Local authorities are unlikely to be able to fund such major projects without outside backing and financial support; a recent bid to the millennium commission seeking funding for public library access to the Internet was rejected in terms of 'not being distinctive enough'. Many schools now provide children with access to information through technology and public libraries are often regarded as the poor relation because they cannot present children with the opportunity to find information in this way. The Comedia Report (13) highlights the problem of ensuring that library services present an image which appeals to young people. Access to information through new technology is one way of attracting young people; many of whom feel the library has nothing to offer them and dismiss it as a dull, old fashioned institution. The emergence of early years education as a major political issue has significant implications for libraries. Much of the work already undertaken by children's librarians focuses on this specific area of the

service. There is a clear opportunity for specialist librarians to work with other groups and agencies, to highlight their specialist skills and to emphasise the role of the library service in this area, not only for children but also for their parents and carers. The continuing debate over literacy and reading standards provides an ideal opportunity for public libraries to become involved in the arguments at a national level and to emphasise the significant role they play in developing a literate society:

*"Public libraries are vital for giving children easy and free access to a wide range of books, forming the basis for a lifetime's use and enjoyment. It offers them the freedom to browse and to choose for themselves. In teaching information skills and the subject courses, most schools require pupils of all ages to use sources outside the school. They should have to search for and assess the information sources as they will have to in their adult working and personal life. The public library is central to this."* (14)

## 5.1. Service Philosophy

In recent years society has witnessed the growth of a market-place targeting the child as a customer and consumer. Through parents and carers or children themselves there is clear targeting of a new and lucrative market base. The opening up of the market has tended to emphasise the similarities which band children together as a homogenous group. That there are similarities cannot be denied; children are dependent on their parents or carers; all children have, by law, to undergo formal education until the age of 16; children themselves react strongly to peer group pressure and want to be seen as part of the group. However, within each local authority children will come from a varied diversity of backgrounds, bringing with them an equally varied pattern of experiences. The public library service tries to provide a service for all children and must attempt to meet their individual needs and requirements. It may be unrealistic to attempt to reach all children and young people; limited funding reduces the viability of providing a service for all children in rural areas at a time which is appropriate for them; access and facilities for disabled children are limited in many libraries and reductions in opening hours limits the use children can make of their public library.

Elkin (15) describes the libraries' purpose as serving the *"whole child"* and the focus of public library provision for children must be the child itself. The Library Association Guidelines (16) state:

*"..... consideration of the child is what must inform and determine the nature of library services to children and young people."*

All of the service aims complement each other and none should take precedence over another. Elkin (17) sums up the aims of the public library service for children by stressing the multi-faceted nature of the provision:

*"At the heart of this philosophy is the belief that through its collections, which are uniquely objective sources of information, and ultimately through reading, the public library contributes to children's leisure needs and their intellectual, emotional, social and educational and language developments."*

A range of national aims and objectives have been published by various professional librarians' groups in the United Kingdom. Shepherd (18) quotes guidelines drawn up by the Public Libraries Group (PLG):

*"- to promote and encourage reading as a means of self development*

*- to develop an awareness of reading for pleasure*

*- to assist language development and improve reading standards*

*- to promote and encourage the acceptance of books and other materials as a fundamental means of meeting information needs*

*- to prepare children to make use of various books and information in later years*

*- to promote the means of extending and deepening cultural awareness*

*- to encourage children of all ages and backgrounds to use libraries"*

These guidelines provide a general overview of service provision for children and young people, concentrating heavily on the libraries role in developing literacy. They fail, in their main objectives, to discuss the libraries role in empowering parents and carers to support their children's literacy and educational developments. The Library Association Guidelines (19) provide a much clearer focus for the way in which libraries benefit children, young people and their carers. This may be because they choose to identify three key areas, the importance of libraries in terms of child development; the

benefits that can be gained through the use of books and other resources; the value of libraries themselves as an institution for the client group.

In terms of child development the guidelines state:

*"Intellectual and emotional development - books and stories have a significant contribution here.*

*Language development - particularly crucial in the pre-school years, and an area where the library can enhance a partnership between parent, child and teacher.*

*Social development - children's attitudes to one another and to society are significantly shaped by reading.*

*Educational development - the need for children to acquire reading skills and information skills has long been recognised and is now being reinforced through the National Curriculum."*

In terms of resources and library materials for children and young people the guidelines state:

*"Enjoyment of story experience, of language of associated art, etc..*
*Knowledge of the wider world through both fiction and non-fiction.*
*Understanding of other people, behaviour, culture, situations.*
*Self-knowledge, identity (both individual and cultural), security.*
*Information both problem-solving and 'unguided' discovery.*
*Confidence in the acquisition of vocabulary, speech and language skills.*
*Shared experiences between adult and child.*
*Support for both formal and informal education."*

In terms of what children and young people can gain from libraries the guidelines state:

*"Assistance, guidance, interpretation, enthusiasm and encouragement from trained staff.*

*A far wider range of materials than home or school can generally provide.*

*Access to materials for every child, regardless of background.*

*Access to services at a choice of times and places.*

*Use of materials, the majority of which are available for loan at no charge.*

*Access, through one service point, to the greater library network.*

*A neutral ground between home and school for independent and unhindered discovery.*

*A place to learn and practice information skills.*

*Knowledge of a community facility that has potential lifelong relevance.*

*Experience of the library as an inviting place, with activities and events."*

These guidelines demonstrate a much clearer view of the role played, not only by the library as an institution, but also by specialist and trained staff who, through their expertise and knowledge, extend the significant effect that libraries can have on the lives of children and their carers. A much greater emphasis on detail makes these guidelines of greater significance and value in the planning of library services for children. It is interesting to note that many library authorities have either adopted the total guidelines or adapted the contents to relate more closely to their own needs. In reflection these guidelines are important because they stress the value of experience and expertise in the subject area. All the contributors to these guidelines were senior practitioners with an extensive knowledge of children's librarianship. Their value also lies in the fact that they will be updated on a regular basis and therefore will remain relevant.

It is interesting and useful to compare the Library Association Guidelines with library aims produced in the United States and identified by Richardson (20) as:

*"To make a wide and varied collection of materials easily and temptingly available.*

*To give guidance to children in their choice of books and materials.*

*To share, extend and cultivate the enjoyment of reading as a voluntary, individual pursuit.*

*To encourage lifelong education through the use of public library resources.*

*To help the child develop to the full his potential ability and his social understanding.*

*To serve as a social force in the community altogether with other agencies concerned with the child's welfare."*

These guidelines return to a much more general overview of library provision, providing basic aims, without relating them directly to individual children. Their value perhaps lies most significantly in the final statement. Here the role of the library is described as a *"social force"*, an institution working with others to contribute to making things happen to improve children's lives. This could be incorporated in the new edition of the Library Association Guidelines.

An international perspective of the role and value of public libraries is outlined in UNESCO's public library manifesto; amongst its key missions it states:

*"creating and strengthening reading habits in children from an early age;*

*supporting both individual and self conduced education as well as formal education at all levels;*

*providing opportunities for personal creative development;*

*stimulating the imagination and creativity of children and young people;*

*promoting awareness of cultural heritage, appreciation of the arts, scientific achievement and innovations."* (21)

There are clearly definite aims and objectives for the provision of library and information services for children and young people. It is encouraging to observe that these are being developed within the specialism and actually provide an outline for new staff to follow. It would be useful for colleagues in related professions, such as education and social services, to have some idea of the content of library guidelines to enable them to understand more fully the diversity of children's library provision and to develop cross-departmental co-

operation. Unfortunately there is little evidence to indicate that such guidelines are promoted outside the confines of the profession.

## 5.2. Early Years Learning / Child Development

The recognition that pre-school learning plays a vital role in a child's future development has presented a unique opportunity for public libraries to play a major role in enhancing children's potential. In the Bullock Report 'A Language for Life' (22) significant emphasis was placed on the role of pre-school learning; the report stated:

*"We believe that a priority need is to introduce children to books in their pre-school years and to help parents recognise the value of sharing the experience of them with their children."*

Early learning, however, is not just about literacy and public libraries have an important role to play in other areas of child development. We have seen in the Library Association Guidelines (23) that public library services for children need to take account of their developmental needs. There is still a tendency, however, for librarians, including some specialist staff, to negate the value of children's librarians in the support of child development. It is a factor which is even less widely recognised outside the profession. Elkin (24) highlights this issue when she states:

*"Concern about the low profile of children's libraries and lack of understanding at national or governmental level of their role in the intellectual, social or cultural development of the child has been a source of concern for a number of years."*

In focusing on early learning, children's librarians have a real opportunity to promote library services to a wide range of people. The work requires building partnerships between parents, carers, playgroup staff, nursery teachers and other agencies working with young children. There are opportunities to develop inter-departmental and inter-agency working groups which consider the whole child rather than one aspect in isolation. Norfolk operates a series of 'Under 8's Forums' across the county whose membership consists of representatives from the voluntary sector and statutory organisations. Amongst their many functions, the forums operate training days which are open to members of the local community; recent topics covered have included multi-culturalism, disability awareness and storytelling. The forums are interlinked with the county and district councils and are able to report back to

elected members on issues relating to Under 8's and their carers. Membership of these groups enables children's librarians to promote the whole library service and also their own expertise in terms of book knowledge, storytelling skills and child development. Northamptonshire's 'Early Years Liaison Groups' have a similar remit. They facilitate the sharing of information and plan joint initiatives to improve training and services for parents and carers. Many authorities operate a similar liaison structure but it would be useful if a national network could be established for the exchange of ideas and information.

In considering the role of libraries in early years development we need to look at how parents and carers use libraries with their young children. The opportunity exists for public libraries to become a real focus for pre-school learning for children and a centre for parenting and caring skills. Research for this thesis showed that many librarians had recognised the significance of their role in terms of services and service initiatives for under 5's and their carers. Many libraries had created 'Parenting' collections providing easy access to a range of stock for carers; others were closely involved with the Pre-school Learning Alliance and similar groups and played a significant role in organising courses for playgroup and nursery staff. The use of public libraries by parents and carers of babies and young toddlers is a growing market, but it is undoubtedly a market that still requires further promotion. On the part of some library staff there is a tendency to limit the role the library can play by adhering to too many rules and regulations and emphasising the institutional nature of the library service. Despite many changes in library design and layout, the inclusion of specially designed areas for young people, and exciting ways of displaying books and other resources, for many adults their image of the library remains of a quiet, studious place intended only for serious study. Moon (25) has commented on the off-putting nature of many libraries, which do nothing to welcome the less literate and non-bookish people. Many parents, particularly those who are not traditionally library users, are frequently embarrassed by their children's behaviour in libraries and concerned that books can so easily be damaged. It is fair to say, however, that in British society children tend to be restricted in the manner in which they are welcomed in public areas such as restaurants. There is an assumption that certain, clearly identifiable places are intended for children and that children should not be visible outside those areas. Butler (26) acknowledges that toddlers may present a problem for adults within the library, but emphasises that in acknowledging the importance of children we must accept them as they are:

*"..... take them to libraries from birth, accepting that baby noises, and later toddlers' grabbing habits, as part of the human condition, and must be accommodated by the race in general."*

For librarians surely the most worrying reason for adults not bringing children to the library is the belief that children cannot join the library until they are able to read. Local experience has shown that this is the most quoted reason for parents and carers not enrolling their pre-school children in the library. If this is the message that is being delivered then librarians seriously need to rethink the way they promote services for the Under 5's. The public library is one of the few places where parents and carers can take their pre-school children free of charge. In most cases libraries are secure places which can offer even the smallest child a certain degree of freedom. Library membership is probably the first time a child is recognised as a citizen in his own right; a library card signifies the importance of the individual child.

The Library Association Guidelines (27) identify four areas of child development which emphasise the need for library materials. These relate to intellectual and emotional development, where books and stories can be used to stimulate children and to enable them to explore emotions in the safety of the written word. In terms of language development books encourage the enjoyment of language and the discovery of new words; books help to support language acquisition and enable children to be able to express themselves as individuals. Library resources also support children's social development; through books children can learn about themselves and others. The importance of pre-school learning is emphasised in the guidelines; books not only provide the opportunity for children to acquire reading and information skills, they also offer them the opportunity to experience different cultures, different times and different ways of life.

If we consider specific areas of child development we can identify ways in which books, libraries and children's librarians can contribute in a positive manner to that development. In the first years of life children develop socially, physically and mentally at an extremely rapid rate and books can play a vital role in their development. Babies need reassurance and stimulation. From a secure base they can develop an interest in the world about them and begin the process of developing the skills to understand that world. In providing a range of exciting and stimulating books appropriate for children of all ages and abilities the library provides the stimulus to encourage language development and encourages early literacy skills. Through nursery rhymes and finger play

children learn the excitement of the sound of words and through repetition and humour they are encouraged to join in with simple stories which quickly become the first books they can 'read' for themselves. Minns (28) has stressed the value of sharing and telling stories, emphasising that reading activities build on oral languages and experiences which children learn at home. There is evidence to suggest that those children who share stories at home and are familiar with using books are the ones who learn to read quicker. They have already recognised the value of books and regard story sharing as an exciting and pleasant experience. Butler (29) indicates that listening to stories is the child's first move to independent reading:

*"Listening to stories in one's own native tongue in narrative and description - is the first and fundamental step on the road to independent reading."*

The importance of introducing babies to books at an early stage cannot be denied. Libraries not only provide the books but also the specialist staff who can advise parents and carers on their choice of materials, ensure that new materials are promoted, provide storytelling sessions and support for adults and children. The value of books for pre-school children is neatly summed up by Butler (30) when she states:

*"I believe that books should play a prominent part in children's lives from babyhood; that access to books, through parents and other adults, greatly increases a child's chances of becoming a happy and involved human being."*

Many library authorities are now positively encouraging book ownership and library membership for babies and toddlers through projects such as the 'Bounty Bags' scheme and 'Bookstart'. Examples of service initiatives in local authorities are Cambridgeshire who have introduced their own version of the 'Bounty Bags' scheme in liaison with a local bookshop; Hertfordshire have produced a video 'Cuddle Up With A Book', showing how sharing books with children can help their development, encourage literacy and provide a firm basis for their formal education. 'Bounty Bags' promote 'Books for Babies' to expectant mothers. The packs are commercially produced and given to each mother via hospitals registered with the scheme. The packs include various booklets such as 'Baby Care Guide', 'Pregnancy Guide' and 'Baby Products Shoppers Guide'. Since the packs are commercially produced they include adverts relating to services and products, including bookshops and libraries. The Bookstart project has been operated successfully in areas as diverse as Birmingham, Sunderland, Norfolk and Walsall. The project emphasises the

importance of sharing books and introducing books to children long before they start school. Traditionally carers are more concerned with seeing that babies are warm and well fed and less concerned with stimulating their intellectual development. Introducing books to babies from birth helps to develop their intellectual and interactive skills. Bookstart packs containing a board book, poster, library information, joining forms, etc. are given out by health visitors at children's nine monthly check. This encourages parents and carers not only to start using books with their babies but also to enrol them as library members. The Norfolk project is an example of inter-agency co-operation between the library service, the community health partnership and local community officers. Once established the project has become very much the responsibility of local people, with them deciding the next phase of the development. It is interesting to compare the aims of the project as it has moved from a professionally led to a community led scheme. The initial aims were stated as:

*"To promote long term literacy in the community*

*To encourage parents/carers to play a more proactive role in supporting their children's intellectual development*

*To provide increased access to resources by promoting library use and general awareness of literary issues*

*To provide a link between a child's physical and intellectual development and welfare*

*To raise the self esteem of parents by liaising with Family Literacy and other similar groups in the area*

*To work towards the formulation of a policy for early literacy supported by adequate funding."*

These have now developed to become:

*"To provide all nine month old children attending the Woodcock Road and Prospect surgeries with a Bookstart Pack. To be supplied at their hearing test by the Health Visitor.*

*To encourage the use of the library through the book packs and by organising and supporting events at the library.*

*To develop resources and support events that encourage parents to be more involved in their children's learning and build confidence in parenting.*

*To develop projects that encourage art, craft, music and drama to broaden the horizons of the under fives living in the Mile Cross and Catton Grove areas.*

*To help parents and children to be better prepared and more confident when starting school."*

In widening the project it is responding to the needs of the local community whilst retaining the initial impetus of encouraging library membership and story sharing and improving parental perception of the role they play in their children's learning development.

Public libraries play a major socialising role for many young children. The library may be the first place that toddlers visit where they mix with other children and adults outside the extended family unit. At events such as storytimes they learn certain behaviour patterns are acceptable whilst others are not. A pre-school storytime has the obvious benefits of sharing books and stories with children but they can also act as a social forum as well. This may be the one time that families sit down and listen to stories together. The sessions may also have a community value as well, enabling parents and carers to share information and ideas about local events and activities. They also have an informal educational role, as the librarian shares her skills and expertise with parents and carers; a process described by one American librarian as *"literacy parenting skills"* Jeffery (31) describes the value of sessions aimed particularly at new parents and very young babies:

*"Programs give suggestions for appropriate materials and demonstrate how to share them. Caregivers will learn about nursery rhymes, finger games, recorded music, and the many wonderful picture stories to share with children."*

Another area of child development where the value of books and specialist staff frequently goes unrecognised is in helping children to discover their own cultural background and a sense of their own identity. In our multicultural society one of the libraries' most important roles is in enabling all children to experience the diverse cultures and traditions that represent their heritage. It is important that all children are able to study their own culture's history to enable them to know where they have come from and learn what makes them what

they are. In discovering their own identity and being secure with their own self children can learn to recognise what they have in common with other children and what makes them different. Discovering their own individuality also calls for children to learn about and respect different beliefs and different ways of life. Through books and stories children can find positive role models where children of different cultural backgrounds interact on equal terms. Children with disabilities should also find role models in stories, which show them in a positive but realistic manner. The value of books in such circumstances is described by Elkin (32):

*"In experiencing a wide range of books, all children should be able to identify themselves, to see their lives in perspective and as having some significance in society. Books can help children to a deeper understanding of themselves and others and help them to mature into ripe, balanced personalities."*

Libraries should provide books which enable all children to feel they are valued as individuals. The skills for librarians are in ensuring they know which book will be needed by which child. Interaction with parents and carers is important here, many are unaware that there are books available which may help their child. Raising awareness of multicultural topics, disability and special needs in books is also part of the librarian's role. Input into NEB courses for Nursery Nurses, liaison with the Pre-School Learning Alliance and contact with other child related groups ensures that librarians are sharing their expertise and knowledge. The OFSTED inspection of playgroups, particularly in areas of low ethnic population, have recorded that many playgroups have inadequate coverage of books relating to multi-cultural and gender issues. There is a significant role for librarians here to ensure that organisers of Under Fives groups are aware both of the need for such books and the range of titles available. The neutrality of the library and the non-judgmental nature of librarians is important in ensuring that all children, regardless of their ability, race or background, are treated with respect. However, the call for more specialist knowledge is clear; librarians must have a detailed stock knowledge and be able to respond to children's individual needs. The removal of specialist posts in favour of generalists may be doing our clientele no favours:

*"For librarians, giving support means not only the application of expert knowledge and experience to provide materials and services but also, and more particularly, providing caring interest, belief in the individual's importance, and confidence in the individual's abilities. it is the provision of time, attention, positive attitudes and security."* (33)

It may be, however, that specialist staff need to focus more clearly on what their role ought to be. Working with children directly is exciting, rewarding and very important but it is only one aspect of the specialism. Clearly within the areas of early learning and child development there are opportunities for cross-departmental and inter-agency groups to ensure that the child remains as the central focus of all decisions. The specialist librarian has an important role to play in such groups and should ensure that the public library has a high profile and is significantly involved in initiatives which arise out of such co-operation. The children's librarian must recognise that parents and carers and other agencies supporting children are an important part of her clientele and work towards a partnership to ensure a better and more all-encompassing service for children.

## 5.3. Reading and Literacy

The concern over falling literacy standards has been growing for many years. Blame has been apportioned to poor, badly trained teachers; the introduction of much maligned 'trendy' teaching methods; the move from traditional teaching methods to using 'real' books; the breakdown of family networks and the move to a more technological society, where children are seen to spend more time with computers, television and video and less time on reading. Whatever the reason there is clear factual evidence that children are not reaching their full literacy and reading potential. The Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit (ALBSU) records that one third of fourteen year olds have a reading age of eleven or less; that one in eight of sixteen year olds have difficulty in reading, writing and understanding English; that 40% of sixteen to nineteen year olds in further education lack basic literacy and numeracy skills. ALBSU suggests that the cost to business in the United Kingdom of poor basic skills may be within the region of £8.4 billion pounds a year (34).

One reading scheme which has proved very successful in New Zealand is the 'Reading Recovery' approach, this is a one to one approach concentrating on Key Stage 2 children. Those schools who have used the method in this country find it very successful, however, it is financially expensive to operate calling for retraining of teachers and in-depth classroom work with a handful of children. For these reasons the government has chosen not to concentrate resources on increasing the number of participating schools.

So what, then, is the role of the public library in the literacy crisis? The traditional role of libraries has been to promote reading and to develop literacy standards. This, however, remains a very informal and passive role which relates to individuals rather than society at large. Despite considerable effort on the part of many library staff to contribute to the literacy debate, their unique input is at best marginalised and at worst ignored. Several major reports relating to reading, literacy and language development (Butler, Southgate, Kingman and Cox) (35, 36, 37 and 38) make little direct reference to the role of public libraries and even less reference to the significance of librarians. All this despite the fact that libraries provide free access for all children to a range of books and information resources and, through specialist staff, are able to offer advice and support over the choice and use of materials. The LISC Report 'Investing in Children' (39) makes a case for increasing the public libraries role in developing literacy:

*"..... it is our clear view that, at a time when unfulfilled reading potential affects the economic, cultural and social life of the country, the potential of a library, and in particular a public library which is freely available to all, as a force in support of reading and information literacy cannot be too strongly emphasised."*

There are individual library authorities who are developing excellent projects to promote the role of the library service in expanding literacy. One example is Enfield's "Promoting Literacy Through Libraries" project which is jointly funded by Enfield Council and the Home Office Section 11. The aim of the project is to improve literacy skills of children from Bangladeshi, Turkish, African-Caribbean and refugee groups in three to eight year olds. A specially appointed Community Children's Outreach Librarian has devised a special reading programme 'Roll On Reading' which aims to promote the appreciation of literature and encourage competence in mother tongue and English (40). However, outside library circles little recognition is given to libraries support for literacy.

Recent national initiatives have done little to rectify the situation. A project fronted by the Department for Education (DFE) has called for authorities to bid for GEST funding to develop literacy and numeracy skills. The project, which has been accepted for funding, in Norfolk will focus on developing literacy skills. Initial discussions seemed to suggest that the library service would have a significant role to play in developing this project, but it now seems that the work will concentrate round a special literacy hour delivered in the classroom. In a political climate which is calling for more emphasis to be placed on the

'basics' of reading it seems that the literacy focus in schools will more frequently be on decoding words to provide access to information resources, rather than in developing a lifelong love of reading and books. The National Literacy Project outlines a national framework for the teaching of literacy which focuses on a daily hour of structured reading:

*"The aim is to develop literacy skills through a model of reading strategy. The model focuses on exploring text from top down. through whole-class shared reading, and small group guided reading. It is accompanied by a systematic teaching of bottom up skills of phonics, spelling, vocabulary, grammar and punctuation." (41)*

Although in some authorities public libraries have been involved in the initial process of establishing projects, it is unlikely they will have an extensive role to play in encouraging children to read a wider range of books and develop reading stamina.

A recent initiative announced by the Department of National Heritage (DNH) is to encourage children to 'develop a lifelong love of books'. This is surely one of the library services key roles, yet there is only one librarian on the advisory panel. Public libraries already operate a range of promotional activities designed to encourage reading and it is difficult to envisage how a national scheme could be incorporated into locally focused projects. Although it has been stated that public libraries will have a significant role to play in developing the scheme there does not appear to be any real commitment to involving libraries in the decision making. Eccleshaire (42) suggests that all attempts to improve literacy and develop the reading habit are welcome but that the emphasis of this initiative is incorrectly placed:

*"Children don't need badges, certificates, bookmarks, stickers or anything else to encourage them to become enthusiastic about books. They need easy access to books through schools, libraries and shops. They need a cultural climate, in schools especially, that can foster reading as a hobby and a habit, not just a tool for passing exams. If the government really wants to launch a new initiative for reading it should fund schools and libraries properly so that the books and readers can get together in an appropriate environment."*

### 5.3.1. Early Literacy

The growth of political concern over early years teaching and the need to develop an extensive range of nursery provision has raised general awareness over the importance of developing early literacy skills. In 'A Language for Life' (43) the report stated:

*"It has been said that the best way to prepare the very young child for reading is to hold him on your lap and read aloud to him stories he likes, over and over again. The printed page, the physical comfort and security, the reassuring voice, the fascination of the story: all these combine in the child's mind to identify books as something which hold great pleasure."*

The role of public libraries in developing early literacy skills has not been well researched and much of the evidence supporting libraries is of an anecdotal nature. Services to pre-school children are, however, an area in which many libraries concentrate time and resources. In recent years the increase of novelty and board books, the development of nursery rhyme and song tapes and the extensive range of picture books have given librarians a firm base to deliver and extend services. The nature of library provision enables librarians to concentrate on the whole child rather than focusing purely on an educational and learning stance. Librarians see their role as complementing formal education; they do not set out to teach reading skills, rather they encourage children to experience the depth and range of library materials and enthuse children to enjoy the pleasures that books can bring.

The National Curriculum states that on entering compulsory schooling children should be able to:

*"..... listen and respond, with enjoyment, to stories, songs, nursery rhymes and poems enjoy books and understand that words and pictures carry meaning."* (44)

Clearly libraries have an important role to play in preparing children to meet these requirements. Some of this can be achieved by working directly with children but librarians need to take a more pro-active role in working directly with parents, carers and other agencies. It is often through libraries that parents and carers gain the information that empowers them to provide much more positive support and help for their children's development. Many libraries have created special parent/carer collections which include materials on child

welfare, child development, health care, storytelling and other related issues. In some cases an Under Fives librarian has been appointed who concentrates solely on work with pre-school children and their carers. The Knowsley Under Fives Library and Information Campaign was started in 1991 with the appointment of an Under Fives Librarian. This post not only has responsibility for ensuring the appropriate development of services in libraries but also visits playgroups and has particular concern for reaching children and their carers who are not traditional library users. Monitoring of the project has shown increases in both library members and children's issues. The Hampshire Early Years Initiative places 'taster' collections of books in clinics and storytime visits to make contact with parents and carers and their children. The Gloucestershire 'Grow With Books' campaign focused on support for parents and carers of young children (45):

*"If books and literacy are so important for early development and lifelong learning, even in today's technological age, then access to the materials that bring wealth of learning are essential."* (46)

### 5.3.2. Family Literacy

The concept of Family Literacy developed in America, where research has shown that low literacy skills are inter-generational. Children whose parents have poor literacy scores tend to do poorly themselves in language and literacy testing. In the United Kingdom, evidence from the Adult Basic Skills Unit (ALBSU) also shows that children whose parents have literacy problems tend to under-achieve in reading and writing. Family literacy emphasises working together to achieve literacy, language and writing skills. Parents and carers who, initially, find it difficult to admit they have literacy problems are willing to acknowledge their difficulties if, by doing so, it will improve their children's chances of success:

*"A bond created between parents and children working towards a common goal is a powerful incentive to change behaviour and to break the cycle of low literacy."* (47)

The whole concept of family literacy acknowledges that learning to read, developing language skills and basic education patterns are stimulated at home. It fosters the vital role that parents can play in preparing children for a lifetime of enjoyment and reading success. Family Literacy is a shared learning experience which strengthens the family and provides an opportunity

for adults to improve basic literacy and language skills and for children to develop a love of books and early understanding of reading. The focus of Family Literacy in the United Kingdom was initially directed towards families with children showing reading difficulties at nursery or reception levels but the project has recognised that children at primary and middle school also experience severe literacy problems. In certain areas Family Literacy also targets secondary school pupils and their parents.

What is the role of librarians in the delivery of Family Literacy projects? In the United Kingdom projects are usually delivered through Adult Basic Education (ABE) Departments, with funding and support from ALBSU. Librarians may be involved on an advisory group which monitors the output and success of the project. They may also be called upon to deliver some of the aspects of the programme itself; particularly those relating to books, reading and storytelling. The librarians' expertise is often focused on demonstrating how parents can improve their storytelling and story sharing skills with their children:

*"Who better to instil the joy and love of reading in children of all ages than a skilled and caring children's librarian who can make a book or story come alive with music, fingerplays, puppets, dramatics, crafts, and all sorts of other exciting, fun activities."* (48)

In America libraries have taken a much more pro-active role in the delivery of Family Literacy Programmes. In 1989 Bell Atlantic approached the American Library Association and asked them to join with them to develop a literacy project. The idea of Family Literacy was identified by a steering group of senior librarians who sought to design a programme administered by public libraries that would serve the needs of adults and children and strengthen the reading skills of all members of the family. Since 1990 a total of almost 60 literacy projects have been launched throughout the United States. The projects show that it is viable for public libraries to take the lead in developing literacy projects and in working in successful co-operation with the private sector.

In the United States the librarian's role is recognised as vital to the success of courses. As librarians have had a key role in establishing Family Literacy programmes it is therefore hardly surprising that they play a key role in the delivery of such courses. Programmes are organised by librarians in consultation and partnership with Adult Basic Education staff; the librarian's role is to provide reading activities for children and model positive reading

behaviour for parents. Courses are held in libraries because that is felt to be the most appropriate place, providing access to books for those who do not own them and enabling people to enjoy experiencing visiting the library. The advantages of a library based Family Literacy Programme are identified by Talan as:

*"That's where the books are!*

*That's where people who are crusaders for reading are!*

*The public library is a safe haven/non-threatening to parents and to children.*

*Librarians love books and reading and avidly promote the joy of reading to others (teachers often just teach the skills of reading and promote it as an informational tool).*

*Other wonderful materials are found at the library and families who go there can access these, such as videos, books on tape, large print books and dictionaries.*

*The public library is* ***THE*** *"lifelong learning institution" which will never graduate or promote you; you can always use its services no matter how old you are, how educated or uneducated.*

*Children who discover the world of reading at the library will continue to access it for the rest of their lives.*

*Public libraries are* ***FREE*** *and in nearly every community!*

*Most public libraries provide entertaining, informative and fun programmes for children and even the entire family.*

*Children and adults can correlate their books with each other by subject or genre, thus encouraging family discussions and experiences.*

*Public libraries are non-discriminatory. They have "something for everyone"!"* (49)

Experience has shown that when sessions are held in libraries parents and children choose books and take them home together, but where programmes are held outside the library then those families rarely visit their local library.

The American experience is an example of how librarians in this country could develop literacy projects. Through taking the initiative to develop and expand programmes American librarians are now recognised as having a key role to play in family literacy. By networking they have acquired funding and a reputation for delivering the goods. In Britain librarians could play a less passive role in family literacy and other such projects. There is a tendency amongst librarians in this country to 'wait to be asked' before they become involved with other agencies. Local experience has shown that if librarians do not take a proactive role in the development of literacy it is all to easy for them to become simply the providers of books. If public libraries are to take a significant role in the literacy debate they need to promote themselves now, by emphasising that specialist staff have the knowledge and expertise to develop literacy and language skills and encourage reading in children of all ages. Greenhalgh (50) emphasises the importance of the libraries' role in promoting literacy and reading:

*"..... encouragement of early literacy and enjoyment of reading are seen as a welcoming entry for the young into civil society and the 'great book of life', the library's role in creating and sustaining literacy cannot be over-estimated."*

It may be that children's librarians need to reinvent the role they play in the development of literacy. Taking a much stronger role in developing local and national initiatives which will ensure that the library service is at the centre of literacy programmes. Currently, in many cases, public library services are at the periphery of the development and organisation of such courses.

### 5.3.3. Reading

The public perception of a decline in reading standards is an issue which has been debated for many years. The Bullock report 'Language For Life' (51) suggested that there was no real evidence to indicate a widespread decline in reading standards, but emphasised that society demanded more from children and young people than ever before and therefore a higher standard of education was required. The notion of learning to read by 'rote' identifying particular letters and sounds was challenged by teachers favouring the 'real book' method, which considered children's understanding and enjoyment of the whole story as the key

to literacy. The two main advocates of 'real reading' were Liz Waterland (52) and Jill Bennett (53):

*"Children need to care about what they are reading, books are an end in themselves, they are reason for reading, not merely the objects by which people are enabled to learn." (52)*

*"The books we offer children transmit the message about what reading is. This first view is crucial because it tends to be the one that stays with them. If the books seem to imply that reading is really just word-by-word decoding, or a progression from one boring non-story to another through a controlled vocabulary scheme, then we should not be surprised that so many children abandon the activity as soon as they can. The ability to read is developed through reading, so beginners must be allowed and encouraged to behave like readers." (53)*

Others, like Griffiths (54) have suggested that learning to read is a separate issue from real reading. The Kingman Report (55) recommended a model of English language which could be used to determine what should be taught at school and therefore what knowledge the teacher should have to teach effectively. Whilst recognising that not all current methods of teaching were particularly effective the report did not recommend a return to 'rote' learning. Since the teaching of reading is one of those topics which lay-people and professionals alike have an opinion on it is not surprising that parents and carers are confused about the best way to help their children. Whilst not being teachers one of the most importance roles of the specialist librarian is to offer advice to parents and carers on the range of books available; suggest books which might encourage the non-reader or books which will move children on a stage further; allow children to experiment with the books they choose and to enthuse children over the pleasure that books and stories can give.

The LISC Report 'Investing in Children' (56) reinforces the importance of public libraries in providing a wide range of books for children of all ages and all abilities free of charge:

*"Public libraries are the only means whereby the widest choice of titles can be made available free of charge to the user. They also have, or should have, the means of making books accessible to children through display, promotion, advice and assistance. They are the one potentially constant source of supply of books which can also provide an environment in which to enjoy reading and gain value from it."*

It also highlights the importance of specialist librarians having a detailed knowledge and enthusiasm for children's books; the report suggests that this is the key issue in developing library services for children and young people. In 1988 Broome (57) indicated that the changing emphasis in the role of librarians had moved them away from specialists to managers which had resulted in the loss of many skills:

*"Today's emphasis is on the librarian as manager of resources and an information specialist and I do not underrate the importance of these roles. Regrettably, however, these developments have caused some librarians, and a few library schools, to overlook the crucial need of children for imaginative stimulus through books and the part which the librarian can play in meeting the need."*

The indications in many areas are that children's reading standards are falling and they don't read as much as they used to. Whilst it is true that the range of books published within the last ten years has shown a move towards lower ability, shorter texts for children of all ages, library statistics show that children's issues remain steady or actually increase. Public libraries issues of children's books increased from 82 million in 1990/91 to 101 million in 1992/93. As witnessed by this research there has been a reduction of specialist staffing, particularly those directly interfacing with children. The decline of specialist staff means that there are less librarians able to help children select appropriate materials and anecdotal evidence suggests that children need considerable help to choose the right books for their needs. Berkeley (58) suggests that the specialist role is important in maintaining children's reading and literacy levels:

*"Children need access to a wide range of materials to inform their minds and to broaden their perspectives if they are to successfully meet the challenges of our modern society; children need the guidance and assistance of knowledgeable specialists to guide their selection, train them to independence in library use and provide the bridge between a child and a book, which is so often an essential part of children's reading development. Without these facilities children's voluntary reading will decline sharply with a resulting decline in standards of literacy and therefore in children's potential ability to cope with the demands of modern society."*

In recognising that those children who start school with a knowledge and love of books and stories are at an advantage over children whose experience in these areas are more limited then the value of children's librarians is obvious. There is

much evidence to support the role of specialist staff. Bradman (59) states:

*"I believe that our children's lives can be enriched enormously if we provide them with good children's books* [children's librarians] *are the experts ..... they really do know about children's books, especially the books in their own library."*

Moss (60) presents an equally forceful argument:

*"As teachers, librarians, parents it is our task personally to ensure through our joy in books and skill in communication that the children in our sphere catch the spark of enthusiasm that can ignite their own fires, enable them to blaze their own trails."*

The promotion of books to children and young people requires enthusiasm, knowledge, an awareness of children's interests and a respect for their opinions. Children's librarianship is about advising children on their choice of books but also enabling them to make their own selection. A recent survey carried out by the Children's Literature Research Centre at Roehampton University (61) indicated that cover design was the most influential factor in affecting children's choice of reading materials. A large percentage of the children surveyed, particularly those at key stage 2 stated that they required more help in making an informed choice. The majority of children still know very little about how to select books; their knowledge of authors is limited and the range of books available is extensive. It is not surprising therefore that children lose interest and become discouraged with reading. Librarians need to seek ways of providing support and information about books and authors and ensuring that children get enthusiastic, knowledgeable help when they visit the library. Specialist staff cannot always be available to help every child who visits the library and this has implications for the training and support of other library staff. We have seen from the survey results for this research that more specialist staff are adopting a supporting role, ensuring other staff are able to enthuse and support children and their carers. Equally the research shows that an increasing amount of in-house training is aimed at library assistants. In promoting books to children and their carers librarians can be seen to take a passive role; providing access to books but leaving individuals to make their own choice. If we accept that children and their carers need more help selecting materials then librarians must be prepared to take a more pro-active role. In 'Reading For Fun' Dina Thorpe (62) details one method of librarians encouraging reading and supporting family choice. Family Reading Groups emphasise the value of choosing and sharing books together as a family unit. Birmingham Library services outline the values of Family Reading Groups:

*"Books and Reading are fun,*
*It helps you to get to know what your child likes reading,*
*You and your child will be able to read the latest children 's books,*
*Taking part will help your child's reading,*
*By seeing you reading your child will follow your good example'*
*It's a chance to get to know both your school and your local librarian better,*
*You and your child have an opportunity to find out which books suit him/her best.*

*Discussing the books together helps librarians choose books for the library,*
*It's a place to meet other parents and talk about children and their reading."* (63)

The value of Family Reading Groups lies in the fact that they encourage parents and children to talk about books together and sees the concept of reading as a family issue rather than an individual pursuit. The success of such groups relies heavily upon the librarians knowledge of books and her ability to enthuse others and in encouraging parents and children to share their ideas and opinions.

The Roehampton report also indicates that many children, particularly boys, selected books by genre and therefore find it difficult to access the alphabetisation sequence found in most libraries. Tyerman (64) suggests that librarians need to be more responsive to the needs of their clientele and to arrange stock in a way which children can access. Several library authorities have explored methods of making stock more accessible to children by categorising some fiction by genre and arranging it in genre sequences. Children's librarians need to consider the advantages and disadvantages of different arrangements which may have more appeal to children than they do to staff. Above all librarians are trying to create independent readers who have the confidence to access library stock for themselves:

*"What children willingly read, the books they choose, define literacy and literature for them. Their growth in literacy depends upon their freedom to choose, to value, to exploit and to reject different texts, different kinds of literature in response to their own purposes and interests."* (65)

At a time when children and young people's education is so high on the political agenda, with discussions on literacy and numeracy, reading and homework; and when children are faced with a range of activities to take part in, it is not surprising that reading for pleasure seems to have lost its popularity. Access to home computers, television and video games may be seen as a threat to the book, or they may be regarded as opportunities for accessing information. The fact

remains that children require the imaginative stimulus which comes only from reading. Lutario (66) suggests that imaginative reading is not given a high enough priority in schools or at home and indicates that if adults do not prioritise the reading of fiction then children will not see it as important:

*"If we give the reading of fiction a high priority, it suggests that it is an importance and valuable activity; if we give it a lower priority, it suggests that it is of little value, or that other things are more important."*

Within the context of reading it is equally important to promote non-fiction reading for pleasure. Non-fiction materials are frequently regarded in terms of information sources for formal study rather than for personal interest and pleasure. Children's librarians need to develop the role that non-fiction can play in children's lives by ensuring that children and their parents and carers are aware of the range and level of information books available. Many library authorities have introduced 'First Facts' or 'First Information' books sections to emphasise the role simple non-fiction books can play in stimulating reading. other libraries have split non-fiction stock into leisure and homework collections thereby hoping to help children select materials more easily and increase the use of stock. As yet it is to early to tell how these initiatives will effect library use.

Children's librarians are ideally placed to share their enthusiasm for, and knowledge about, books with children and their carers. Through book promotions, visits to schools, storytimes, exciting displays of books in the library and a range of other activities specialist staff have the opportunity to ensure children continue to enjoy books and stories. Butler (67) sums up the essence of reading for pleasure:

*"If reading is to benefit a child, it must become part of that child's life. Not as a task to be mastered, not as a mark or a grade on a school report, but as a living activity, as normal and essential as eating and sleeping."*

## 5.4. Marketing and Promotion

Kinnell draws attention to the need to develop marketing strategies in the delivery and development of library services for children and young people:

*"Whilst meeting the needs of children and young people through effective library services is inevitably dependent on adequate resourcing of services, marketing enables those resources that are available to be most effectively deployed."* (68)

She highlights issues raised by the LISC Report 'Investing in Children' (69) which emphasise the need for a strategic focus in the planning of services and the necessity to seek new ways of delivering those services, with more stress being placed on the monitoring and evaluation of such services.

It would be fair to say that most authorities operate at least a limited marketing strategy; promotions undertaken by children's librarians have frequently targeted a specific group, for example teenagers or under 5's, but all too often general promotions are aimed at too wide an audience. Interviewees for this current research highlighted summer reading games and major reading programmes which had been designed for a wide age range of children, frequently from pre-school to early teenage years; clearly it is impossible to design a single promotion which effectively reaches such a wide age range. There is a tendency to rely totally on anecdotal response to promotions and not attempt to formally measure their success. Where results are measured these are frequently in terms of quantitative standards and not related to qualitative issues.

When considering the role of promotion in marketing the strategic management of library services for children there is a tendency to concentrate on outreach activities and a range of high profile events such as book festivals and reading games. Whilst these are important, in terms of meeting children's needs, we need to investigate a much wider concept of promotion. The Library Association Guidelines (70) identify the significance of promotion throughout service developments and delivery:

*"Promotion is a vital and integral part of service delivery and is not something to be added on. Promotional strategies should, therefore, be built into service development at the planning stage."*

Children's librarians need to be aware that in developing services for children they need first to be able to convince adults and politicians of the necessity and value of the work they are doing. Eyre (71) has noted that at a time of severe financial restraints in the public sector the role of public relations becomes even more important; she suggests that as services are reduced the need for public relations and promotion become ever greater, but indicates that these are the areas most likely to be cut first.

The main impetus of community promotions should be to reach non-library users. Use of the library empowers children with access to books and information; but they can only use that power if they know the library exists. The traditional image of the library as a middle class institution still deters many families from making use of its facilities. The Comedia Report (72) indicates that all publicly funded institutions are used and exploited more by the middle class rather than poorer social groups. Promoting library services, the value of information skills and an enthusiasm for children's fiction to children is an easily achievable task. Children are, in many respects, a captive audience whose enthusiasm and interest can be gained through storytimes, information skills packages delivered in the public library or at school, booktalking sessions and library introduction tours. Despite their initial enthusiasm many of these children will never visit a library as they are reliant on their parents and carers to bring them. It is also important to remember that there is increasing competition for children's time; the public library is merely one option. Children's librarians should, therefore, play a significant role in redressing this situation by ensuring that library policies include social positioning of the library and its relevance to children and adults. Again there is a tendency to 'preach to the converted', talks to adult groups include teachers, playgroup leaders, childminders and nursery nurses; groups of people who are already committed to supporting and developing children in as wide a sense as possible. Specialist staff need to seek new ways of reaching non-users; working with groups such as Family Literacy and Bookstart programmes may be one way forward.

The main focus of promotion is to develop local awareness of the public library, it's resources and the range of services it has to offer. In doing this it is hoped to create new library members and to raise awareness of children's books and reading. Eyre (73) has suggested that in recognising that the library is a service rather than a building it has forced librarians to reconsider how they provide that service. Targeting particular groups such as teenagers or after-school groups may mean that a library service is taken to the group rather than expecting them to come to the library. Hampshire's 'Family Library Link' is a project focusing on the needs of a single large housing estate, where a specially designed mobile provides books and storytelling for families who would not otherwise have easy access to a library.

It is my observation that for most children's librarians the main thrust of promotions is through book related activities. There are many examples of such activities throughout the country, including reading games and trails and

book festivals. Many of these are professionally produced and excitingly packaged. There is a tendency, however, for librarians to reduce the value of such events by not having a clear audience in mind. Quantity sometimes overrides quality in the desire to induce more children to participate. In recognising that such events need to 'sell' themselves to children and compete with professionally produced packages from the private sector librarians have sought sponsorship which can enable them to reach a wider audience with a much more 'sellable' product. It also needs to be accepted that such promotions do not encourage non-users to enrol either in the promotion or in the library itself. Those children who are experiencing difficulties with reading or who come from families who are not traditionally library users will not be encouraged to join a reading game. Librarians need to accept that there is benefit in targeting and providing a 'fun' package for regular users as well as seeking new and exciting ways to reach children who are non-users.

In ensuring that children's services remain high on the overall public library agenda then children's librarianship needs to promote developments to colleagues both locally and nationally. This is an area where many librarians do themselves, their specialism and their clientele a dis-service. Not enough opportunities are taken to tell the librarians about initiatives and ideas which raise the profile of individual local authorities and encourage other librarians to develop ideas to fit their own needs. In focusing on the profession, national events can be used to draw the general public's attention to libraries. In 1995 the Library Power campaign proved a successful promotional vehicle in reaching parents, carers, teachers, the press, local and national government and other opinion leaders and decision makers. In spotlighting the educational role of the libraries the Library Association highlighted the importance of specialist staff in helping to develop young people. With the theme of 'switching on young minds' the campaign focused on libraries empowering young people with information, nurturing independent thought and imagination and providing support for curriculum based studies.

## 5.5. Education

Within the last ten years there have been significant changes in the education system of the United Kingdom. The introduction of the National Curriculum involved changing from a predominantly school based syllabus to a centrally determined and centrally evaluated system. Within the National Curriculum there are specific areas of study that all schools must follow. This has had significant repercussions for the book publishing market and public libraries. The range of

books published in the non-fiction market, to a large extent, compliments the subjects covered by the National Curriculum. Public libraries have now witnessed a demise of books relating to 'hobby' topics outside the curriculum. There is a real concern that non-fiction in public libraries will be dominated by curriculum materials. Elkin voiced this concern when she stated:

*"There is growing concern that non-fiction books in schools and public libraries will be completely dominated by the requirements of the curriculum and by the emphasis placed by the National Curriculum on the use of text books."* (74)

Librarians' concerns are perhaps two-fold; in the first instance many children want to read non-fiction for pleasure and their interests are frequently not school related, it is becoming increasingly harder to satisfy the needs of these children. The second problem is the fact that as curriculum stocks grow teachers may see public libraries as another means of resourcing and supporting their classroom needs. The LISC Report (75) draws attention to this issue when it categorically states:

*"The public library service in general is not adequately resourced to make up for the deficiencies of educational institutions that cannot or will not provide sufficient textbooks and library books for their own pupils, nor does it have professional specialist staff in sufficient numbers to cope with the additional demands from pupils who are often inadequately briefed by teachers and unable to use books and other information sources for themselves."*

In authorities which have a Schools Library Service clear demarcation lines have had to be produced to ensure that the public library does not provide schools and teachers with a free service that they should be 'buying-in' via the schools library service. In theory a protocol agreement between the two areas of the service identifies exactly what each can and cannot do, but in practice there are areas that overlap, such as storytelling and book promotion. The outline of Norfolk's protocol agreement states:

*"THE SCHOOL LIBRARY SERVICE will:*

- *Provide advice to schools and teachers on the planning, organisation and exploitation of school libraries.*

- *Provide additional resources to use in schools, whether as part of*

*classroom teaching, or in the school's own library.*

- *Provide a pre-OFSTED inspection health check on school libraries, detailing shortcomings of stock, suitability of premises, layout, organisation and pupil accessibility.*

- *Provide in-service training for teachers in library use and information handling skills.*

- *Through the Tutor Librarian Unit, assist with team teaching.*

*THE PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE will:*

- *Provide an adequate range of books and other materials to satisfy the general and specific information needs of individual young public library users.*

- *Encourage the development of information retrieval skills in young people by instructing visiting classes of children in these skills on public library premises.*

- *Answer requests for information from individual young people and assist them in acquiring answers from other sources.*

- *Encourage the love of reading and the use of libraries by providing reading games and other book-related activities on public library premises.*

- *Undertake promotional activities relating to these reading games and to public library use both on library premises and within schools.*

- *Promote the enjoyment of reading by giving book talks to classes of children and, in liaison with the School Library Service, taking part in Book Weeks and other school based activities aimed at encouraging reading for pleasure."* (76)

The changes within the education system have meant that much younger children are using public libraries to find information they require for school rather than using libraries for pleasure. This has implications for both bookstock and staffing; it may be that the amount of national curriculum material needs to increase to

cope with demand and that more specialist staff are needed at those times when children are more likely to use the library. One of the main aims of children's librarians is to offer young people the support needed to learn to use the library and access information effectively for themselves. Increasingly this support is needed through computer technology. Children are accessing the library with information demands that they feel cannot be met purely through the medium of books. Young people are used to finding information in exciting new ways and the library service needs to be able to meet these demands. Using the technology is not a problem for children, where the specialist librarian comes in is to actually help children decode information once they have downloaded it into hard data. Librarians need to seek the commitment of elected members and senior officers to ensure that children will have the opportunities provided by new technology on library premises. The raising of political awareness on the role of homework and the provision of homework centres outside schools should have impact for public libraries. Many libraries already act as unofficial homework centres for children; providing them with the opportunity to work with friends and discuss the outcome of their work. More libraries would do this if the resources were provided. The creation of homework centres may also encourage inter-departmental links, with education, libraries and youth and community services working together to provide effective homework support.

Both the Labour Party and the Princes Trust have spoken of the need to create Homework Centres for Children and Young People. There is little national recognition of the public libraries who already fulfil this role. For many young people the public library offers them their only opportunity of a neutral environment in which to complete their homework, either alone or with a group of friends. Initially it would appear that the public library is the obvious choice for homework centres but there are problems in accepting this role. The role of the public library would be even more dominated by trends in education and would have to respond to national curriculum and GCSE demands even more than it does already. Consideration would need to be given to funding for materials, many of which would not be in traditional book format. Children and young people clearly need a considerable amount of assistance and support in finding and using information and it may be that this develops the role of the librarian in an increasingly specialist way. Two library authorities who are gaining some national recognition for their development of homework centres are Southwark and Westminster. Both have approached the question of staffing in different ways. Westminster operates a scheme organised by librarians with assistance from youth workers, whilst Southwark has established a network of homework clubs run by staff with a knowledge of the National Curriculum and of contact with children but who may not

be professional librarians. One of the major problems for public libraries will be finding enough appropriate space to situate the centres and create the right atmosphere. It may be that Inner London Boroughs or urban centres would find it easier to develop this kind of service. Their libraries are fairly close together, so children could journey to a nearby library if they needed to and they tend not to have very small libraries which would have problems housing sufficient appropriate materials. The problem in developing this sort of project is really in rural areas. There seems to be a tendency to provide funding and resources for urban areas where there can be a clear focus of the needs of a particular and easily identifiable group of children. Establishing homework centres in rural areas would meet with the problems of limited access due to reduced opening hours, a lack of space for any developments and the tendency for small village libraries to concentrate on services for the elderly. This is a chance for public libraries to take a lead role in establishing a vital service for children and young people but they must be prepared to move quickly before other agencies take the opportunity.

The use of computer technology outside school maybe indicates a change in educational patterns. Since computers can be accessed outside school, with no teacher input necessary, there are implications for non-classroom based time. A report produced by Education 2000 (77) suggests that children need to be empowered to take responsibility for their own education:

*"For too many young people education has been a passive act; they have been subject to, but not involved in, the process. The essential challenge facing education today is to ensure that youngsters become active learners, involved and committed to tasks they understand, taking an ever-increasing responsibility for their own learning, and ready for a lifetime of continuous learning."*

This has implications for public library use which could extend its open learning role to provide study opportunities for children and young people. It may be, however, to fulfil this role libraries need to consider how information will be accessed. Elkin (78) considers the implications for libraries if they fully take on board their role within information technology:

*"Access to the vast information resources of libraries will increasingly need to be from where children and young people are, i.e. schools, clinics, youth clubs and home via IT connections into libraries. This is fundamental in enabling the nation to have full and equal access to information in the future."*

## 5.6. Information

The public libraries role as an information provider is an essential part of service provision to children, young people and their parents and carers. Through public libraries there is access to a wide range of information and through specialist staff children are shown how to access that information, thus providing them with the power to find and access information for themselves, use tools such as newspapers to develop current awareness and enabling them to take more control over their own lives. An awareness of the need to inform children and their parents and carers on a range of subjects has developed quite recently. Politicians are demanding more and more that parents and carers are given information on local schools relating to their performance via such documentation as league tables and OFSTED reports which libraries can easily make available. The Children Act (79) emphasised the importance of parents and carers being able to easily access information. It is the role of the public library to provide easy access to current information, presented in a manner accessible to all ability levels. The follow-up interviews for this research took place shortly after the publication of the Children Act and it is interesting to note the different approaches adopted by library authorities to implement sections of the Act. Some specialist librarians had not seen the Act, whilst others were unsure of the implications for libraries. In several cases library authorities were investigating their current services to see if the Act affected them in any way. A relatively small number of authorities were participating in a cross-departmental approach with a working party discussing the implications of the Act. Birmingham were one of the most forward-thinking authorities, having, at the time, already taken a lead role in identifying the specific groups with particular information needs. A policy that they continued to follow and develop in the Centre For The Child which houses a childcare information bureau which provides parents and carers with access to a range of resources relating to childcare in its widest sense.

An equally vital role of information provision is in reaching the teenage market. At a time of high unemployment young people need access to information on issues such as welfare rights, careers, writing CV's and job hunting. Many of these young people are not traditionally library users and many do not regard public libraries as a source for the sort of information they need. It is important that specialist staff seek ways of reaching and informing this audience. One option is to work closely with youth workers, social services and schools to develop collections of appropriate material at places where young people go, such as youth clubs and job centres. Another option is to work with local agencies and the National Youth Agency. The National Youth Agency has developed a network of youth information

shops aimed at providing quality information for young people in an environment where they feel comfortable both asking questions and seeking advice. Currently only one of these is housed within a public library. Whilst a public library may not always be the right place to house such a centre there is surely a role for librarians here as providers of information on a local and national basis.

## 5.7. Conclusion

In considering whether children's librarians use their professional status to provide effective, quality library services for children and their carers, and whether such services can make a real difference for children and their families in today's society, it is necessary to accept that:

- Public libraries lack the political significance attached to some other local authority services such as education, social services and health.

- The general perception of libraries amongst the general public as a whole is changing but many retain the image of the public library as a place for quiet study and reading.

- A significant percentage of the public will never use libraries or will have limited expectations of what the library service can offer them.

- The concept of education is changing; the value of lifelong learning and the notion of people developing different skills throughout their career has emphasised the importance of libraries in the support of all learning processes.

- The introduction of the National Curriculum and debated concern expressed over teaching methods has meant a return to a more structured model of teaching with much closer guidance and scrutiny from the centre. This has meant a reduction in the ways that teachers can develop individual projects and enlist help from agencies outside the school.

- The development of Information Technology for the home market may mean a change in the education pattern as leisure and study become increasingly blurred, opening opportunities for public libraries to provide support direct to the student's home.

- The strengths and weaknesses of much library provision lies in its staff. Librarians display a commitment and dedication to their clientele and a desire to provide quality services despite financial restraints. However, by nature many public librarians find it difficult to enter the political arena and fight for their service.

- In terms of working directly with children, the numbers of young people affected by any specific activity or service may be very small, but for those few children the effect may be very great. For example library storytimes may only attract a dozen children but it may be the one social event outside the home that those children attend.

Turning to the specialism directly it is possible to identify specific areas which provide direct benefits for children and their carers.

### 5.7.1. Commitment to the Child

In recent years there has been a considerable effort by specialist librarians to identify the manner in which the service should develop with an over-riding commitment to the child. Whilst recognising that services should be focused on the child there has been acceptance that children are dependent on a range of adults and that to provide an effective service for children requires the development of liaison with parents and carers. Emphasis has been placed on the 'whole' child and inter-agency developments with the voluntary sector and other statutory bodies has increased, ensuring that children have become an importance focus for the whole community. Examples of such a process were identified by several authorities for this research; interviewees identified links with clinics, pre-school playgroup alliance and other similar agencies, which provided an opportunity for library staff to work as part of a programme reaching non-library users and existing members. Such developments present greater opportunities for higher public profile which is particularly important in gaining recognition for children's services from local and national politicians.

### 5.7.2. Child Citizenship

The public library places great value on the individual child and recognises their importance as a vital client group, not just in terms of developing lifelong library membership but in valuing children as themselves. Library membership is one of the first marks of citizenship for many young children. The public library provides access to materials for all children, regardless of background or ability.

### 5.7.3. Early Years Learning / Child Development

The public library and specialist librarians have a vital role to play in terms of early years learning and child development. It is widely recognised that children need to experience a range of books to help stimulate and develop their imaginative skills. The library provides a gateway to a wider range of materials than most children would ever experience elsewhere. In providing collections of nursery rhymes, songs, verse and picture books, libraries enable children to develop a love of books and provide parents and carers with the opportunity to stimulate their children's language development. Through books children can experience, in the safety of their own home, vicarious situations which may frighten or worry them, equally books can provide children with the opportunity to recognise themselves in a story and know that they are not alone. Regular visits to the library and attendance at organised storytimes and other events play a significant part in developing children's social skills. The selection of books in the library should provide children with the ability to learn about themselves and other people; in learning about their own cultural background and recognising their individuality children are taught to respect other cultures and traditions and to value other people. The public library can act as an entry point for children into their local community and be a starting point for their discovery of a wider world. Children's librarians can ensure that library buildings and other staff are welcoming and create the right atmosphere for children and their parents and carers.

### 5.7.4. Literacy and Reading

In terms of developing literacy and a lifelong love of books in children the public library plays a significant role. The library is the one place where children will have free access to high quality books. Through promotions such as reading games and book trails specialist librarians encourage reading for all ages of children. Storytimes and 'booktalking' sessions in schools enable librarians to

introduce new and exciting books to children; their enthusiasm and expertise should extend children's reading. Projects such as 'Bookstart' encourage parents and carers to introduce books to very young children and begin the process of developing literacy. Inter-agency developments, such as the Family Literacy programme, emphasise the libraries' role in encouraging literacy in the whole family. By sharing their knowledge and expertise with the organisers and students on such projects children's librarians can encourage more effective use of books with children and extend adults confidence in their own abilities. Children who enter school with an enthusiasm for books and stories and a knowledge of how books work are at an advantage over those children without first literacy experiences. Public libraries provide the opportunity for parents and carers to help children develop these skills. By developing literacy skills the library service empowers children to access information through newspapers and other resources which will have a major effect on their lives.

### 5.7.5. Accessing Information

The public library provides children and their carers with access to books and information to support both formal and informal education. Specialist librarians provide children with the opportunity to learn to find information for themselves and to access materials in a range of formats. For children the library can act as neutral ground between school and home and is a place which allows children to pursue their own interests as well as school related topics. In the case of many children the public library is the one place which offers children the space and opportunity to study quietly as an individual or pursue topic work with a group of friends. Librarians develop a range of information and study skills packs to enable them to work directly with children to ensure the most effective use of library resources. Through libraries parents and carers can gain greater knowledge of issues such as children's rights, children's welfare and child development which can help them improve their 'parenting skills'.

### 5.7.6. Promotions

Through high profile promotions children's librarians can raise political awareness of issues relating to children. At a time when children and young people are frequently regarded in a negative light in terms of education standards, behaviour patterns and social awareness the library can offer a positive image of children enjoying books and developing information access and interpretation skills.

### 5.7.7. Supporting Parents and Carers

When working with parents and carers, specialist librarians offer advice on a range of book related topics; these may relate to appropriate story books for specific age and ability children, suggestions to encourage unenthusiastic readers, books relating to a specific issue, such as 'a new baby in the family' and information for parents of children with particular reading difficulties. Through sharing their skills in areas such as storytelling and story sharing specialist librarians can offer informal training to adults and encourage them to develop such skills themselves. In providing such training librarians are effectively empowering adults to support their children in more formal areas of education. Storytelling promotes the oral tradition and libraries are one of the few places where such traditions are continued.

### 5.7.8. Reading

In a specific library context little research has been undertaken to discover the value of books and reading to children and their families and much of the evidence presented is of an anecdotal nature. For many families, however, the public library provides an opportunity to develop a lifelong love of books, improve their literacy and educational skills and improve their quality of life.

### 5.7.9. Education

Public libraries provide children with access to books and other resources to support their formal education, as well as to pursue their own interests. Children's librarians should have a detailed knowledge of the National Curriculum and other programmes of study and ensure that the public library can support children's education. Public libraries provide children and young people with the opportunity to access information for themselves and specialist librarians should ensure children have the skills to use such information in the most effective manner. In supporting children's educational needs public libraries need to develop new methods of delivering information packages through Information Technology, thus meeting the demands of a much wider audience. Many librarians have recognised the need to offer children and young people a place to study after school and are seeking ways of developing the public library as a homework centre.

### 5.7.10. Information

Public libraries play a valuable role in ensuring that children and their carers are provided with appropriate and up-to-date information. At a time when more information relating to children's education and welfare is becoming available librarians have a key role in ensuring that parents and carers are aware that such material is available and providing easy access to such resources. In providing parents and carers with appropriate information libraries are empowering them to play a much more informed role in supporting and developing their children. Librarians are actively seeking ways of reaching new audiences which are, traditionally, non-library users; to do this they have linked with other groups such as the National Youth Agency and seek to provide information at a venue appropriate to the client.

## 6. General Conclusions

In conclusion the research for this thesis has identified specific factors which have contributed to the changing role of children's librarians. Changes in staffing structures, the reduction of specialist posts in favour of generalist librarians, the lack of specialist first professional courses and the widening job remit of senior specialists have all contributed to the seeming decline of children's librarianship. Whilst it cannot be denied that the number of children's librarians posts in the United Kingdom has been significantly reduced in the last few years my research suggests that more staff now take an interest in children's work and that many of the remaining specialist staff have found a much clearer focus for the continuing development of children's library services. This research has shown that in moving from being purely practitioners to managers of their specialism; by developing a co-ordinating and developmental role with emphasis on enabling other staff to carry out the basics of the specialism, children's librarians have become a strong voice to lobby for children's work throughout the profession and to reach local and national decision makers.

When considering the status of children's librarians this thesis has argued that recognition of professionalism lies in specialist staff's ability to convince others of the importance and value of their skills and the services they provide. Although many specialist staff have made significant contributions to enhancing the image of the specialism both locally and nationally, through inter-departmental and inter-agency co-operation; projects such as Bookstart and the creation of the 'Centre For The Child' in Birmingham; the fact remains that many librarians do consider their role to be of less importance in the lives of children and their carers than the role played by colleagues in other service areas such as education and health. Several interviewees for this research indicated that they believed that it was difficult to measure the impact of books and libraries on children and their carers. As such children's librarians were regarded as having a limited contribution to make in terms of overall child development. Whilst this remains the case we cannot expect colleagues outside the profession to acknowledge the contribution that children's librarians make in enabling children to develop to their full potential in society.

In considering the importance of specialist librarians to children and their carers this research has identified specific areas where children's librarians have a key role to play. If librarians choose to focus on specific issues such as:

- support for education; whether that be in terms of formal educational development or individual self discovery

- providing children and their carers with access to a range of information and information sources in a variety of formats and enabling them to make effective use of such information

- supporting children and their families in developing literacy skills and providing children with the imaginative stimulus to ensure a lifelong love of books and reading

- enabling children to become citizens of a modern society by presenting them with the opportunity to learn about themselves and others and the world in which they live

they will demonstrate that they have a significant role to play in creating literate, educated and well-balanced citizens for the future.

## 6.1. Staffing and Management Structures

This research, then, has identified changes in staffing structures over the last twenty years as having a significant impact on the role of specialist staff and on the way in which services are delivered.

The move towards generalist staffing structures has ensured that children's work has become more firmly embedded into mainstream librarianship; with more librarians taking responsibility for service delivery. This thesis would argue that in pursuing such a course of action many authorities have failed to recognise the importance of in-depth specialist knowledge. For children's librarians, however, it has provided the opportunity to show that the skills gained in a specialist area are transferable to other areas of the profession; this factor may have some bearing on the increasing number of children's specialists who are now gaining senior management posts. Although many librarians are now accepting responsibility for children's work it is still true to say that for many generalist staff the specialism needs to be clearly identified in their job description before they will be prepared to accept that children's services are an essential part of library provision. Children's library services need to be seen as an integral part of staff assessments and library development plans in order to ensure that it remains within mainstream

librarianship. Unless this is achieved threatened cuts in funding may well fall on children's services.

The research carried out for this thesis and comments made by Elkin and Lonsdale (1) reveal, in terms of the specialist area, a wide disparity of staffing structures throughout the country. Kempster (2) has observed:

*"Children's services vary widely in the quality and means of delivery, lacking direction and clearly stated policy to guide the specialism into the future."*

The publication of National Guidelines for Children's Services (3) and the national overview of children's library provision presented by the LISC Report 'Investing In Children' (4) have gone some way to providing the policy and vision needed to take children's services into the next millennium. However, the evidence of this research suggests that authorities with an existing firm commitment to children's services will adopt such policies whilst others will simply choose to ignore them.

The Public Library Review (5) has identified a growing demand for specialist information, suggesting that in removing children's librarians posts from their establishment many authorities are failing to meet these demands. Several of the senior specialist staff interviewed for this research suggested that in creating totally generalist staffing structures authorities had limited the depth and range of specialist work that could be carried out. In reality, however, little research has been carried out which shows that a specialist staffing structure produces any better results than a generalist structure in terms of work with children. This research identified the difficulties of considering the roles of particular staffing levels within the delivery of children's services. There remains a tendency for children's librarians to be involved in day-to-day library routines which should not naturally be regarded as part of their functions. Little research has been carried out investigating the amount of time specialist staff spend on such duties. Data gathered for this thesis indicates that a librarian based in one library is more likely to be involved in routine tasks than are those with responsibility for several libraries.

The increasing number of heads of children's services with a wider management brief than young people and schools is, in the eyes of many specialists, a worrying development; this research identified that almost 40% of the respondents had a wider remit than the direct specialist area. To develop children's services to their full potential within an authority requires not merely

management team membership, but more specifically informed membership with the ability to speak knowledgeably on issues relating to schools and children's services. This research identified that the majority of current 'portmanteau' post holders are from a children's specialist background, who therefore possess the skills and knowledge required to develop children's services. However, current post holders suggested that they were already finding difficulties 'balancing' the range of duties and specialisms their posts called for. Information gathered in support of this thesis indicated that senior 'portmanteau' post holders delegated much of their children's specialist responsibilities to middle management posts who effectively took on the role of co-ordinating service developments, informing and enthusing others. It is difficult to assess whether 'portmanteau' posts have had a derogatory effect on children's services or not. No formal research has been carried out in this area.

The LISC Report 'Investing In Children' (6) calls for local authorities to consider a strategic overview in the planning and development of services for children and young people. Over 50% of the authorities surveyed for this research did not have a policy document which outlined developments within the service. In terms of school library services and public library services for children the research identified many authorities where there is little obvious liaison between the two service areas. In some authorities they form two quite distinctive departments which are not always brought together by shared line management. When two departments which share many of the same aims and common objectives cannot be seen to be working together there is little likelihood that other service providers such as schools and colleges of further education can be drawn into a strategic overview.

## 6.2. Education and Training

The reduction of specialist options at a first professional level is seriously limiting the value of specialist posts. Increasingly newly qualified librarians require intensive in-house training before they are able to fully function as a children's librarian. Outside the specialism all public library staff require a basic grounding in the 'core' elements of children's services and an overall understanding of their importance within public library provision. In relying on individual authorities to provide specialist training we need to accept that there will be considerable disparity in both the quality and the quantity of that provision. The practitioners interviewed for this thesis indicated that they felt that current LIS first level courses were failing to provide even the basics of specialist education. Over 60% of the respondents considered specialist education at first professional level to be

poor; they suggested that practising children's librarians were better placed to provide the appropriate training required. The research suggests that there is perhaps some confusion about the role of LIS departments. Higher level degrees courses must have a clear academic content and be seen to expose students to the underpinning knowledge that relates to the practicalities of library work. In terms of specialist education current practitioners regard knowledge of resources as the key to delivering effective services. Although I would argue that knowledge of materials is the most significant element in delivering specialist services; if that knowledge is viewed in a purely academic sense and seen in isolation then it loses its value. It appears that little credence is given to courses such as child psychology and child development which are viewed as being out of the subject area. If we are to develop the specialist librarian's role in the community and view the child in a holistic sense then we need practitioners who have a wider base of knowledge than purely materials; librarians who can relate to other departments and outside agencies. Since it is felt that LIS Departments are not able to provide students with sufficient in-depth knowledge of children's literature then we need to seek other ways of providing that information. Several respondents for this research suggested that it was the responsibility of individual authorities to provide the background specialist knowledge required by new children's librarians. If such support cannot be offered to new professionals within their own authority then one way forward may be to seek guidance and mentoring from specialist groups and through inter-authority co-operation. Consideration needs to be given to how a national standard for specialist training can be achieved. It is clear that unless representatives from LIS departments, local authorities, practitioners and specialist groups can discuss these issues then the disparity regarding current education and training will remain.

Although, in comparison with some other areas of the profession, there are a variety of training opportunities available relating to work with children, in reality it can prove difficult to discover the full extent and range of these courses. Since education and training in the specialist area does not rest solely with LIS departments and Local Authorities but includes other professional groups and national organisations then there is often much duplication of effort. This thesis identified the difficulties many practising librarians found in locating the training opportunities available. Where local authorities work together to provide shared in-house training facilities the opportunities for effective training are much greater; not only is training better resourced but staff are able to experience more than their own working environment and discuss areas of common concern.

The development of NVQ's presents a potential opportunity for library assistants' skills in the workplace to be recognised but their possible further development within professional qualifications should be closely monitored by the Library Association. This thesis suggests that a professional qualification gained in this way could be seen as lowering the standards of librarianship.

## 6.3. Professional Status

The professional status of children's librarians is very much dependent on the way in which they promote and market themselves and their services. Children's librarians need to identify much more clearly their role in society; if they themselves have a clearer perception of the role they play then it will be easier to persuade others of their significance. Specialist librarians need to develop a greater awareness of factors outside the profession which affect both their own role and their clientele. When considering new developments there is still a tendency for librarians to take a passive rather than a pro-active role; unless librarians can successfully raise their profile amongst colleagues in other professions and with local and national decision makers they will retain their low status.

For many occupations one of the most significant factors instrumental in their gaining professional status rests in them having a strong national body or association which represents their interests and which can lobby effectively for those interests with the decision makers. This thesis identifies the failure of the Library Association to ensure that all librarians maintain their chartership as one of the major factors diminishing professional status. Local authorities limit the value of the Library Association by not insisting that their staff, particularly at a senior level, remain members of their professional body.

The research for this thesis found little evidence of inter-authority networking and working together to produce effective programmes for the promotion and development of services for children and young people. There can be no doubt of the high quality of much of the work that is carried out in children's services but there is a tendency not to promote developments outside the instigating authority. This results in similar ideas being developed in individual authorities rather than inter-authority projects being explored. The creation of ASCEL provides opportunities for more effective ideas-sharing between authorities and acknowledges the vital need for a national voice for children's services which has the respect of colleagues within the profession and the ability to speak knowledgeably on the specialist area to national and local decision makers.

There are evident difficulties in merging together the professional and the managerial role of librarians. Progression and personal development within librarianship appear to be almost exclusively through further enhancement of management skills. There are few opportunities of progression for staff wishing to develop their librarianship skills alone. Many authorities now refer to senior staff as managers rather than librarians. It may be that librarians feel this is the only way they will gain public recognition of their status but in doing so they are suggesting that librarianship itself is of little value. Librarianship is only one of the occupations to be facing this problem. Current government policy seeks to de-skill the professions in an attempt to remove their elitist attitude.

## 6.4. The Librarian's Role In Support Of The Child

This thesis has focused on the librarian's role in support of the child and outlined ways in which specialist librarians can meet these needs. Recent publications have indicated that nationally children's library services need to focus much more clearly on the holistic needs of the child. The LISC Report 'Investing In Children' (7) , the Library Association Guidelines for Children and Young People (8) and 'Focus on the Child' by Elkin and Lonsdale (9) all emphasise that the needs of the child must be the first consideration in developing library services for children and young people. The results of this research found clear evidence that many authorities are responding to the needs of children. Many library authorities operate a formal comments and suggestions feedback from children and their parents and carers; and several authorities have introduced children's services as part of their annual quality control. However, it would be true to say that there is still not enough credence given to children's views and attitudes. It is not enough for specialist librarians to value children that recognition must be accepted by the entire library service if children are to become the defined focus of service provision.

This research has identified encouraging reading for pleasure as one of the key functions of the children's librarian. Equally the research findings indicate that in emphasising reading for 'fun' children's librarians immediately lessen the value that decision makers place on the service; whilst school library services are seen to concentrate on supporting children's education and therefore have a serious role, the public library is regarded as providing recreational reading and imaginative stimulus and therefore regarded as having less importance. The recreational role of public libraries is neither fully understood nor fully

researched. With the publication of the Department of National Heritage's Public Library Review: Reading The Future (9) suggesting that libraries have lost their importance because they are no longer centres of *"high seriousness"* it becomes clear that librarians need to demonstrate the value of imaginative stimulus and reading for 'fun'. No in-depth study of the public libraries role in developing children's reading and imagination has ever been undertaken, therefore the proposed study by Elkin, Lonsdale and Kinnell Evans (10) on public libraries and their impact on children's reading and development is welcome.

The current political concern over educational standards, reading and literacy levels and lifelong learning provides ample opportunity for public libraries to demonstrate to the decision makers the significance of the role they already play in meeting these needs. This research has identified the impact of public libraries on early years development and first literacy experiences. Literacy is an area where specialist staff have a particularly important role to play, but this thesis argues that many librarians undervalue the significance of that role and do little to promote their skills and knowledge to other agencies. If librarians appear ignorant of their role in developing literacy then it is small wonder that little national recognition is forthcoming. In terms of literacy development this thesis concludes that individual projects, such as Bookstart, have raised the profile of children's librarians, but that far too many of these projects are approached in a piecemeal manner and attract little national publicity. The pattern for Family Literacy programmes established in the United States of America puts much greater emphasis on the significance of public libraries and specialist librarians in effectively delivering courses than currently happens in the United Kingdom; here public libraries tend to take a secondary, more supportive role and be subordinate to other agencies. Although much valuable work is undertaken by public library staff under the auspices of Family Literacy programmes there is clearly a need for specialist staff to rethink the nature of the partnerships that exist in delivering such courses.

In accepting that children are dependent on a range of adults, for example teachers, parents, childminders and playgroup leaders, children's librarians have come to recognise the importance of developing closer links with adult groups. It has become clear through this research that greater emphasis is now placed on promoting children's services and the value of books and stories to adults. However, whereas many non-specialist librarians feel confident to promote services to children, promotion to adults requires greater specialist knowledge. In authorities with generalist staffing structures there are

limitations as to how much, and how effectively, work with adults can be carried out. However, in many authorities there is clear evidence of inter-departmental co-operation and liaison with the voluntary sector which provides real opportunities for public libraries to play a major part in enabling parents and carers to develop the skills and confidence they need to provide more effective support for their children in a modern society.

The introduction of a range of educational reforms has put pressure on public library services to support children's formal education. If schools cannot or simply will not provide enough resources to support national curriculum studies then children are dependent on finding that support elsewhere. In meeting the demands of the national curriculum public libraries are finding their resources increasingly stretched. The adoption of an integrated strategy may enable library providers to have a clearer view of the function they fulfil. Research for this thesis suggests that there is much duplication of service provision. In many areas school libraries have improved and it may be that public libraries are being used increasingly for recreational reading or to support children with inadequately funded school libraries. This thesis would conclude that public libraries need to be much clearer of the role they play in supporting formal education.

Despite many outreach and community based developments the 'core' elements of public library provision remain essentially a building based service. New technology offers the opportunity to develop services aimed at reaching people either at home or in other venues such as youth clubs or community centres. This thesis has found little evidence of such ventures. As children develop higher expectations of the range and format of materials available from their public library then it becomes increasingly important that information is made available to them in non-book format. Many children already feel that the public library is an old fashioned institution with nothing to offer them. Although there are several examples of authorities developing new technology based collections many librarians are not prepared to provide the extra funding needed to establish such services. The challenge for the future is to provide effective services, through a range of media which children and young people feel meets their requirements, and which can effectively compete with other attractions for their time and interest.

# 7. Recommendations

## 7.1. Staffing Structures: Diversity

This thesis argues that the current diversity of staffing structures in relationship to the specialist area makes it difficult to assess and measure the success or otherwise of public library services for children. There are currently no national standards which provide local authorities with qualitative and quantitative measures for service provision. The Library and Information Services Council (LISC) should be called upon to create such measures, in association with professional groups such as ASCEL and the Library Association. Since none of these groups can enforce the use of such standards the Department of National Heritage should include them within their proposed national framework to raise standards and produce a consistent approach to library provision. They could also form part of the 'public library plan' which the DNH is calling for each library authority to provide (1). The difficulties of assessing what specific duties are carried out by what level of staff also requires further research. Problems identified for this current thesis indicated that in many cases staff at various levels undertook many similar duties, which suggests an inappropriate use of professional time. One way forward would be to use the framework presented in the Library Association Guidelines for Children and Young People (2) and carry out a 'pilot' study in several authorities with different structures to try to establish exactly what the roles of different levels of staff should be.

## 7.2. Proposed Specialist Staffing Structure

In putting forward a proposal for a specialist staffing structure within public libraries this thesis identified the following factors which should be taken into consideration.

- All structures require children's services to be represented on senior management teams. Without effective representation at the most senior level children's services will lose ground and will not be recognised as an integral part of the library service.

- The increasingly wider remit of Heads of Service requires knowledgeable support at middle management level. This post

provides a 'core' of specialist knowledge which permeates to staff in all directions, effectively co-ordinating and developing the service and providing appropriate support and training for generalist librarians and library assistants to carry out basic service provision to children and their carers.

- The growing demand for information relating to issues such as books, reading and literacy suggests the specialist knowledge should not rest solely on one person. To provide effective services requires a range of specialist skills and knowledge.

- The importance of ensuring that children's library services are viewed as part of mainstream library provision and that all staff accept responsibility for their delivery.

- More consideration should be given to the rationale for deployment of staff in particular authorities. Whilst there may be practical reasons, particularly in a large rural county, for basing staff in a geographical area staffing structures should relate more clearly to factors such as child population figures, issue statistics and numbers of schools and community groups.

- The use of specialist staff should not be limited to central and larger libraries; these may have a greater volume of enquiries but they are not, necessarily, of greater diversity. Children in rural areas or smaller communities require the same level of specialist input as those children who have access to a central library. It may be a children's specialist based in one library is no longer viable in terms of effective use of specialist staff. Equally staff should develop a more flexible approach and be prepared to be involved more closely in developing authority-wide projects and services.

The proposed staffing structure could be used in different authorities by reducing the number of specialist posts in line with identified factors such as child population figures, numbers of libraries and children's issue statistics. The structure outlined overleaf acknowledges specific issues raised during the research for this thesis. In incorporating library services into larger directorates it is becoming increasingly likely that the head of children's services will have a

wider remit than the specialist area. This thesis argues that whilst it is important that children's services remain within the mainstream of library provision and are regarded as a vital element of the strategic planning of the directorate, it is equally important that in-depth specialist knowledge and the ability to enthuse and inform others is maintained.

Hence the proposed structure maintains a middle management specialist post which reports directly to the assistant director with overall control of children's services. This post has a vital authority-wide role and has the responsibility for ensuring that children's services in each group meet required standards. Each area has a team of professional librarians, one of whom is responsible for developing services to children and young people. Each specialist librarian has responsibility for children's services in no more than ten libraries. The structure recognises that children's librarians need to devote a large percentage of their professional time to their specialist area but acknowledges the need for all librarians to be involved in other areas of the profession. Thus it is proposed that children's librarians spend 60% of their time on their specialist duties and the remaining 40% on general team duties. It is envisaged that all team librarians would be involved in the delivery of children's services to some extent. Children's librarians are responsible to an area librarian, who retains overall responsibility for developing all services in a particular area; thus ensuing that children's services remain part of the 'total' service and are not regarded as an 'add-on' service. However, the development of staff within the specialism requires input from the senior specialist and the post holder should be involved in appraisal and monitoring of staff, producing job descriptions and present an overview of service delivery in each area The area children's librarians would also form part of an authority wide young people's services team and play a part in developing services outside their working area. This should account for 10% of their specialist time and be recognised as such by their line manager. The valuable role played by library assistants in the delivery of services to children is acknowledged. It is suggested that appropriate staff are identified who spend part of their time carrying out administrative and clerical duties and help in promotions relating directly to the specialist area. This should account for no more than 50% of their time and the remainder would relate to general duties. Such staff should be trained to answer children's enquiries and provide an effective front line service. It may be possible to acknowledge their input through NVQ or City and Guilds Qualifications.

The advantages of the proposed structure are:

- The Head of Children's Services maintains management board status.

- The specialist middle management post has direct line responsibility to the head of service and therefore access to management board.

- Specialist skills do not rest in one person but are shared across the authority.

- Children's services remain within the line management of mainstream provision, but specialist input is clearly identified.

- All staff should be involved in the provision of children's and young people's services.

- Children's work is a clearly identified aspect of certain library assistants, who can be trained to deliver effective services, reducing the risk of inappropriate unsuitable staff being involved simply because they have declared an 'interest' in children's services or have children of their own.

The disadvantages of the proposed structure are:-

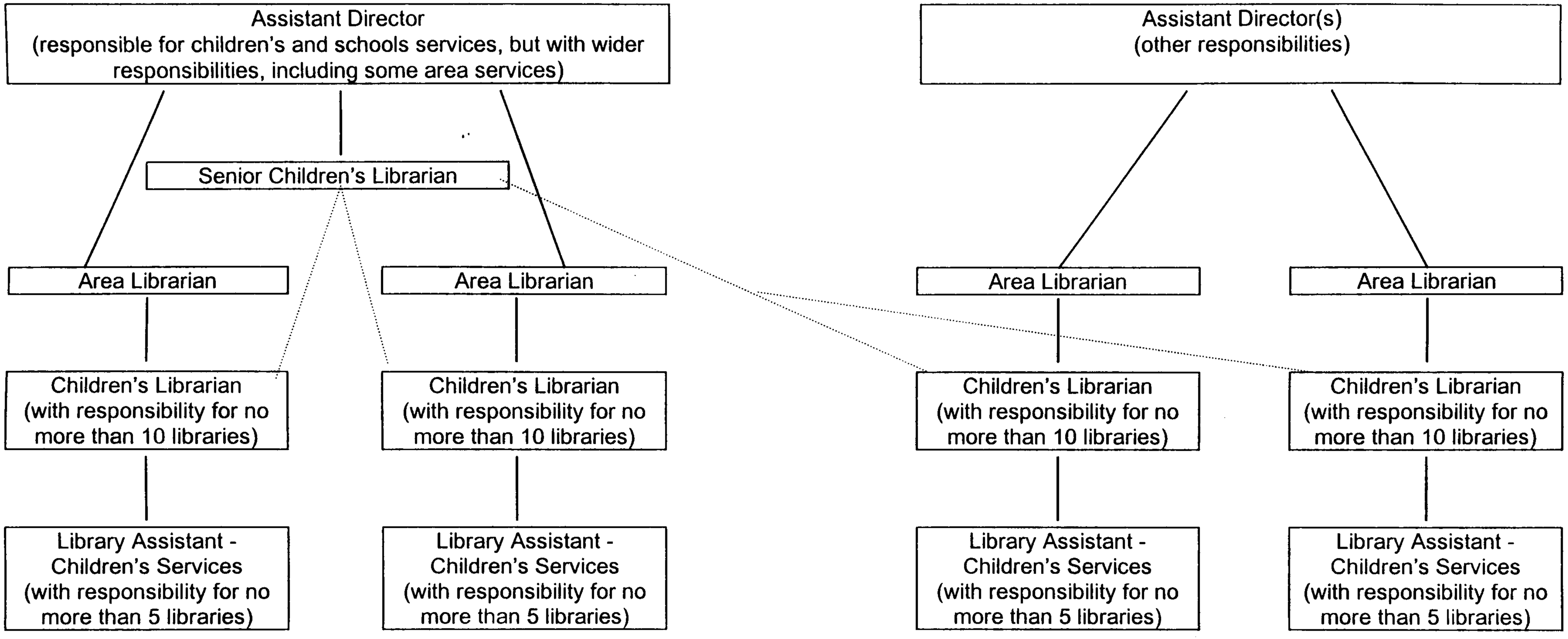
- The involvement of the senior children's librarian in appraisals and staff development needs to be clearly identified and not reliant on individual staff remembering to ask. A formal structure should be established ensuring that in each area links are on the same level/

- There is a very limited specialist career structure.

- There may be problems in individual librarians managing effectively and equitably their specialist and generalist library responsibilities.

- Identifying specialist posts can mean that other staff relinquish responsibility for delivering children's services.

## PROPOSED STAFFING STRUCTURE




N.B. Children's librarians form part of a professional team within their area, spending no more than 60% of their time on specialist duties. They also form part of an authority-wide specialist team under the leadership of the senior children's librarian; this should account for no more than 10% of their specialist time.

All team librarians have some responsibility for delivering library services for children and young people.

Library Assistants are identified who take on a responsibility for delivering some front-line services to children and their parents and carers. 50% of their time would be spent on the specialist area; their remaining time would be occupied with general library duties. Their specialist time would be managed by the children's librarian.

## 7.3. Integrated Strategy

The need for library authorities to develop an integrated strategy involving all channels of children's library provision is one of the key recommendations of the LISC Report 'Investing In Children' (3) . The introduction of Local Management of Schools (LMS) makes it difficult for local authorities to insist upon individual schools identifying specific amounts of money for library resources and schools themselves are left to decide the focus of their own library provision. Local Authorities can no longer dictate policy to schools regarding their libraries; since April 1996 OFSTED has been mandated to look at school libraries and one way forward would be for OFSTED and local authorities to be more prescriptive about library provision in schools. However, the links between public library services and schools library services would need to be considerably strengthened. Planning for both departments should ensure that the two areas of the services are complimenting each other rather than duplicating efforts. Where SLS services exist local authorities should produce service level agreements and seek to establish closer working relationships between the two departments.

## 7.4. Surveying Children

In focusing on the needs of the child many library authorities have attempted to carry out children's surveys but few have achieved great success. Targeting of specific groups, such as teenagers, is more effective than general surveys. The Institute of Public Finance (IPF) is currently piloting a children's questionnaire in some local authorities. However, the current writer suggests a wider search of the children's market, benchmarking our current questionnaire techniques against the best available models, which could well be within the private sector. For example Mothercare, ToysRUs, Early Learning and MacDonalds all effectively target and market services for children. There are barriers to library questionnaires which may not affect the private companies quoted. Respondents to library questionnaires may have low expectations of the library service; in institutions such as libraries children tend to give the answers they feel are expected of them; libraries frequently target children who are already library users; children are perhaps less able to articulate about the value of books and stories than they are about fast food and toys.

## 7.5. Working in Partnership

This thesis has suggested that librarians need to explore new ways of reaching audiences outside the library environment and has identified particular projects which clearly demonstrate the value of such liaison. Partnerships with other agencies and inter-departmental co-operation should actively be sought to consider issues such as:

- mobile services for children in rural areas, liaison with bodies such as the Rural Development Council could provide funding for mobile services aimed directly at children. These would provide materials for loan as well as acting as homework centres with access to computer information and the Internet.

- Liaison with ALBSU could provide funding for mobiles to use with family literacy and other similar groups. These could be established as learning centres with computer access for students; they could also provide materials for loan in an environment that students might find easier to access than traditional public libraries.

## 7.6. Homework Centres

The research for this thesis and other documentation has identified the significant role that public libraries play in supporting formal education; libraries provide resources, a neutral place to study and staff who will help students access information. In focusing on homework centres as one means of helping children develop to their full potential national and local government are offering public libraries the opportunity to take a central role in a major development. The Department of National Heritage and the Department For Further Education need to ensure that capital funding is available for libraries to extend a role, which many of them already fulfil. Staffing of such centres will have a significant effect on their success or failure and discussions should take place between librarians, youth workers and teachers as to the most effective method of staffing.

## 7.7. Specialist Education and Training

Courses relating to the specialist area are delivered by a range of agencies, LIS Departments, the Library Association and its sub groups, Local Authorities and management training centres. The Library Association should seek ways

of collating this information and presenting it to its members once or twice a year. Some excellent training opportunities are provided by local authorities and these could be opened up, at a reasonable cost, to staff from other authorities. Equally local authorities should actively seek ways of working together to provide more effective training. Training packages are reliant on individual authorities and it would be useful if a central body, such as the Library Association, could draw together examples of good practice which could be made available to all public library authorities. Although it is accepted fact that LIS courses need to be financially viable consideration needs to be given to how students gain specialist knowledge and skills. Criticisms of current first professional courses by practitioners suggests that practising librarians should be involved more closely in planning courses, looking rationally at course

content and the most effective way of delivery. Local authorities and specialist groups have a commitment to ensuring that the education and training of librarians is of a high standard and relevant to the library profession and they should take some responsibility for planning and developing future courses. It is therefore recommended that the Library Association and related specialist groups, Local Authorities and LIS Departments should investigate the most effective ways of providing specialist education and training.

## 7.8. Networking

The documentation from library authorities regarding local initiatives which formed a significant part of the LISC Report 'Investing In Children' (3) was a particularly useful manner of libraries sharing good ideas; the current ASCEL newsletter to some extent fulfils this function, but it would be useful to extend this approach. One way forward may be through electronic media; specialist web pages on the Internet could prove a useful method of sharing information which could be regularly updated.

## 7.9. Focus on Literacy

Children's librarians should focus on the current parental concern with children's reading and literacy levels and establish library support groups. Such groups could be seen as the basis for a strong voice for library developments. In the light of this research the role that public libraries currently play in the delivery of Family Literacy courses should be reviewed.

Those library authorities currently involved in such projects should consider the effectiveness of their current role and seek ways of extending library involvement.

## 7.10. Service Measurement

More effective measurement of library services can only be achieved if sufficient recognition is given to the value of qualitative measures. The majority of library services currently measure their success or failure by quantitative methods and this can only give a limited picture. We need to recognise that much of the work carried out within children and young people's services can only be measured in a subjective way; therefore there is a considerable need for harder qualitative service indicators. Departments and agencies, such as the Library and Information Statistics Unit (LISU) and the Institute of Public Finance (IPF) should be called upon to work closely with the Library Association, local authorities and relevant specialist groups to develop such measurements.

## 7.11. Proposed Future Research

Much has been written about 'Portmanteau' posts and it would be useful to identify what effect, if any, such posts have had on the development of children's services. Many librarians argue that widening the responsibilities of senior specialist staff has had a detrimental effect on children's services; suggesting that such an action results in less able representation at senior level and thus poorer delivery of services for children and young people. Others would argue that such a move has brought children's services more clearly into mainstream librarianship and thereby ensured that service delivery and development is the responsibility of all staff. Clearly there are other factors which need to be drawn into the equation such as the number of children's librarians within an authority and effective middle management specialist posts. The current response to the creation of 'portmanteau' posts seems to reflect the negative rather than the positive benefits of a more generalist approach; much of the existing evidence is anecdotal and we need to find more effective ways of assessing the impact of 'portmanteau' posts on the specialism.

A comparison of specialist services in generalist and specialist staffing structures would provide useful information relating to the significance of

children's services; such a comparison would have to seek a form of qualitative measurement of service provision. Such a study would consider whether the range and quality of services for children in a generalist structure are poorer than those provided in a specialist based authority. The research for this thesis has shown that specialists believe that the generalist approach can only develop children's services to a certain level and that to take them beyond that level requires in-depth specialist knowledge and commitment, but can that be proved? To maintain specialist posts we need to be able to present hard evidence which clearly shows their value and not rely on the assumption that 'children's librarians are doing a good job'.

This research has identified that less LIS students now seek employment in public libraries and that many authorities find it difficult to appoint staff into specialist posts. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the pre-conceived traditional images of children's librarianship can be removed by successful and exciting placements for students in the specialist area. To what extent, however, is the traditional stereotype of children's librarianship limiting the number of high achieving students who enter the specialism. A study of LIS students' attitudes towards children's librarianship would provide the opportunity for an attitudinal study; their views of the role of children's librarians and the future development of the service could contribute to forming the basis of a strong specialism for the next millennium.

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**APPENDIX 1**

## List of Authorities Visited

The parenthesis relate to the main body of the text and identify comments made during follow-up interviews from staff in specific authorities.

Barnsley
Bedfordshire
Berkshire (o)
Birmingham (q)
Bury
Calderdale (l)
Cambridge
Clackmannon
Coventry
Cumbria
Cynon Valley
Dyfed
Enfield (a)
Gateshead (p)
Hampshire (e)
Hereford and Worcester (l)
Hertfordshire (s)
Kirklees (b)
Lancashire (k)
Lincolnshire
Liverpool (j)
Merton
Monklands
Newcastle (m)
Newport
Norfolk (c)
North Yorkshire (h)
Nottinghamshire
Perth and Kinross (g)
Powys
Renfrew
Richmond
St. Helens (v)
Sheffield (t)
Shropshire (d)
Staffordshire
Stockport
Trafford
Walsall (n)
West Glamorgan
West Lothian
Wirrall
Wolverhampton

**APPENDIX 2**

## List of 'Core' Questions for Follow-Up Interviews

1. Do you feel that the practitioners' view of themselves and the roles they play has changed in recent years or not?

2. How far do you feel that children's librarianship is regarded as being of considerably less importance than services to adults?

3. Do you think that children's librarians are regarded by colleagues inside and outside the profession (e.g. teachers, social workers, health workers, etc.) as having a significant role to play in the lives and development of children and young people?

4. How far does the use of library assistants in children's services devalue the role of the specialist or professional librarian? Is it simply a question of anyone who likes children can do the work - there is no need for any specialist knowledge or training? Is this attitude reflected in any other part of the library service?

5. Do you feel that staff in children's services have a positive attitude towards their role, or do they see it as a dead-end job?

6. Do specialist staff see the need for management training, or do they feel that a comprehensive knowledge and an ability to carry out the techniques of the job (e.g. storytelling) are the essentials for a successful career in children's librarianship?

7. Do you think that children's librarianship has suffered from the tendency to cut specialist posts and introduce generalist librarians?

8. What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of specialist and generalist staff?

9. Within your staffing structure is there a clear career pattern in children's work, and how easy is it to transfer from a specialist role into a more senior generalist or management post?

10. Do you think that the role of children's services is clearly enough defined? Could you please say a little about your own authority and make a comment about the national view.

11. Are staff responding to demand or do they have clear policies to follow and objectives to achieve?

12. What qualities do you look for when you are appointing staff to work in children's services? What sort of knowledge would you expect to be displayed at a first professional position and at a more senior level?

13. Why do think that in so many authorities services to schools and teachers are treated as a specialist area requiring specific knowledge, while work with children and young people in the public library is often seen as requiring little, or no, specialist knowledge?

14. What do you feel have been the most significant developments in services to children and young people in the last ten years?

15. Have you found that current first level courses in LIS Departments provide the foundation of skills, knowledge and motivation to enter and progress in children's services?

16. Do you think that LIS Departments should provide a series of courses, specialist diplomas etc. relating to children's work which could provide a suitable format for staff development and continuing education?

1. What is the title of your post in your present authority?

2. Are you a member of the senior management team, or equivilant in your organisation?

| Y | N |
|---|---|

3. If No, to which post are you directly responsible.

3.2 How do you have access to this person (and with what frequency)?

Personal access

Specialist committee/Meeting

Other

4. How would you define your specialist area:-

Childrens Services

Young People

Schools/Education

Combination

(Please specify any specialism which you represent outside services to children and young people).

5. Do your present duties include any, or all of the following; please indicate

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Y | N | a) Co-ordination of stock selection |
| Y | N | b) Liaison with schools, including school library support services. |
| | | |
| Y | N | c) Liaison with other professional groups |
| Y | N | d) Co-ordinating training within the specialism. |
| Y | N | e) Organising events and activities relating to relating to the specialism. |

(Please outline any other duties you undertake directly relevant to children's services).

6. In your authority what percentage of work with children and young people is carried out by:-

a) Specialist staff

b) Generalist staff

c) Non-professional staff

7. From the list below please indicate which services are carried out by what level of staff.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| S | G | NP | Storytelling |
| S | G | NP | Work with teenagers |
| S | G | NP | Book Selection/Stock |
| S | G | NP | Book Promotion |
| S | G | NP | Library Design |
| S | G | NP | Class Visits |
| S | G | NP | Craft Activities |
| S | G | NP | Liaison with schools |
| S | G | NP | Management of Services |
| S | G | NP | Work with Under 5's |
| S | G | NP | Liaison with adult groups |
| S | G | NP | Special Needs |
| S | G | NP | Other (please specify) |

8. In your authority do you have a policy document relating directly to children's services and does it reflect the aims and objectives of the remainder of the library service?

9.1. Do you organise any training courses relating to children's work for staff in your authority.

| Y | N |
|---|---|

9.2. If Yes, are the courses organised at:-

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| a) | Non specialist staff | Y N |
| b) | Specialist staff | Y N |
| c) | Non-professional staff | Y N |
| d) | Staff at all levels | Y N |

10. From the list below please indicate areas of service you have organised training sessions for within the last 2 years (please include any courses you are intending to run this year).

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Work with teenagers | Storytelling | Book selection/Stock |
| Book Promotion | Library Design | Class Visits |
| Liaison with schools | Craft activities | Educational Developments |
| Management Skills | Work with Under 5's | Liaison with Adult Groups |
| Special Needs | Other please specify | |

11.1 Are staff in your authority encouraged to attend specialist training courses organised by outside agencies?

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Regularly | Y | N |
| Infrequently | Y | N |
| Not at all | Y | N |

11.2 Do you have structure by which course participants report back to other staff in your authority? If Yes please outline the method.

12. Do you consider that library schools provide sufficient courses for specialist studies (either at an initial level or for on-going studies). If No please indicate the major gaps you see in the provision.

13. Who do you consider to be in the best position to provide specialist training?

14. Would you be prepared to take part in a follow-up interview by telephone or in person?

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be grateful if you could include in your return.

1. Current staffing structure.
2. Annual Reports.
3. Details of training schemes.
4. Representative samples of booklists and other promotional materials.

**Appendix 4**

Library Authorities Surveyed

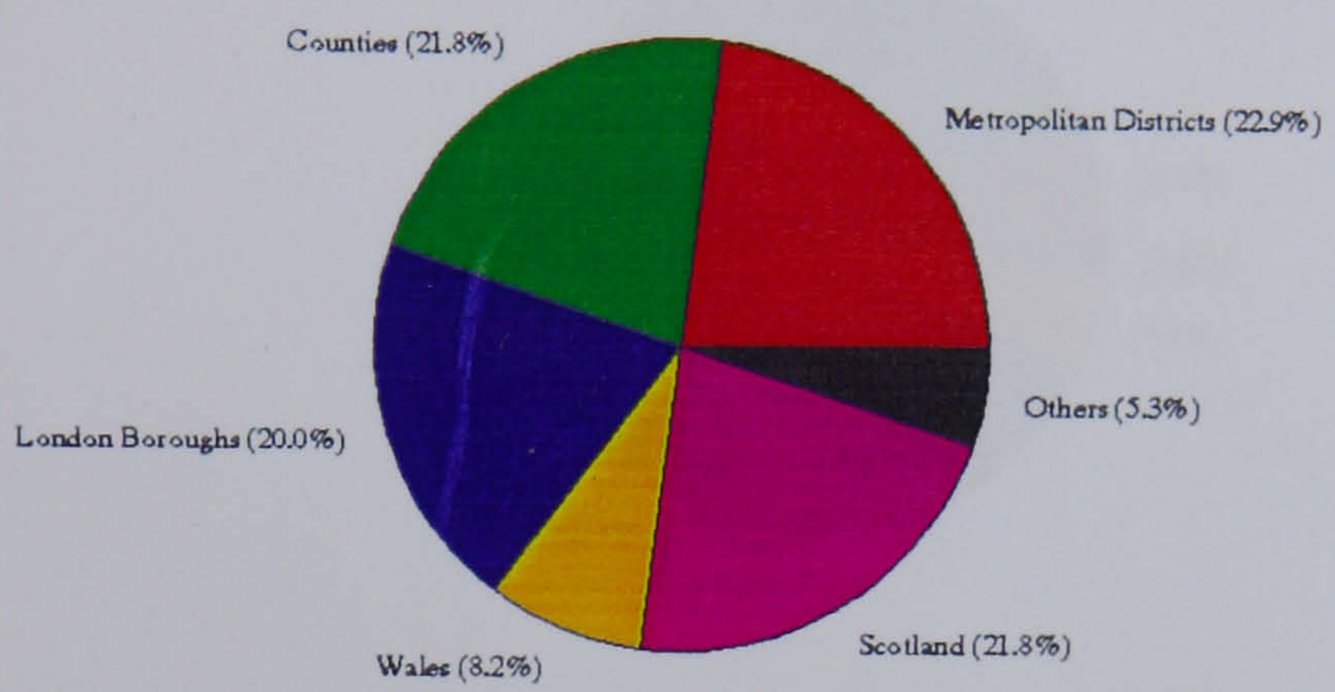



Figure a

Response to Initial Survey




**Figure b**

## Appendix 5

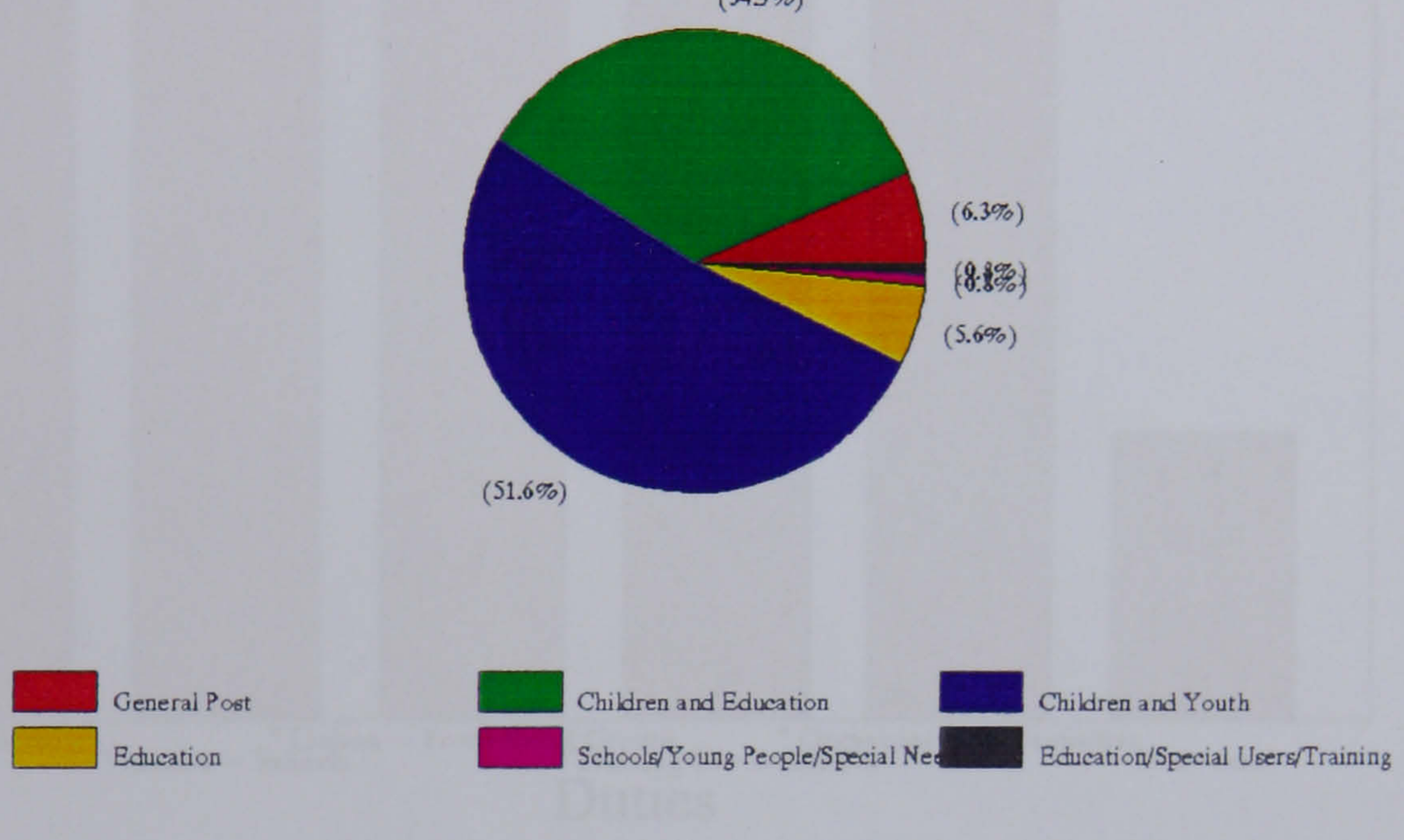



**Figure a**

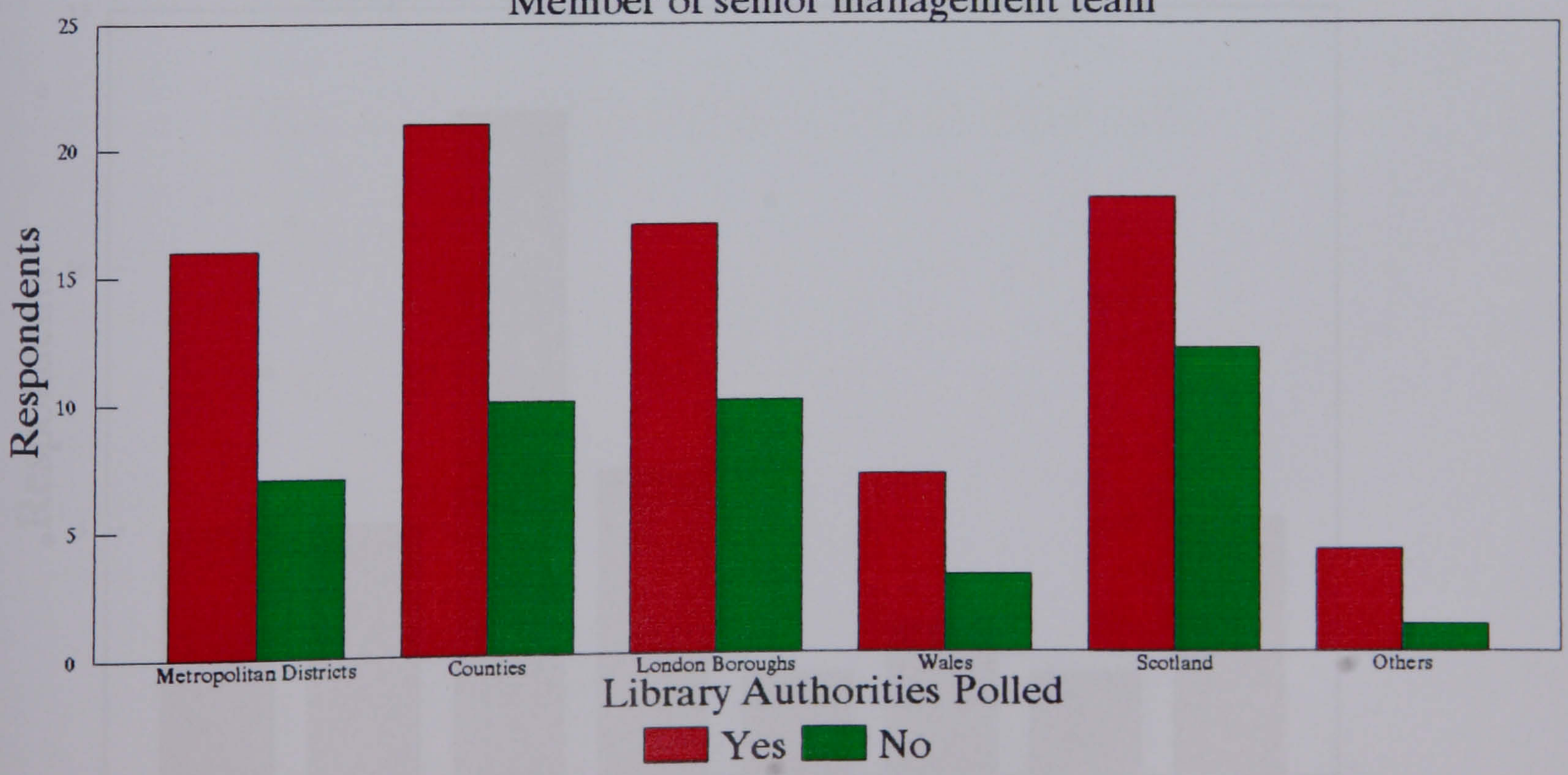



**Figure b**

**Appendix 6**

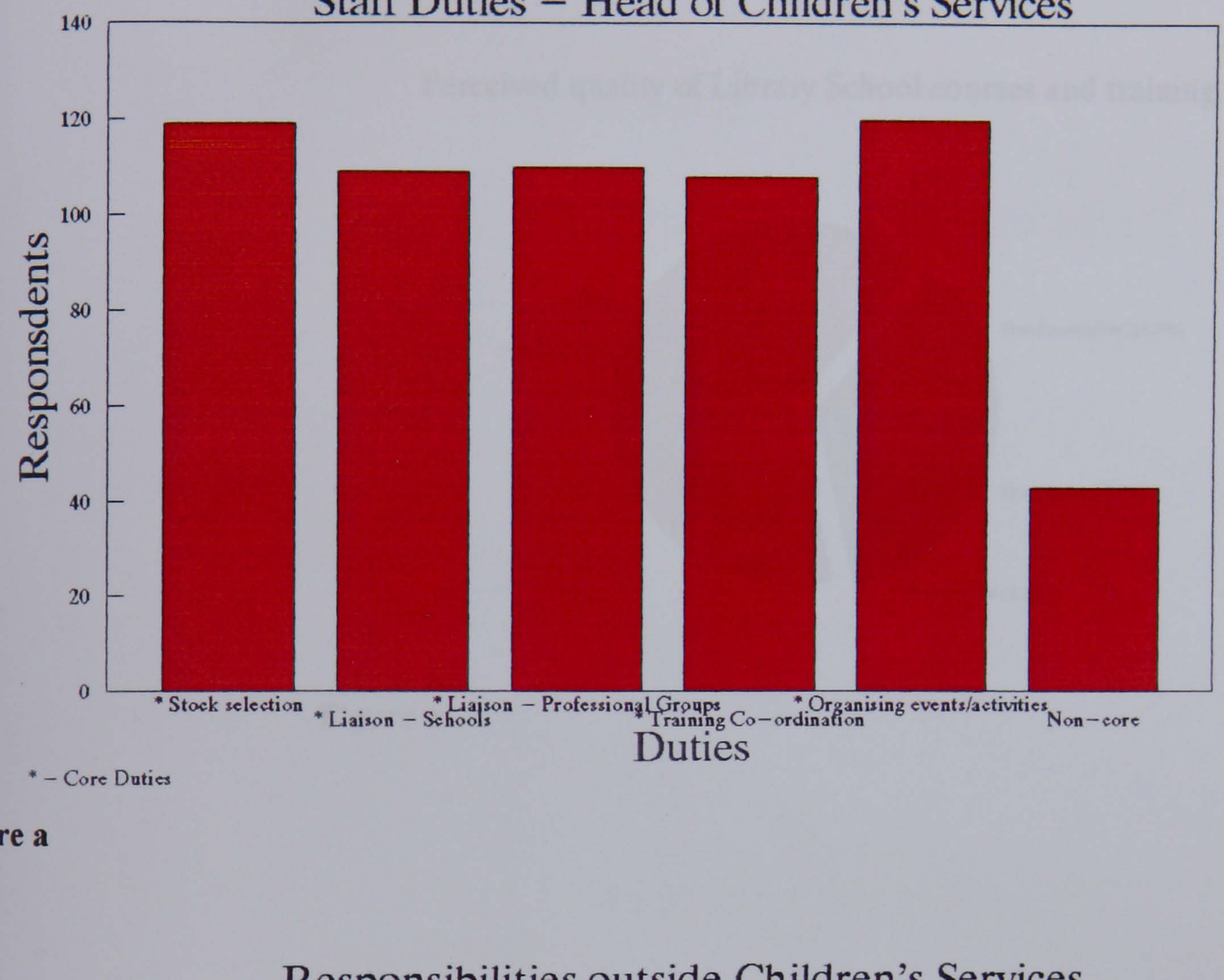



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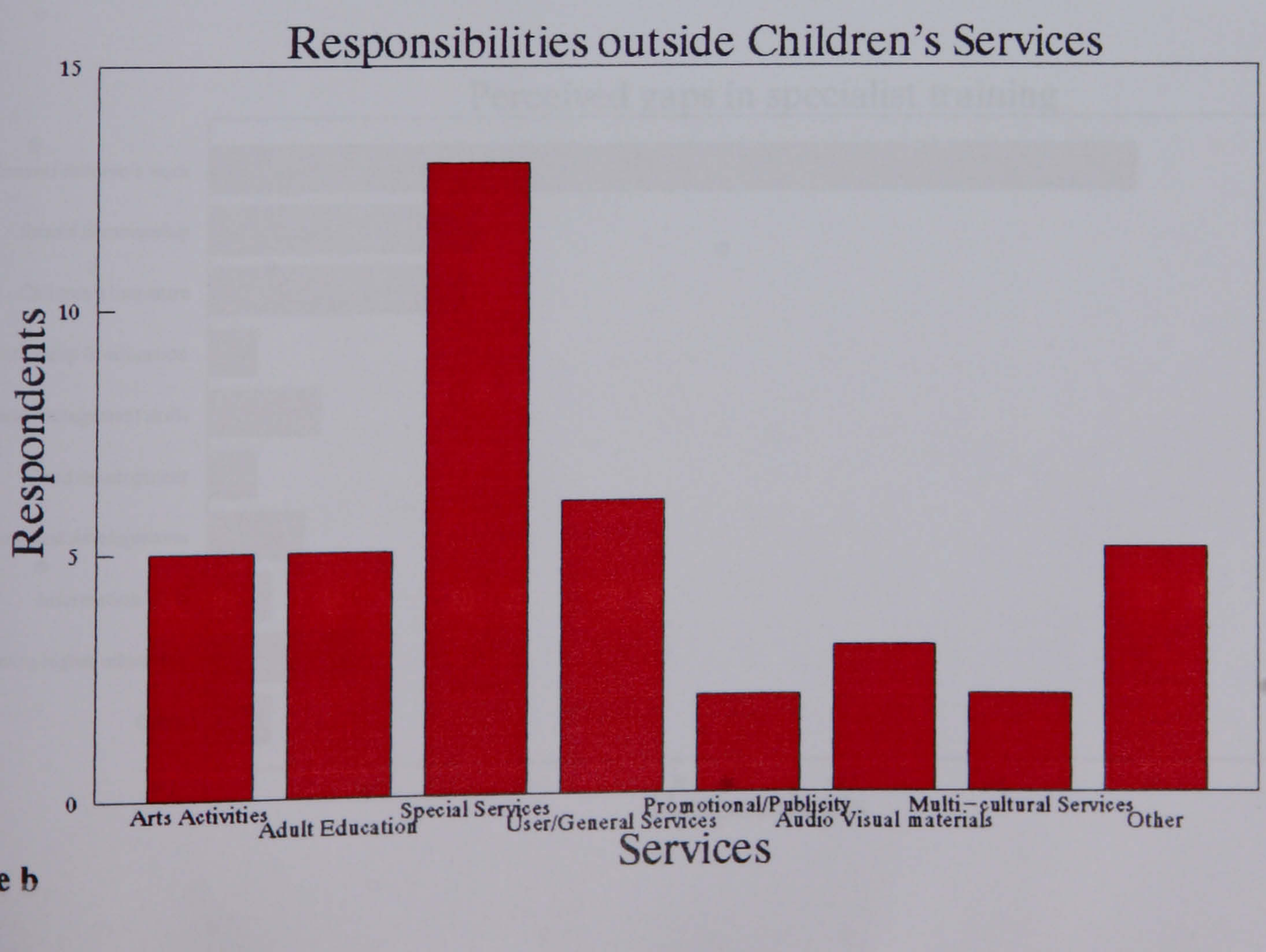



**Figure b**

**Appendix 7**

Perceived quality of Library School courses and training

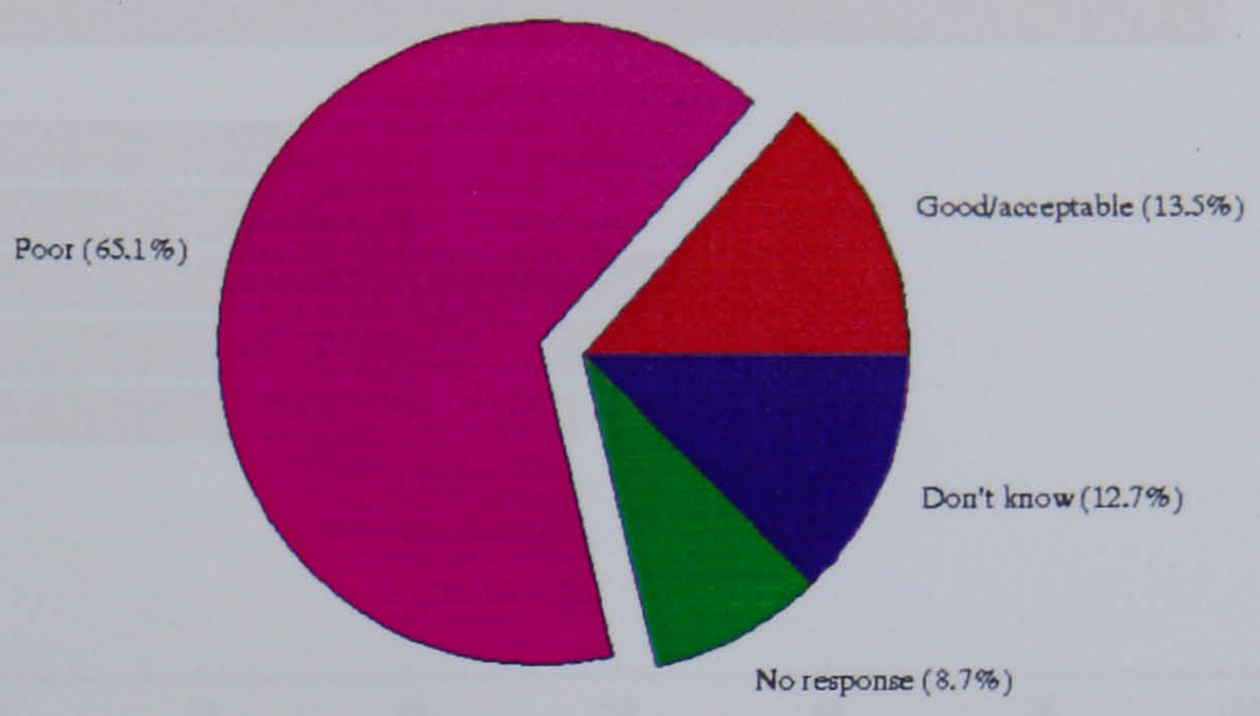



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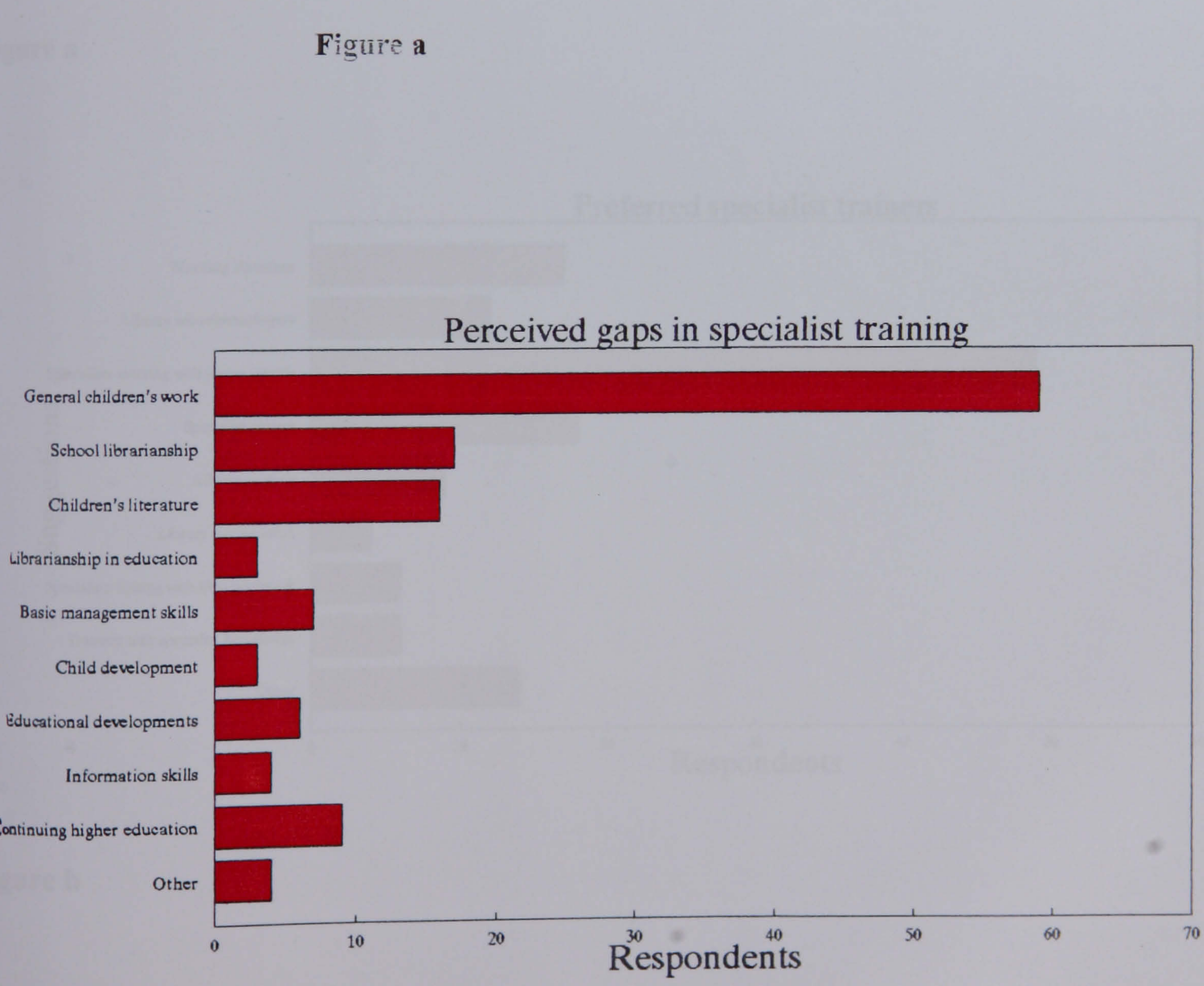



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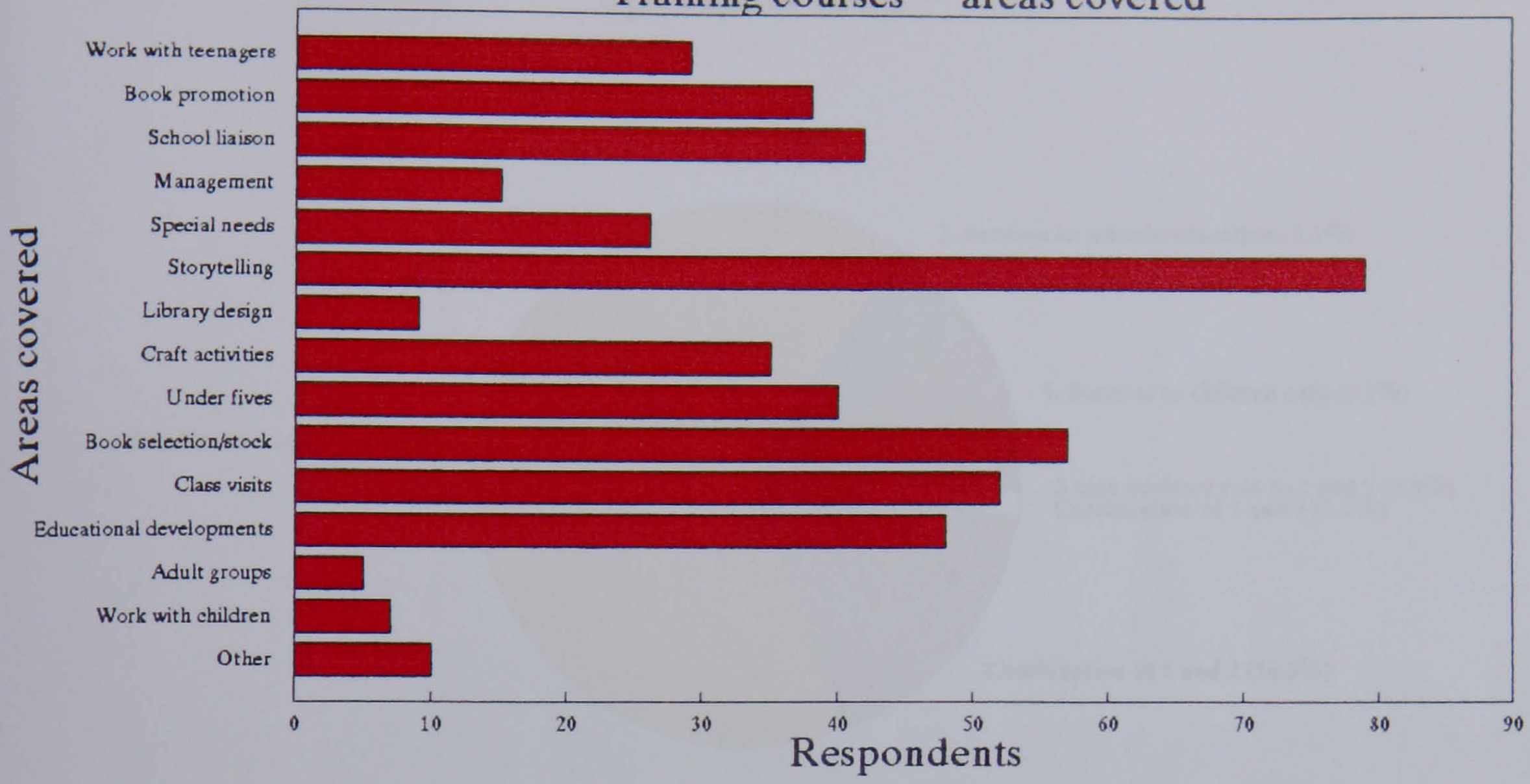



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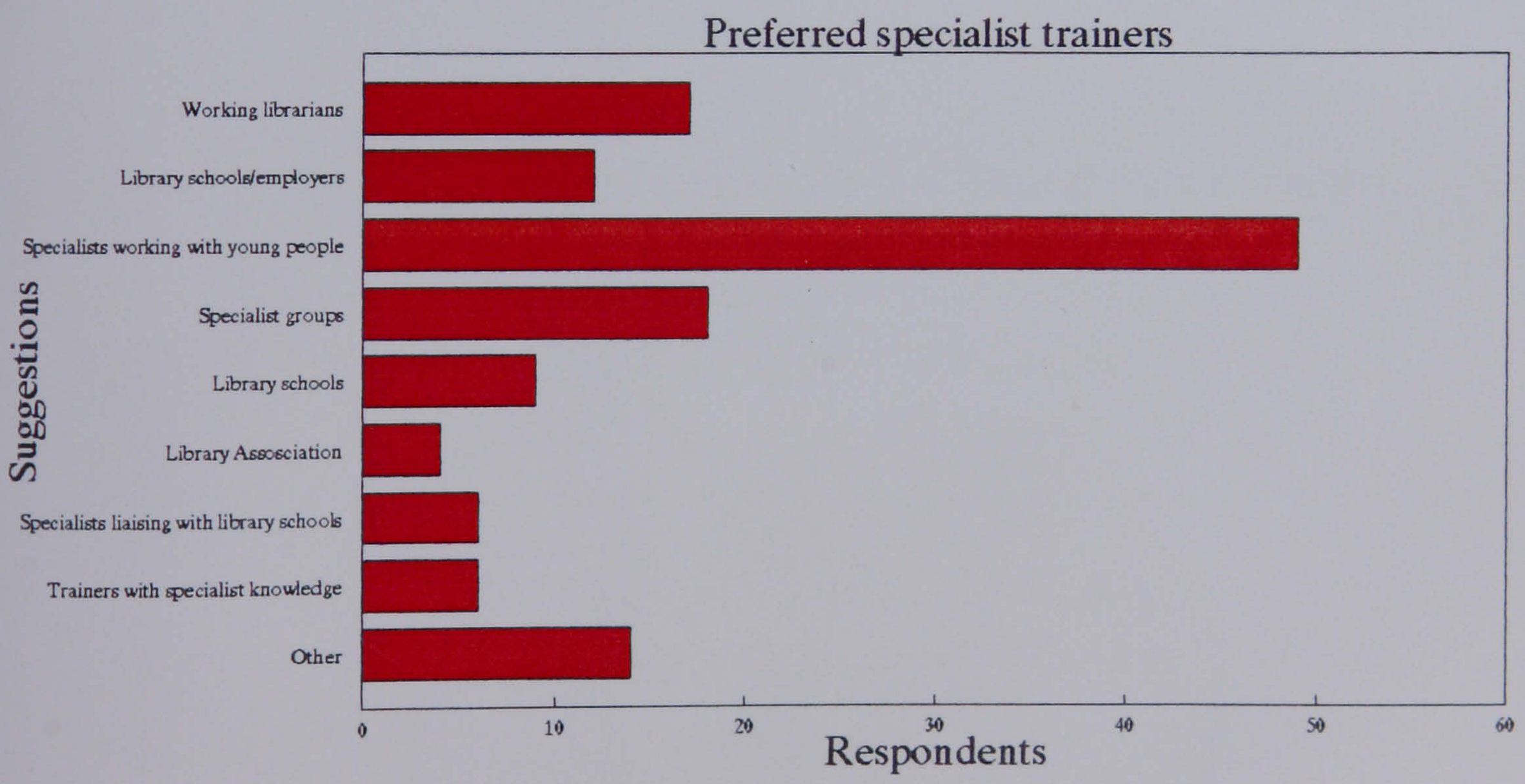



**Figure b**

**Appendix 9**

Specialist area

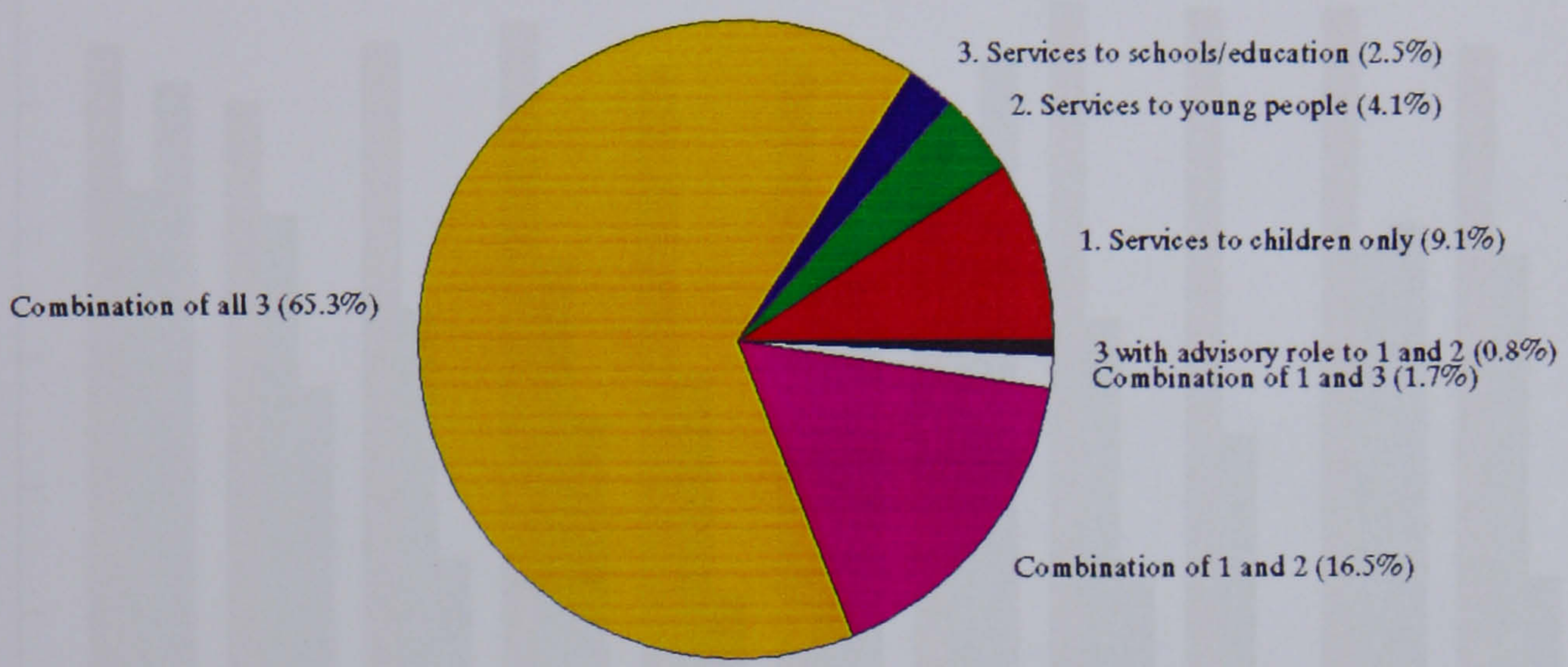



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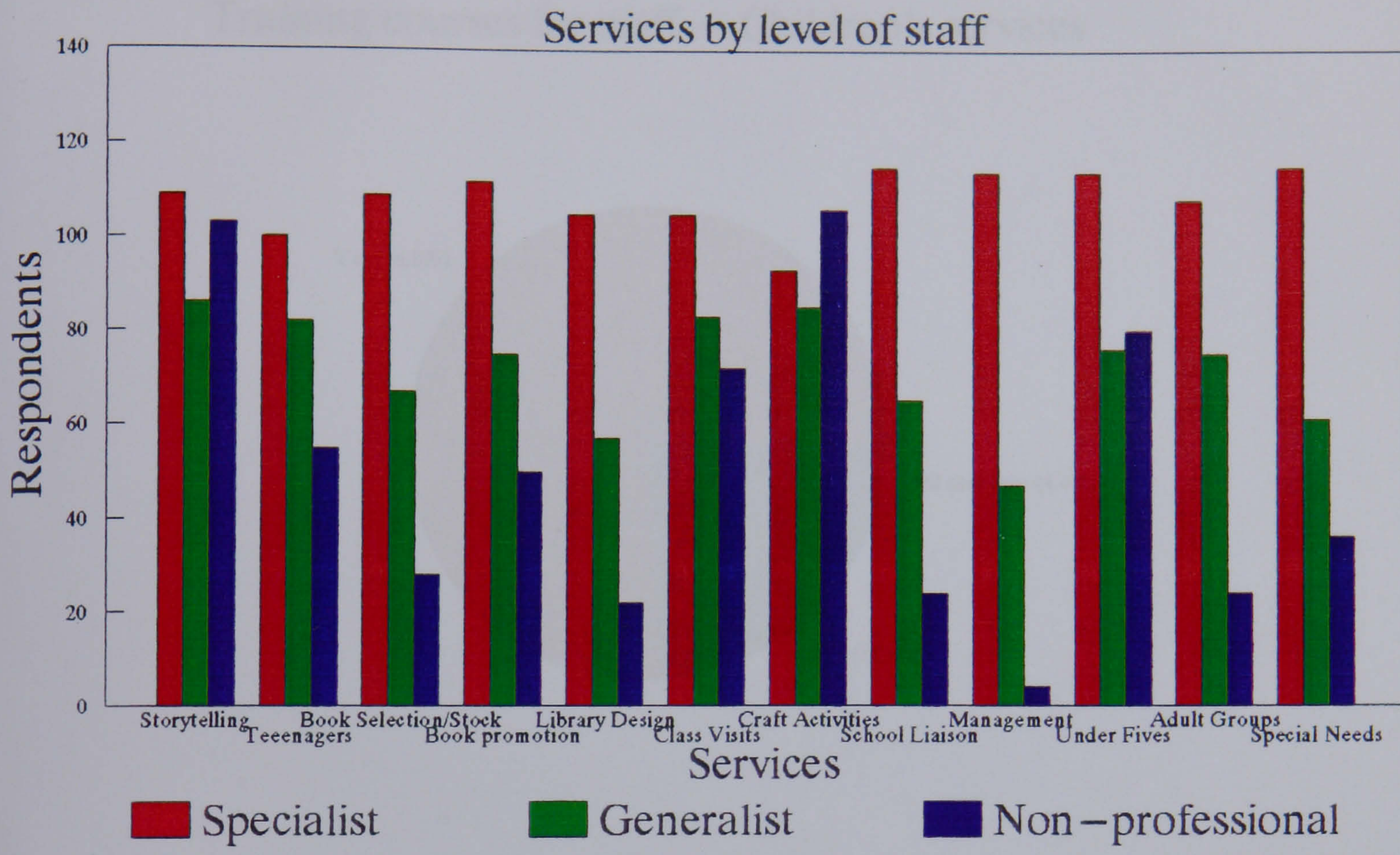



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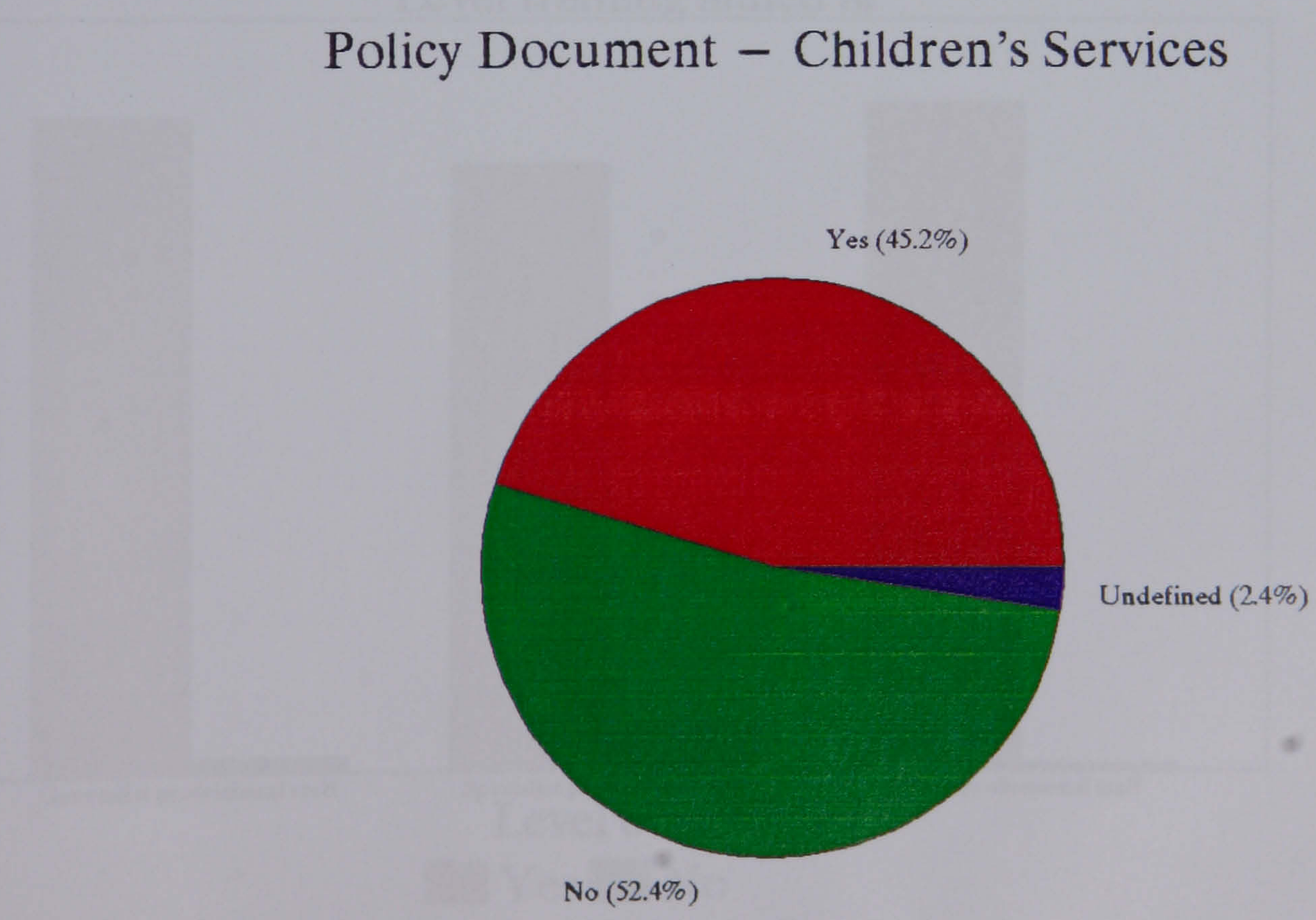



**Figure b**

# Training courses for staff – Children's services

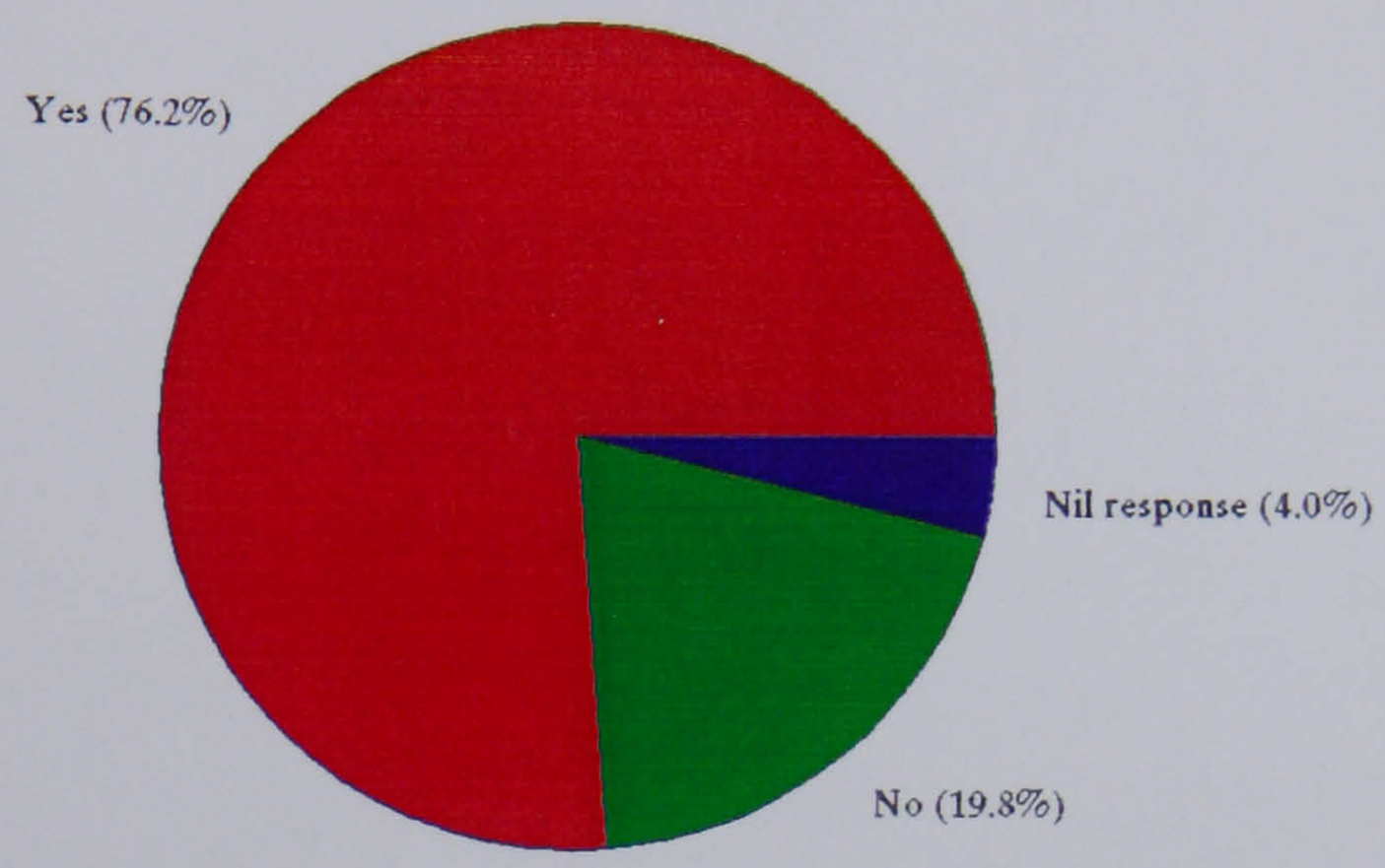



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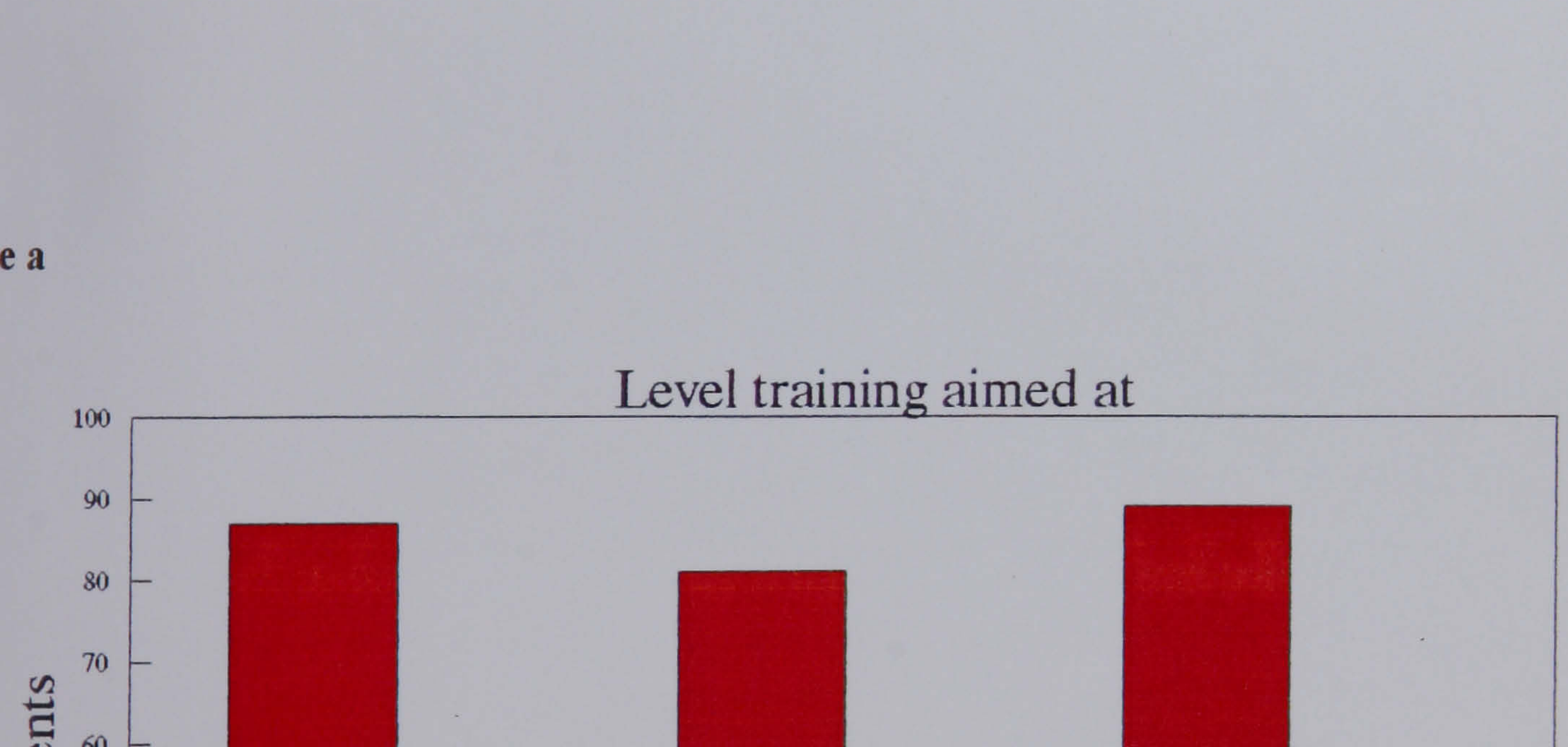



**Figure b**