



The modernisation review of public libraries

“Empower, Inform, Enrich”

**Views to the Department for Culture,
Media and Sport**

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from

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of the United Kingdom & Ireland Limited**

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1. The Booksellers Association

- 1.1 The Booksellers Association ["BA"] is a trade association situated in London, SW1, which represents booksellers in the UK and Ireland who sell new books to consumers and to institutions like libraries and schools.
- 1.2 The BA has a diverse membership, covering all types of businesses; large chains and small independents, general and specialist, terrestrial and online, retailer and wholesaler, located both on – and off – the high street.
- 1.3 Over 3,900 bookselling outlets are currently in membership of the BA, of which approximately 1,300 are independent bookshops. Of our total membership, 656 booksellers are registered with us as suppliers of books to libraries.
- 1.4 BA members sell printed books, audio books, e-books and e-readers. Booksellers may also employ 'print-on-demand' (POD) technology, which can produce from digital printers a bound paperback from a remote digital file in around four minutes.
- 1.5 UK and Irish booksellers operate in a very competitive marketplace, competing particularly on:
 - Price
 - Service
 - Location
 - Stock range.
- 1.6 Formed in 1895, the Association's aims are to help our members to:
 - Increase sales
 - Reduce costs
 - Improve competitiveness, efficiency and productivity
 - Network
 - Represent their views.
- 1.7 In view of the last point, we very much welcome the opportunity to give our thoughts and comments regarding the Modernisation Review in general and on some of the questions posed in the DCMS Consultation Document, *Empower, Enrich, Inform*, in particular.

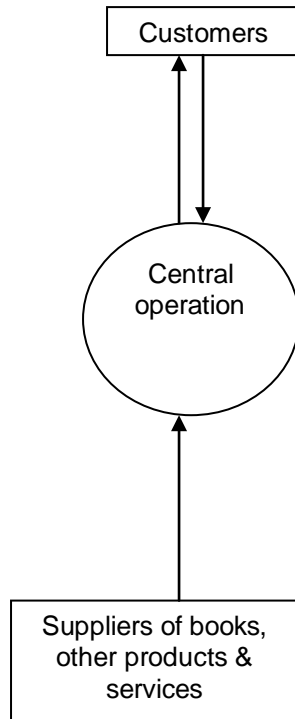
2 Consultation exercise

- 2.1 The BA's Chief Executive was one of the 29 contributors to *Empower, Enrich, Inform*. The latter certainly did 'inform'; it was useful to have sight of the questions to which DCMS particularly wanted answers.
- 2.2 It is with some hesitation that we put forward our comments, because we are not librarians. However, there are great similarities between what a bookseller has to do and what we believe a librarian has to do. As we see the position, we both:
 - Serve the customer
 - Obtain books and other products from suppliers
 - Have to manage our operations effectively
 - Operate in a fast period of change.
- 2.2 So our views in this submission are put forward particularly on the basis of successful experience in the bookselling sector in the hope that some of our ideas could usefully be adopted in the library world in the future.

- 2.4 But when considering the matter, what has surprised us is how many reports, investigations, enquiries, consultation documents and so forth have already been written or carried out into the library world, and yet – to date – so little action seems to have been taken.
- 2.5 Even the investigation into the Iraq War doesn't seem to have produced as many enquiries. Around 30 different initiatives seem to have been taken to look into the library world and to modernise the sector. Recently, there have been (in alphabetical order), the following significant reports:
- All Party Parliamentary Group Report
 - Audit Commission Report
 - CILIP Guidelines on What Makes a Good Library Service
 - DCMS's Framework for the Future, the Government's Strategy for Public Libraries
 - Inquiry into the Wirral Library Service
 - Parliamentary Select Committee's Report.
- 2.5 The latter referred to the public library sector as a "*Unique Service in Distress*". A pretty worrying description. There are so many ideas in all these reports. We wonder whether there is any point we can now make which hasn't been made previously.
- 2.6 But what we especially hope is that the outcome from this current Inquiry will be action, as opposed to further words, reports and management consultants' investigations.

3 Similarities between bookselling and the library world

3.1 Both booksellers and librarians have the following set up:



AREAS OF CONSIDERATION

Customers' changing needs

Role

Governance

Supply chain efficiencies

3.2

What successful experiences can booksellers pass on in the key areas considered on the right of this simple chart?

4 Role of the public library

4.1 The Activities and Resources of a Public Library, which are set out in Appendix A of *Empower, Inform, Enrich* (and reproduced below in the right-hand column), are impressive and laudable.

4.2 As the Minister of Culture says, “.... libraries provide a universal opportunity for enriching experiences, for learning, studying and informing individuals in their area”.

4.3 Libraries have a vital role in a democratic society and promote especially equality of opportunity. A previous Minister of Culture, Chris Smith, described libraries as the “universities of the street corner”. A description which is difficult to better.

4.4 Branch and school libraries in particular provide an invaluable service to rural and small town communities, including supporting pre-school groups, homework clubs, reading groups, support for local schools and home deliveries to the elderly and the infirm. It is these libraries and their staff which often undertake the most valuable work.

4.5 If you asked a person on the top of a Clapham Omnibus how he or she would describe a public library, the answer might well be along the following lines:

“A public library is a place – supported by the Government – where I can borrow the books I want, read books, newspapers and magazines, have access to reference material and the internet, all without charge”

- Free book loans
- Journals and newspapers
- Reference collections
- Access to ICT & Internet
- Information, advice & guidance
- Dedicated expert staff
- Council information and guidance
- Reading groups
- Study support
- Formal & informal learning, including basic skills
- Job-hunting support
- Outreach
- Public space
- Activities & events
- Third sector information
- Community information
- Health & well-being information, signposting and support
- Personalised service
- Access to partner and shared services
- MP and council surgeries
- Volunteering

4.6 We think that such a description sums up the role of a library pretty well.

4.7 But we would now like to consider this mythical statement a bit more to consider some of the implications.

5 Location

“A public library is a **place** – supported by the Government – where I can borrow the books I want, read books, newspapers and magazines, have access to reference material and the internet, all without charge”

Location

- 5.1 Where should libraries be situated? If you are a bookseller relying on passing trade, you obviously choose places that are easy for the public to visit in the best locations that budgets can afford.

Premises

- 5.2 How do you get the public in? By making your premises attractive. By making the visit by the customer enjoyable in some way. By ensuring the visit to the library is special in some way.

Opening hours

- 5.3 When should libraries be open? Well, ideally at hours that the public find most convenient, given, of course, that there is adequate funding available to support the opening hours requested.

6 Research

- 6.1 But our comments above are only guesswork. To try and nail down perceptions, booksellers often carry out market research to test their theories.
- 6.2 Talking to a number of librarians at the launch of *Empower, Inform, Enrich* at Borough Library, we were struck by how few libraries seemed to have carried out detailed market research to find out what their potential ‘customers’ actually wanted.
- 6.3 We suggest that in order to modernise the libraries, greater focus is spent by librarians on market research.
- 6.4 There is an independent market research agency in the book trade called Book Marketing Limited (www.bookmarketing.co.uk). BML work in the past has included producing the following two reports:
- **Household Library Use Survey 1998** - a detailed examination of the public's use of libraries in Britain / 1998
ISBN 1 873517 26 2
 - **Reading the Situation** - Book reading, buying and borrowing habits in Britain / 2000
ISBN 1 873517 76 9
- 6.5 We have no connection with BML, but we think highly of them and it may be that some library authorities might find their work useful.

7 Government

*"A public library is a place – supported by **the Government** – where I can borrow the books I want, read books, newspapers and magazines, have access to reference material and the internet, all without charge"*

- 7.1 As *Empower, Inform, Enrich* admits, the funding and policing is split between two government departments. DCLG are responsible for the overall funding; DCMS for the policy. This is a recipe for all sorts of problems. There is also MLA (which, seemingly, cannot instruct Councils), and the Advisory Council on Libraries.
- 7.2 The local authorities are responsible for the funding on their patch. Libraries seem to be caught in a pincer movement. If librarians and others complain to the local authority that they can't do this and can't do that, the local authority can easily blame the activity on central government. If complaints are made to central government, the complainant can similarly be referred to the local authority, which directly controls the purse-strings. An arrangement for easy buck-passing.

8 Governance

- 8.1 The BA believes that one of the key reasons for the perceived problems in the library world is that the governance is wrong. There should be one body that has overall responsibility for EVERYTHING concerned with the public library service – the strategic aspects, the operations and, most importantly, the management and finance.
- 8.2 While public libraries are a statutory service, effectively funded by national government, they are operated and managed by individual and designated library authorities within local government. The Secretary of State's responsibilities, as defined by the 1964 Act, are "superintending". Local government will not want to give up their responsibilities for providing the service but national government must ensure that adequate provision is actually made to meet the diverse needs of every community.
- 8.3 The existing requirement to provide a "comprehensive and efficient service" is vague. Library authorities need to be told what they are expected to provide and a new Agency should introduce an effective method of monitoring such provision. In recent years, the DCMS, in consultation with the profession, established Public Library Service Standards and these should be re-introduced. In short, local government must be aware of their responsibilities and national Government must monitor delivery to ensure an adequate service is provided across the country.
- 8.4 We therefore support the establishment of a Library Development Agency, as recommended by the All Party Parliamentary Group, provided that the LDA is given responsibility for all the aspects of running the service, including the management, operations and finance.
- 8.5 The establishment of such a body has the potential to give the service exactly what it needs:
 - Strategic leadership
 - A vision for the service
 - Powerful advocacy
 - The ability to encourage innovation

- Responsibility for proper budgeting and financial controls.
- 8.6 The Board of this new body should, of course, include representatives from the library world, but we suggest also that strong consideration is given to including a representative from the bookselling and publishing sectors. (A representative from a book and on-line publisher of business information could well be particularly appropriate.)
- 8.7 If you have clear leadership at the top, and clear governance and management structures, the benefits will soon cascade down the line to benefit all those in the public library world.

9 Competition with booksellers and local traders

*“A public library is a place – supported by the Government – where I can **borrow** the books I want, read books, newspapers and magazines, have access to reference material and the internet, all without charge”*

- 9.1 The Minister of Culture has mentioned her wish that consideration be given to libraries selling books (*“Why shouldn’t more libraries sell books as well as lend them?”* - page 9 of *Empower, Inform, Enrich*).
- 9.2 Our objections are not because booksellers wish to protect themselves from competition, they are because what has been suggested by the Minister is – in our view – anti-competitive.
- 9.3 Libraries are supported by taxpayers’ money and, being in the public sector, already have an advantage over private companies. They obtain financial support from the public purse, and fiscal benefits in areas such as property and occupancy costs, tax, VAT concessions etc.
- 9.4 So if libraries start to sell new books in a substantial manner (as opposed to selling off old/tired stock) they would have a competitive advantage over booksellers who pay taxes to support, *inter alia*, libraries. That can’t be right.
- 9.5 Actually, for the record, there was an experiment many years ago in opening a bookshop in a branch library in Wandsworth. It was a disaster! One of our members was involved. Hardly any books were sold and most library users wanted to borrow the books because they thought they were still in the lending library. The bookseller involved at the time has written recently to the BA to say: *“.....and those that they didn’t buy, they pinched - shrinkage was dreadful!”*
- 9.6 The Public Libraries & Museums Act 1964 makes clear in Section 7 that the duties of library authorities are *“to make facilities for the borrowing [our underlining] of books and other materials”*. There is no reference in the Act to *‘selling’* and we would question whether libraries currently have the statutory framework to sell.
- 9.7 Furthermore, it is our understanding that European competition law actually prevents state services competing unfairly with private enterprise - or creating situations in which that might arise. Some observers are questioning, moreover, whether it is currently fair for, say, public libraries to act as free internet cafes or to lend DVDs out very cheaply – well below what local DVD traders could offer.

10 Books in libraries

*“A public library is a place – supported by the Government – where I can borrow the **books** I want, read books, newspapers and magazines, have access to reference material and the internet, all without charge”*

- 10.1 A bookseller has to have in stock the right book at the right time (again, within budget constraints). If the books that are wanted are in stock, the public will support the library service; if they are not, they won't. Simple as that.
- 10.2 Total book stocks in libraries have been reportedly allowed to decline by more than 20% across the service. Today, only 8 pence in every £1 spent by the public library service is expended on books and in some authorities just one penny in every pound is spent on children's books! This is extremely worrying.

e-books

- 10.3 At present, the public can borrow hardbacks, paperbacks, audiobooks and e-books from public libraries.
- 10.4 Globally, e-books currently represent an estimated 3% of all printed books sold. But the amount of book content that has been digitised by publishers, coupled with the development by hardware manufacturers and the promotion of e-book readers by retailers, will lead to a very significant increase in e-book usage. In our Business Plan, the BA is estimating that by 2020 e-books will account for 20% of total book sales. (Some publishers believe we are being too conservative with this prediction and that the figure will turn out to be higher.)
- 10.5 This has implications for booksellers and libraries. If consumers want a particular product or service, we should do our best to supply them. But we are worried about the loaning of e-books in the library market.
- 10.6 First, we fear a significant increase in illegal file sharing. There are already websites allegedly advising consumers as to how to remove Digital Rights Management (DRM) software from proprietary e-book brands. In the future, a malicious borrower could easily get round encryption/protection software and share illegal copies, thus doing great harm to the Intellectual Property Rightsholders and to the printed book.
- 10.7 Secondly, we are concerned that the whole concept of copyright could easily be undermined.
- 10.8 There is undeniable tension between the library world on the one hand and authors, publishers and booksellers on the latter. The former want to give as much information to their 'customers' for free; the latter to make a living by creating, producing and selling copyrighted material.
- 10.9 So we urge the library community to come out clearly in defence of copyright and territorial rights.
- 10.10 The BA would welcome working with the library world and with the Publishers Association and Society of Authors to see how a sensible framework could be devised which enables e-books to be loaned to borrowers but also at the same time, protects the interests of those who have commercial considerations.
- 10.11 e-books are an undeniable threat to bookshops but they also represent an opportunity, and the BA is working hard to ensure that its members embrace all new technologies.

11 Supply chain efficiencies

“A public library is a place – supported by the Government – where I can borrow the books I want, read books, newspapers and magazines, have access to reference material and the internet, all without charge”

Standards

- 11.1 Ensuring that the public have access to the books they want requires supply chain efficiencies. Knowing what books are required; making sure they are there in the library (or if not there, that they can be quickly supplied); and handling the books in the most efficient way possible.
- 11.2 We understand that around 200 individual councils are permitted to specify their own requirements about how books are processed and what information accompanies them. The cost of pandering to this drive for personalisation is incurred by suppliers and by the corresponding management and administrative operations in each council.
- 11.3 A consultant who has considerable experience of libraries and their systems estimates that this is costing nationally some £200,000,000. A complete waste. You can buy a lot of additional books with this sum of money.
- 11.4 Standardisation of the information and supply flows in public libraries is an absolutely essential must-do priority if the service is to survive.
- 11.5 In order to have standard operations, someone needs to define, set, explain and support them.
- 11.6 The Booksellers Association, Publishers Association and The British Library and CILIP own jointly Book Industry Communications Limited [www.bic.org.uk] BIC has been set up precisely to develop standards in the book world. It is experienced and capable and it would be wasteful to create another body to do it.
- 11.7 Following a hugely successful e4books initiative to encourage supply chain efficiencies between booksellers and publishers, BIC is now engaged in an e4libraries [www.bic.org.uk/e4libraries] programme.
- 11.8 e4libraries aim is to improve the efficiency of the library supply chain through the application of technology and commitment to standards. Its remit covers both public and academic libraries and its focus is on printed books and reading resources delivered digitally.
- 11.9 Two free guides have already been produced and are available on the website: *Beginner's Guide to EDI in Libraries* and *Mapping Orders from your Library Management System to EDI*.
- 11.10 We urge all involved in library supply to support this programme and join in the associated accreditation scheme.

Competition between suppliers

- 11.11 Library suppliers would very much support any new moves to standardise processes to remove the unnecessary cost and work involved in servicing the individual requirements of authorities, and to encourage optimum use of EDI etc to eradicate manual transactions from ordering to eventual payment.
- 11.12 Library authorities will not want to deal with a multitude of publishers. Library suppliers offer significant benefits arising from consolidation of supply and economies of scale, and can offer considerable support to individual authorities in the purchasing and management of stock.

- 11.13 In order to bring about the best possible service from library suppliers to local authorities, there needs to be genuine competitive tendering and the avoidance of monopolies.
- 11.14 We therefore do not support a single central buying authority acting on behalf of all libraries. A range of options and alternative sources of supply should be available to local authorities in order to create healthy competition for the contracts to supply.

12. Conclusion

- 12.1 It would be good if the future leaders of the sector can get everyone on the same page and build a powerful vision of how we can all help to deliver an efficient service. At stake is a literate, well read, educated and knowledgeable society.
- 12.2 The Booksellers Association would welcome being part of any future discussion and looks forward to decisive action by the Minister of Culture on the steps now to be taken.
- 12.3 Key to this, we feel, is the appointment of a single agency that has total control of the whole sector.