

THE PUBLIC SERVICE ETHOS AND UNION MOBILISATION: A CASE STUDY OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICE

**Steve Davies
Cardiff School of Social Sciences
Cardiff University**

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Abstract

After thirty years of neoliberal public sector reforms involving the increased use of the private sector and the import of private sector methods, in many respects, the public sector is barely recognisable from when Mrs Thatcher was elected.

This study is about one specific part of the public services – the public library service – and is analysed in the context of the wider picture of change in the public services. In particular, the focus of the thesis is the attitude of library service workers to the public service ethos (PSE), whether and how it informs their attitude to their work and its potential for use by their union in mobilisation.

The thesis addresses three research questions:

- Has the public service ethos survived? And if it has, what does it mean for workers?
- Is there a relationship between commitment to the public service ethos and union membership and activism?
- Could the union utilise the ethos in its campaigning? And, if so, how?

Starting from a theoretical discussion of the origins and meaning of the PSE and a discussion of the relevance of mobilisation theory, the study highlights three key areas. First, there is an examination of whether workers in the public library service believe that a PSE exists and, if so, what it means to them. It is demonstrated through qualitative and quantitative data, including a survey of union members in the library service that it is both alive and well and a significant influence on how they view their working life. Secondly, there is an analysis of whether there is a relationship between union activism and commitment and a belief in the PSE. Connected with that is a debate about the utility of the PSE as an aid to mobilisation at the workplace. Thirdly, there is a discussion of the relevance of the PSE to unions' wider campaigning, given their expressed aim of drawing on external power resources through alliances with service user groups.

The study shows that public service workers continue to believe in a PSE, offering their union the opportunity to associate itself with it, thereby distinguishing itself from the employer and strengthening the union both within and outside the workplace.

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List of Acronyms used

ACE	Arts Council for England
ALP	Annual Library Plan
BIS	Department for Business, Innovation and Skills
BOS	Bristol Online Survey
BSA	British Sociological Association
BSAS	British Social Attitudes Survey
CABE	Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment
CBI	Confederation of British Industry
CCT	Compulsory Competitive Tendering
CILIP	Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals
CIPFA	Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy
COHSE	Confederation of Health Service Employees
CPA	Comprehensive Performance Assessment
CUPE	Canadian Union of Public Employees
DCLG	Department for Communities and Local Government
DCMS	Department for Culture, Media and Sport
DfE	Department for Education
DNH	Department of National Heritage
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
FBU	Fire Brigades Union
FTE	Full Time Equivalent
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
LGE	Local Government Employers
MLA	Museums, Libraries and Archives Council
NALGO	National and Local Government Officers' Association
NAO	National Audit Office
NATS	National Air Traffic Service
NIRS	National Insurance Recording System
NPM	New Public Management
NUPE	National Union of Public Employees
ODPM	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
ONS	Office for National Statistics
PCS	Public and Commercial Services Union
PFI	Private Finance Initiative
PSE	Public Service Ethos
PSIRU	Public Services International Research Unit
PSM	Public Service Motivation
PwC	PricewaterhouseCoopers
RMT	National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers
SEMLAC	South East Museums, Libraries and Archives Council
TGWU	Transport and General Workers' Union
TPA	Taxpayers' Alliance
TUC	Trades Union Congress

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

We live in a period in which the Prime Minister boasts of releasing public services from ‘the grip of state control’ (Cameron, 2011); the UK’s foremost sociologist can assert that ‘there are no alternatives to capitalism’ (Giddens, 1998: 24); a member of the Murdoch media dynasty can claim (about broadcasting) that the ‘only reliable, durable, and perpetual guarantor of independence is profit’ (Murdoch, 2009); where unions are frequently seen as simply a market distortion; and in which there is a cross-party consensus on the need for public services to focus on ‘managers, markets and measurement’ (Ferlie and Steane, 2002: 1461).

This is the background to the thesis and it is interesting to reflect on how these changes have come about.

1.2 Marketisation and public sector reform – the context

At the time of writing, we are in a new phase of this process of public sector reform, under a Coalition that took office in May 2010. The intent seems clear – to ratchet up further the marketisation of public services, extending and deepening changes that began in the late 1970s.

Public services under the Conservatives 1979-97

In 1979 when the Conservatives came to power, few people imagined that this would later be seen as a watershed election, signalling the end of the ‘social democratic moment’ (Berman, 1998) that had been ushered in by governments across the western world in response to economic depression, fear of revolution and war. The class compromise after the Second World War saw governments of all political complexions accepting the objective of ‘full employment’, state intervention in the economy and a welfare state¹. Among other things, this had the effect of strengthening the bargaining position of the trade unions. As Kelly (2012: 351)

¹ In the UK, this is sometimes described as ‘Butskellism’, after the supposed similarities between the policies of Conservative Chancellor R.A. Butler and his Labour shadow, Hugh Gaitskell.

observed, 'many industrial relations academics regarded the policies of the 1979 and 1983 Thatcher governments as an aberration' and that '(s)ooner rather than later, the Thatcher interregnum would come to an end.' The 1979 Conservative manifesto carried no mention of privatisation, competitive tendering or contracting out. It simply claimed that 'the reduction of waste, bureaucracy and over-government will [also] yield substantial savings', referred to the waste of 'local direct labour schemes' and pledged to 'provide safeguards against unfair competition from direct labour' (Conservative Party, 1979). The 1983 election manifesto contained references to tendering for some public services:

To release more money for looking after patients, we will reduce the costs of administering the Health Service. We are asking health authorities to make the maximum possible savings by putting services like laundry, catering and hospital cleaning out to competitive tender. We are tightening up, too, on management costs, and getting much firmer control of staff numbers (Conservative Party, 1983).

What may have begun as a pragmatic way of meeting a number of different but related objectives (cutting public expenditure, reducing staffing levels in the public sector, weakening public sector unions) became part of the emergence of neoliberal ideology at governmental level in the UK (Grimshaw et al, 2002).

Conservative policy towards the public sector developed a greater coherence over time. It became associated with the notion of separating 'core' from 'non-core' functions in public services. Later, heavily influenced by the 'reinvention of government' model developed by American management gurus Osborne and Gaebler (1992), fragmentation, compartmentalisation and commercialisation of public services became a key element of New Public Management (NPM). Such changes were seen as an important step on the way to privatisation. Related to the idea that the public sector should 'steer not row', acting as a commissioning agent rather than delivering services itself.

Domestic problems, allied with the rapid changes developing in the international economy and the breakdown of the Bretton Woods system created a new environment for policy. A mix of hitherto obscure right-wing think tanks like the Institute for Economic Affairs (founded in 1955) and newer ones like the Centre for Policy Studies and the Adam Smith Institute (founded in 1974 and 1976 respectively) became very influential as advocates of neoliberal policies in Conservative party circles (Fourcade-Gourinchas and Babb, 2002).

As Bel and Warner (2008: 104) point out, the theoretical basis for this approach rests on a combination of public choice theory, property rights theory and industrial organization theory – competition, incentives and ownership (Jensen and Stonecash, 2005). Public choice suggests that competition will restrict ‘excessive’ supply of public services, and thereby cut delivery costs (Niskanen, 1971). Property rights argues that private ownership offers stronger incentives for cost reduction (Shleifer, 1998), and industrial organization theory maintains that private contractors will be more likely to take advantage of economies of scale (Donahue, 1989).

Advocates of contracting out support services, such as Domberger (1998), identify a number of advantages over in-house provision: the public sector can concentrate on core business; market discipline drives down prices; the obligation to formally specify a contract assists with control and monitoring of the level and quality of output; periodic contract renewal imposes incentives for higher motivation and productivity among both managers and workers; use of a private sector provider enhances flexibility, adaptability, responsiveness to change, and the capacity for innovation in service provision.

While early research on outsourcing (e.g. Domberger and Jensen, 1997; Domberger and Rimmer, 1994) identified a clear link between contracting out and cost savings, today the evidence is seen as mixed (Bel and Warner, 2008). Boyne (1998a) and Hodge (2000) in meta-analyses found no systematic relationship between private provision of public services and cost savings. There is now considerable dispute about not only whether savings are made by outsourcing, but also, the sources of any such savings and their sustainability.

Ancillary services in health and other parts of the public sector were seen as soft targets for contracting out – peripheral services that could be delivered by external providers at a lower cost while having no impact on the core work. Pollock (2004: 23) argues that the outsourcing of services like catering, security and ancillary staff within the NHS was a less ‘politically damaging’ method of cutting costs than ‘trying to dismantle national terms and conditions of service that had been agreed with the unions’. It could also be portrayed as a local rather than national decision. Greener claims that it is mistaken to regard services such as hospital cleaning as ‘inessential services’ (2008: 95), and the crude application of the management orthodoxies of outsourcing and the idea of ‘core’ and ‘periphery’ (Atkinson, 1987) also revealed a misunderstanding of the nature of public service work in general and, the place of team work within that.

The Conservative government abolished the Fair Wages Resolution in 1983. This was seen by the unions as timed to coincide with the introduction of competitive tendering (Wing, 2003). The Resolution obliged contractors carrying out work for the public sector to abide by the wage rates of the equivalent public sector worker. It had effectively operated as a disincentive for contractors to cut wages and conditions as a way to compete for contracts with in-house teams. Its repeal marked a move away from, if not an abandonment of, the 'model employer' approach in which the public sector set an example to the private sector. From the 1980s on, the public sector was urged to emulate the private sector.

Great claims were made for cost savings under competitive tendering and a significant amount of research has been carried out on the impact of contracting out on costs, much of it arguing that extensive savings are made (Bosch, Pedraja and Suarez-Pandiello, 2000; Domberger and Jensen, 1997; Domberger et al, 1987; Gradus and Dijkgraaf, 2003; Ohlsson, 2003; Parker and Hartley, 1990; Reeves and Barrow, 2000; Stevens, 1978; Szymanski and Wilkins, 1993; Szymanski, 1996).

However Deakin and Walsh (1996) are sceptical about claims for the efficiency impacts of market mechanisms, claiming that many studies rely on assertion or on surveys of 'management perception'. They refer to Van Horn's comments about contemporary US research on contracting out (1991):

When pressed, few officials could supply any hard evidence to support their claim that private contracting was cheaper than government service delivery. If cost comparisons were ever made they were forgotten. Without any pressure to change, most officials have long since decided that they would rely on private firms to perform a range of local county and state government services.

There is also a considerable literature that argues that if cost savings are made, they are at the expense of either quality of service, the jobs, pay and conditions of the workforce or other externalised costs (Deakin and Walsh, 1996; Ganley and Grahl, 1988; Kelliher, 1995; Kelliher and McKenna, 1988; Kerr and Radford, 1994; Milne, 1997; Painter, 1991; Pinch and Patterson, 2000; Reimer, 1999; Sachdev, 2001; Sachdev, 2004) – in other words, where this occurs it 'does not represent a genuine improvement in overall productivity and is more like a transfer of value away from employees' (Maltby and Gosling, 2003).

Although influenced by principal-agent and public choice theories and enthusiastically embracing both contracting out and its cousin privatisation, the Conservatives imposed their own pragmatic limits on their crusade. Happy to sell off state owned enterprises and to contract out support services in the public sector, they stopped short at what was seen as the politically risky option of large scale private sector involvement in the clinical side of the NHS or core activities in other public services. Ironically, it took a Labour government to make that step.

Instead they introduced a whole series of reforms in the public sector (the NHS internal market, Local Management of Schools, the Financial Management Initiative and Next Steps Agencies, the Private Finance Initiative) designed to introduce markets or to replicate some of the market's disciplines within the public sector by various proxy measures such as the purchaser-provider split, Key Performance Indicators and targets.

New Labour – continuity not change 1997-2010

New Labour² came to office determined to prove its economic competence and to distinguish itself from previous Labour governments. To do so, the incoming government accepted the public spending plans of its Conservative predecessor for the first two years of the new term. It also embraced much of the previous government's neoliberal analysis in terms of public service reform with the deployment of many of the standard instruments from the New Public Management toolbox.

What Le Grand and Bartlett (1993) called public service 'quasi-markets' continued, with some amendments, under the post 1997 Labour governments. This reinvention of government model (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992) around an 'enabling state' using markets and contracts has the state focus on its 'core' activity, leaving peripheral activities to the private or voluntary sector - 'sticking to the knitting' (Peters and Waterman, 1982).

As Deakin and Walsh (1996) pointed out, under the Conservatives the market did not completely replace hierarchical control in the public sector although the balance shifted towards a contract-based service. Under New Labour the aspects of this change identified by Deakin

² The expression 'New Labour' was first used by Tony Blair in 1994 in his party conference speech. It also appeared in the party's 1996 draft manifesto (Morgan, 1998).

and Walsh – purchaser-provider split, development of contracts and quasi-contracts, and trading systems based on prices and user choice – all continued and were developed further.

The election of the New Labour government in 1997 saw a process of continuity and development rather than a change of direction. Certainly, the language of New Labour was less hostile to the public sector and there was more public money available for investment. New Labour accepted that, after nearly two decades of underinvestment, there was a need for increased public spending. Among the new ministers, there did not exist the visceral dislike of the public sector that many Conservative ministers seemed to possess. Nevertheless, New Labour policies cannot be seen as a complete break with the neoliberal agenda. Prime Minister Tony Blair frequently complained about public sector workers: on one occasion, memorably describing them as ‘wreckers’ (Blair, 2002). Tony Blair’s mantra of ‘what matters is what works’ (Blair, 1998) was used to signal New Labour’s transformation into a ‘profoundly pragmatic party, a party that has in some ways moved beyond ideology’ (Pemberton, 2010: 45). Others argued that behind the rhetoric of technocratic pragmatism was a normalization or ‘routinization of neoliberalism’ (Jessop, 2007: 288) or that New Labour reconstructed social democracy as ‘the best shell’ for a new variant of neoliberalism (Hall, 2012:19). Fourcade- Gourinchas and Babb (2002: 569) argue that

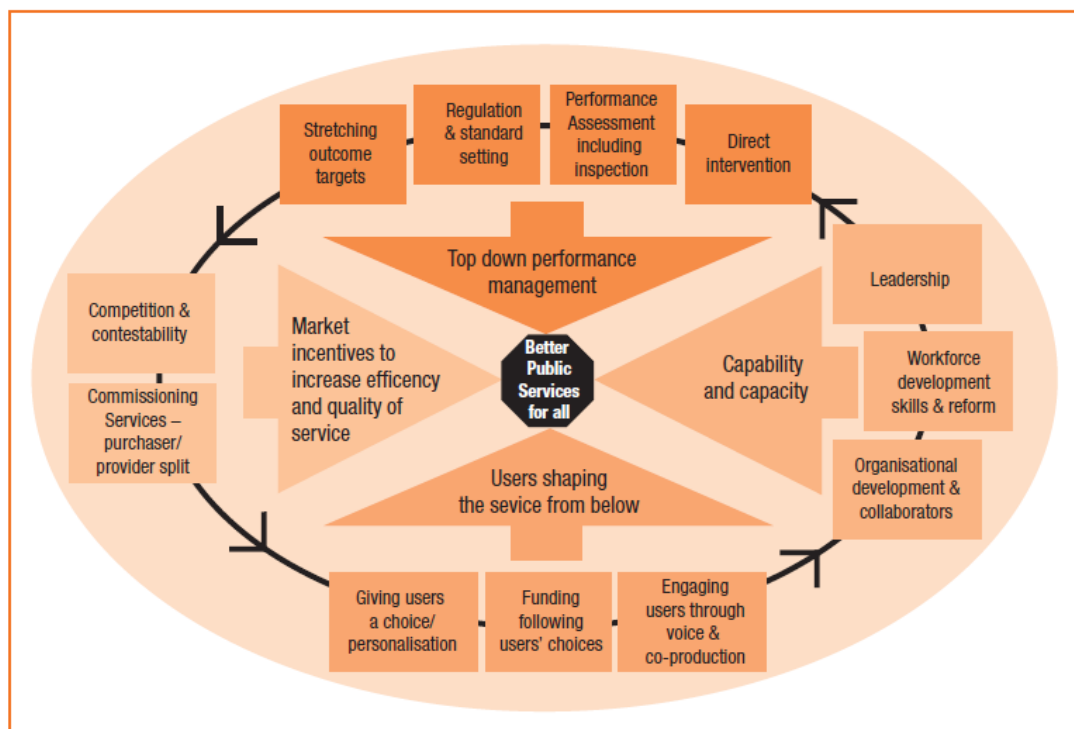
As an ideological force, the neoliberal creed was self-reinforcing, in the sense that there “were no alternatives” simply because everybody believed this, and acted upon this belief.

This was true not just in the UK and led Perry Anderson (2000: 13) to remark that ‘neoliberalism as a set of principles rules undivided across the globe: the most successful ideology in world history’. Despite the talk of first, stake-holding (Hutton, 1995), and then partnership, the fundamental line of march remained the same: private sector solutions were required for public sector problems (Grimshaw et al, 2002). In this way, public sector reform through competition and markets became part of the received wisdom of all major UK parties. Although the details may be disputed, ‘modernisation’ became bipartisan. As Crouch (2011: 83) points out:

By the early twenty-first century the Labour Party had abandoned the belief that some services required public provision. This belief had been based on the assumption that there was such a thing as a public service professional ethic that supplied a better motive to providers of such things as healthcare than the maximisation of profits.

The New Labour government had a four pronged approach to public service reform (Cabinet Office Prime Minister's Strategy Unit, 2006), combining top-down pressure from government itself (through performance management); citizen pressure (through choice and voice); competitive pressure (through markets); and capability and capacity building (for civil and public servants and central and local government) (see Figure 1a). The programme highlighted the choice agenda, relying on a range of key drivers to improve efficiency including: the purchaser/provider split; competition and contestability; and market incentives. Markets were seen as the means to drive up standards and drive out inefficiencies. If, as in some traditional public services, markets did not exist, then they must be created. If there is an initial absence of market actors willing to engage in a particular market, then incentives must be provided by government to remedy this. Both the third and private sectors have important roles to play in this model.

Figure 1a: New Labour's public service reform agenda



Source: The UK's Government's Approach to Public Service Reform – a discussion paper, Cabinet Office/Prime Minister's Strategy Unit, 2006: p23

Public services were redefined to mean those funded by the public purse rather than those delivered by the public sector (Blair, 2006). One of the four key principles of New Labour's

public service reform programme was 'the promotion of alternative providers and greater choice' (Blair, 2001).

Markets and contracting in public services were a response to the perceived problems of hierarchy and bureaucracy. In turn, networks were put forward as a refinement, and a solution to the problems, of marketised public services. However, this went alongside centralised control of funding and a huge increase in regulation in order to overcome the loss of control caused by fragmentation. Rhodes (2000) notes that contracting out has evolved away from an emphasis just on price and competition to one of building relationships based on trust and co-operation (relational contracts) but in a service that is subject to increasingly stringent monitoring (Boyne, 1998b) trust is likely to be systematically eroded.

As Entwistle (2005: 201) observes, 'principals operating in a hierarchy have access to a greater range of instruments of control than do principals operating through markets'. One of the paradoxes of New Labour is visible here – a Government with wide-ranging social policy goals ('joined-up government') but with a self-limiting approach that favoured private sector delivery. Therefore, ambitious interventionist goals 'have to be realised through the orchestration of fragmented networks of providers' (Entwistle, 1999).

While much of New Labour's public sector reform programme followed on naturally from the Conservatives' approach, one element carried a substantial step change – the large scale involvement of the voluntary sector in the delivery of public services. One of New Labour's unexpected legacies may be the changed position of the voluntary sector in British life, in particular the sector's transformed relationship with the state and the political consensus about its role in the delivery of public services (Davies, 2011b). By emphasising and encouraging the sector's role in public service delivery, the New Labour government not only transformed the character of the state-voluntary sector relationship but also facilitated changes within the sector.

The Conservative - Liberal Democrat Coalition 2010

The Coalition government elected in May 2010 is engaged in a major restructuring of the state – at both local and national level. The economic problems relating to the debt and the deficit are the reasons set out for the change but the real objective appears to be a massive shrinking of the public sector. Rather than responding to a financial crisis caused by irresponsible risk

taking by an under-regulated banking sector, the Government recast the problem as one caused by a profligate state sector that is too big and spends too much of the nation's wealth. As David Cameron put it to the 2009 Conservative party conference:

Why is our economy broken? Not just because Labour wrongly thought they'd abolished boom and bust. But because government got too big, spent too much and doubled the national debt (Cameron, 2009).

The public sector reform programme needs to be seen in that light. Building on the changes brought in by the previous Labour Government in involving the third sector in delivering public services and in encouraging the 'spin-out' of employee mutuals from the public sector, the Coalition announced early on, its commitment to:

support the creation and expansion of mutuals, co-operatives, charities and social enterprises, and enable these groups to have much greater involvement in the running of public services (HM Government, 2010: 29).

In the Comprehensive Spending Review (published in October 2010), the Coalition Government promised:

...a new right for public sector workers to form employee-owned cooperatives and mutuals to take over the services they deliver... (HM Treasury, 2010: 35)

The Government announced that its wider public sector reform programme would focus on:

- Promoting 'independent' provision in key public services (in other words, provision from both private sector companies and civil society bodies)
- Developing new rights for communities and public employees to buy and run services
- Attracting external investment and expertise into the public sector to deliver better and more efficient services
- Extending innovative payment and funding mechanisms, such as personal budgets and payment-by-results commissioning in more areas
- Increasing democratic accountability at a local level
- Maintaining continuity of service and managing risks in light of these reforms

(HM Treasury/Cabinet Office, 2010: 2)

As we shall see, almost all of these approaches have been considered, are being considered or have been put into practice in today's public library service. The Coalition said that it will also set proportions of specific services that should be delivered by 'independent providers, such as the voluntary and community sectors and social and private enterprises' (HM Treasury, 2010: 34).

Grimshaw and Rubery (2012) describe the Coalition as having 'an intensified neoliberal policy emphasis' in comparison with the previous Labour government. They argue that although it is impossible to say whether the Coalition will succeed in transforming what they call the 'liberal collectivist UK social model into an entirely liberal model' (2012: 121), this is clearly the intent of the government.

1.3 The End of the Public Service Ethos?

In this context, it might seem an odd moment to undertake a study of the belief in the public service ethos of a group of public sector workers and its mobilising potential for their trade union. Especially as some (on the left) have argued that the juggernaut of neoliberalism has crushed these values:

Emptied out from inside, the ethos of public service underwent an irreversible 'culture change'. The habits and assumptions of the private sector became embedded in the state (Hall, 2012: 19-20).

As with many such statements, this was not backed with serious empirical evidence. As such, it is interesting from a sociological point of view to consider seriously as whether a concept that is so 'contrary to dominant anti-statist cultural discourses' (McDonough, 2006: 630) has, in fact, been obliterated. Any signs of survival will challenge the dominant discourse and, in turn, require explanation and lead to a consideration of its potential as a basis for trade union resistance to neoliberal reforms and austerity. This latter point is doubly significant, for while there has been a great deal of research on union mobilisation and organisation (e.g. Heery et al, 2000; Kelly, 1998; Milkman, 2006), there has been little work done on the significance of the orientation to work of union members within the public sector. Equally, the perception of the PSE among union members has rarely been related to their understanding of their trade union and the role it might play in defence of the public sector. In particular there is little work done on how the shared possession of a concept like the PSE could assist the rank and file leadership, and on its potential as a union mobilising tool and in wider alliances with service users and

community groups. These are the issues to be considered in this thesis, through a detailed analysis of the changes that have been implemented in the public library service and the ways in which these have been interpreted by the people who work there and their trade union, UNISON.

The thesis developed from a long working relationship with UNISON, the public service union. It was built on contacts made with various UNISON headquarters officers in my period of employment with another public service union (now called PCS). While working for that union I developed some expertise and experience in analysing the politics behind, and impact of, privatisation and contracting out (e.g. Davies, 2006a; 2007a; 2008a). UNISON wanted to utilise this knowledge and so in 2004 commissioned a report on contracting out cleaning services in the NHS (Davies, 2005a). Thus began what has become a long working relationship with UNISON and it builds on a tradition of 'action research' within social science and contributes to contemporary discussions on 'public sociology'.

During this time I developed a proposal for a PhD thesis built around a dedicated piece of research on the question of public service trade unionism and the impact of globalisation (and globally organised management services companies) on public services more broadly. However while working with UNISON on the public library service, I met many UNISON activists working in libraries all over the UK. I was struck by the passionate commitment to the public service that they showed – despite the fact that they usually seemed to feel neither valued by their political masters nor appreciated by senior management. On the other hand, despite these convictions, they felt highly valued by the service users. At just the moment when library closures and cutbacks were, once again, back on local authority agendas, I felt that this intersection of ideas and agency – with the PSE and the union - was an important area for study about which there was virtually no research. So the subject of the thesis changed to an examination of the attitude of public service union members – specifically in the public library service - towards the public service ethos and of the potential for the union to associate itself with that ethos as part of its campaign to defend and extend the library service. In doing so, the thesis focuses on a series of questions:

- Has the public service ethos survived? And if it has, what does it mean for workers?
- Is there a relationship between commitment to the public service ethos and union activism?

- Could the union utilise the ethos in its campaigning? And, if so, how?

In pursuing answers to these questions it became clear that any deep understanding of the impact of these wide ranging changes needed to move beyond generalities about New Public Management and the Public Service Ethos and examine the specifics in detail. While there is considerable discussion of fundamental change, there is little research that focuses concretely upon the impact on workers of such a long period of reform in one service. We would expect, for example, that the process of change would have been uneven between sectors and that commitment to the ethos of public service would also vary. To that end, this thesis focuses on one particular part of the public services – the public library service - and constructs a historically grounded study of its origins, the manner in which it became part of the welfare state and the detailed ways in which it has been changed over the last thirty years. It is against this background that the workers' experience of change is assessed, along with a consideration of their commitment to the service as part of the welfare state and their feelings about its future. The account of the trade union response, and the potential for effective campaigning and resistance, develops from this analysis.

1.4 The Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is in four parts. Part 1 introduces the thesis with a consideration of the background to the relevant debates. Part 2 is an historically grounded, detailed examination of the public library service in the light of public service reform. Part 3 addresses workers' interpretation of the changes, and Part 4 analyses the union response.

Chapter 2: Origins and development of the public service ethos

Having reviewed the marketisation of public services of the last three decades in the Introduction, this chapter engages with the literature on the public service ethos, beginning with a discussion of its meaning. It looks back at the origin of the ethos in the UK, particularly in the context of an expanding public sector as part of a modern, industrial society.

It locates the development of the ethos within both its utilitarian and its radical traditions. In other words it examines its place as part of the elimination of corruption and nepotism in the 19th century imperial state and of its association with the widening of the franchise and the

democratisation of knowledge. In particular it makes a connection between the growth of the public sector and the growth of democracy.

The chapter then examines the debate about the basis of the ethos, its source, and refers to discussions about whether it relates to the job, the sector, the role of the professional, self-selection or socialisation.

To some commentators, three decades of neoliberal policies should have eliminated the PSE. The scale of the threat of marketisation is examined as is the debate about the survival of the PSE.

Chapter 3: Politics, power and public service union mobilisation

This section examines the position of public service unions, their origin and development and then goes on to look at their traditional sources of power, the impact of changing circumstances in weakening their 'institutional embeddedness' and their search for alternative sources of power.

This has led to the beginnings of a change in approach, embracing the principle of alliances with service users which go beyond workplace issues of jobs, pay and conditions as unions increasingly recognise that there is a connection between their aims in relation to the workplace and their wider social policy goals. The public service ethos could act as a bridge to coalitions with service users as well as providing public service workers with an alternative vision and a basis around which to mobilise.

Chapter 4: Researching the Union

The chapter on methodology begins with a discussion of academics working with unions, relating the experience to Burawoy's (2004) taxonomy of types of sociology. It places the relationship that I built with UNISON within the tradition of public sociology.

The research questions are then outlined before examining the research setting with an explanation for the choice of the public library service and UNISON members as subjects of study. This is followed by an explanation of the research design and justification of both the

quantitative and qualitative methods used including online surveys (both large and small), semi-structured interviews with UNISON reps and UNISON paid officers and participant observation.

Chapter 5: The UK public library service

This chapter examines the public library service to see how it has developed and, in particular, how it has been affected by the last three decades of neoliberal policy of UK governments. This allows a review of the current position of the service in the context of its history over the last century and a half as a backdrop to a discussion on the public service ethos among library staff.

One of the main arguments of this thesis is that public service workers have retained a belief in the notion of a public service ethos, despite the assaults on it from the neoliberal policy turn of the last thirty years. The PSE was seen as something that was central to the public library service – shared by elected politicians at local and national level, local government senior management and library staff, both those professionally qualified and those not. Today, workers believe that it has become largely the preserve of the staff as politicians and senior managers have abandoned it in favour of a market approach to public service provision. To understand these changes it is necessary to understand a little of the history of the British public library service.

Chapter 6: Measuring a public good – development and decline in the language of metrics

This chapter follows on from the previous one with an examination of the governance of libraries and a review of the key metrics by which the performance of public libraries is measured.

Chapter 7: The public service ethos: a terminal case or alive and well?

This chapter examines the data in relation to attitudes to public service among library staff. It primarily draws on the survey of UNISON members in the library service. It first sets out some of the basic data, then looks at respondents' views as to whether they believe a public service

ethos (PSE) exists within the library service. The chapter then reviews some of the factors that might cut across the survival of a PSE, before a discussion of the implications of the data.

Chapter 8: Union reps and the PSE

This chapter looks at the views of the most active layer of the union – the reps. It first of all provides some demographic information about the reps and then looks at what they understand by the PSE. This is followed by a discussion of whether public service workers' belief in the PSE is the result of self selection into the public service or socialisation once working within the service. There is then an examination of the reps' views on the public service employment bargain and whether and how that affects attitudes towards the PSE. To conclude the chapter reviews the relationship of the PSE to union membership and how it could affect the way that the union engages in coalitions with civil society groups.

Chapter 9: UNISON's library campaign

The previous chapter argued that there is evidence to show that – at least in the public library service – the public service ethos still retains an important hold on the attitudes and thinking of the workforce.

This chapter examines the changing views of the UK trade union movement in general and UNISON in particular, of the idea of building alliances with service users and community groups. It then specifically examines UNISON's public library campaign in that context.

A strategic turn with the objective of building alliances would include a recognition that the best way to safeguard jobs, pay and conditions is to focus on the quality of service provision. This would require the union to be able to recognise and negotiate the inevitable tensions that would be created in the course of such an approach – both internally and with external partners.

This chapter discusses whether the basis for such an approach exists in terms of the relationship (or potential relationship) between the union and the PSE. It reviews the experience of library campaign groups in this context, and takes a close look at some of the key events and landmarks of UNISON's library campaign, especially the *Love Your Libraries People's Inquiry* conference in 2010 and *Speak Up for Libraries* in which UNISON is a key

partner. The chapter concludes with a discussion over whether there are more generalisable lessons beyond the public library service.

Chapter 10: Conclusion

In this chapter, the themes of the study are drawn together and the argument returns to the main research questions. It summarises the main arguments and draws out the key implications concerning the meaning of the public service ethos to public library service workers, why it has been sustained despite the marketisation of public services and what that potentially offers to their union.

PART ONE: BACKGROUND

Chapter Two: Origins and development of the public service ethos

2.1 Introduction

Marketisation of public services has raised questions about the sustainability of the public service ethos³. Hall (2012: 20) goes so far as to argue that three decades of marketisation and privatisation of public services has resulted in an 'irreversible culture change' with the 'habits and assumptions of the private sector ...embedded in the state.' The ethos is a powerful but sharply contested idea, illustrated by the very different views of two former senior civil servants. In one of his last speeches as Cabinet Secretary, Sir Gus O'Donnell referred to 'the public sector ethos we hold so dear' and asserted: 'In the 21st Century we are witnessing a return of public sector ethos' (O'Donnell, 2009). By contrast, in evidence to the House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee (2002: 12), Steve Robson (a former Treasury permanent secretary) dismissed the public service ethos as '... a bit of a fantasy, it is rather like middle-aged men, who fantasise that beautiful, young women find them very attractive.'

Given that during his time at the Treasury, Robson was responsible for rail and London Underground privatisation, the Private Finance Initiative, and regulation of the UK financial services industry, and that after he left he became a non-executive director of Royal Bank of Scotland, his contempt for the idea of a public service ethos is perhaps not surprising.

More interesting perhaps is the September 2010 comment by the Conservative Cabinet Office Minister, Francis Maude, to the BBC's *Panorama* programme that the 'public service ethos is very important'. Admittedly this was done in the context of a discussion on top pay in the public sector and how, in Maude's view, the public service ethos meant: 'People will come and work in a public sector for salaries that aren't competitive in a private sector sense' (Evening Standard, 2010). Consequently he called for a return to a more 'old-fashioned' public service ethos (BBC online, 2010).

³ Throughout this thesis, the term public service ethos is used (unless quoting others), even though in the literature a number of terms are used interchangeably with it.

Despite this instrumental usage of the concept, the fact that a member of an avowed state-shrinking, neoliberal government makes reference to it, shows the lasting strength and influence of an idea that has helped shape the British public services since at least 1854 (with the publication of the Northcote-Trevelyan Report) and which can trace its roots back to the writings of Plato (Plant, 2003) and through the nineteenth century British idealists such as T H Green (O'Toole, 1990).

The persistence of the ethos has led to some questioning the impact of New Public Management (NPM) (Geddes, 2001). The last thirty years, beginning with the first Thatcher government, saw a growth in a contractual approach to public services associated with NPM (Hood, 1995) and growing concerns that these developments may be incompatible with the continued survival of the public service ethos (Hebson et al, 2003; Du Gay, 2000; Richards and Smith, 2000; Sheaff and West, 1997; O'Toole, 1993).

This chapter discusses the contested meanings of the public service ethos, examines its origins, and the reasons for its continuing relevance despite the threats to its existence posed by an increasingly marketised public service.

2.2 Definitions and contested meanings

The public service ethos 'lacks a clear, universally accepted definition' (Horton and Farnham, 2005: 2) and has been described as 'nebulous' (Corby, 2000) and 'ambiguous' (Pratchett and Wingfield, 1994). To add to the confusion, there is not even agreement on the English term to be used. *Public service* ethos and *public sector* ethos are often used interchangeably, although Brereton and Temple (1999: 456) strongly argue that 'the term *public service ethos* can describe attitudes in both public and private sector organizations' and therefore distinguish it from those values and ethics which are exclusive to the public sector. In the North American literature, neither of these terms is extensively used; scholars preferring the term 'public service motivation'. This betrays its roots in psychology and organisation theory and is particularly associated with Perry - building on the work of Staats (1988) - among others (Perry and Wise, 1990; Perry, 1996; 1997; Houston, 2000; 2006; Crewson, 1997). Because of their different roots, Rayner et al (2011: 30) insist that, although similar constructs, the public service ethos and public service motivation 'should not be considered interchangeable'. Horton and Farnham

(2005: 2) argue that public service motivation is a function of the wider concept of the public service ethos. Labour market economists use pro-social motivation to describe agents' preferences and pro-social behaviour to describe their actions (Gregg et al, 2008). Similar but slightly different terms are used in other countries – for example, 'Beamtenethos' in Germany and Austria; 'l'éthique du bien commun' in Francophone Canada (Horton and Hondeghem, 2006). Horton and Farnham (2005) suggest that, in varying forms, the public service ethos is found in all liberal democracies – the variation between countries being an indication of path dependency.

According to Richards and Smith (2000), the difficulties in the UK in providing a definition are due, in part, to the nature of Britain's political system and unwritten constitution. This was highlighted by former Cabinet Secretary, Robert Armstrong's view that the ethos is, at best, 'a portmanteau concept' (Richards and Smith, 2000: 48). Despite these difficulties, many writers have identified what they consider to be the key elements of the public service ethos. Horton (2006: 32-33) defines it as:

the ethical framework within which British public officials are expected to operate. This includes behavioural traits such as honesty, integrity, impartiality, and objectivity; loyalty to the organisation and its goals; a commitment to public service; and accountability through and to political authorities.

The House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee (2002: 7) defines the public service ethos as

a principled framework for action, something that describes the general character of an organization, but which, and more importantly, should also motivate those who belong to it.

Hebson et al (2003: 6) note that there is a 'surprising consensus' over the constituent parts of the public service ethos. Adcroft and Willis (2005: 397) claim that there are 'fundamental differences between public and private sectors' which creates 'clear ethical distinctiveness'. In support they refer to Pollit's argument about the context of public sector decision-making:

The public sector, if it is to retain legitimacy in the eyes of citizens, has both to practise and visibly to display values of equity, impartiality and a certain moral enlightenment which are not *central* to the commercial marketplace, even if they are sometimes found there (Pollit, 2003: 24).

Pratchett and Wingfield (1996: 641-642) identify five features of a generic public service ethos that they argue can be applied across the range of professional and occupational groups within British local government:

- *Accountability*. An acceptance of the legitimacy of democratic government and a commitment to implementing policy regardless of their own views.
- *Bureaucratic behaviour*. Display characteristics of honesty, integrity, impartiality and objectivity.
- *Public interest*. A commitment to the 'public good' and the wider interests of the community with a corresponding belief that the organisation exists to serve that.
- *Motivation*. Based on altruism, a commitment to serving the community, rather than financial self interest.
- *Loyalty*. Operation within a complex (and sometimes conflicting) set of loyalties (including to the employer, department, organization, profession, institution and community).

Hoggett et al (2006: 766) see no problem in many forms of the public service ethos existing among different groups of public service workers, each with possible different core values:

each group, in their own way, may conceive of the public good differently. The point is that, however defined, some notion of the public good is strongly valued by them and this is what remains distinctive about an ethos of public service.

Adcroft and Willis (2005: 397) conclude that where the 'ethical distinctiveness' of the public sector is lost, 'commodification and deprofessionalisation occur, which must necessarily have implications for all stakeholders'. Behind this are the different basic philosophies in the public and private sectors. Staff and managers in the different sectors 'have conflicting priorities' (Hebson et al, 2003: 497), different perceptions and are motivated by different things. The public service ethos values service, duty and obligation, while the private sector values financial viability, profit and shareholder value (Audit Commission, 2002a). A private sector organisation is primarily accountable to its shareholders, and therefore does not have this same imperative. Or to put it another way, distinctive public service values include equity, universality, impartiality and integrity, honesty and altruism, political neutrality, loyalty, probity, trustworthiness, fairness, incorruptibility, public accountability, serving the public interest,

community, citizenship, justice and democracy (Farnham and Horton, 1996; Rouse, 1999; Pratchett and Wingfield, 1996).

John and Johnson (2008: 106) offer what they describe as a 'simpler definition of wanting to work for the public interest'. As they point out, by focusing on the 'key purpose of the public sector', it helps to understand how the public sector's mission – as interpreted by the workers – becomes part of their own views and motivations. As will be argued later, this is important in understanding how workers appropriate the idea of the ethos.

Perry and Wise (1990: 368) define Public Service Motivation (PSM) as 'an individual's predisposition to respond to motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions and organisations'. They further argued that these motives could be grouped under three distinct categories: rational; norm-based; and affective. Rational motives refer to individual utility maximisation; norm-based relate to attempts to conform to norms; and affective involves behaviour related to emotional responses to different social contexts.

Perry and Hondeghem (2008: 3) note that:

the meaning of public service motivation varies across disciplines and fields, but its definition has a common focus on motives and action in the public domain that are intended to do good for others and shape the wellbeing of society.

Perry (1996) developed his theoretical framework with a measurement scale of PSM. He initially saw it as having six dimensions: attraction to public policy making, commitment to the public interest, civic duty, social justice, self-sacrifice, and compassion. In the course of his research he refined the model to four dimensions, combining public interest, civic duty and social justice into one.

Building on the work of Perry; Brewer et al (2000) approached this issue in a slightly different way, identifying four different conceptions of PSM: Samaritans, communitarians, patriots, and humanitarians. Samaritans are individuals strongly motivated to help others. Communitarians are motivated by civic duty and public service. Patriots act for causes much bigger than themselves and put duty before self. Finally, the motivation for humanitarians is a strong sense of social justice and public service. Although these conceptions reflect different attitudinal bases and behavioural foci, they share a common commitment to perform public service.

Vandenabeele et al (2006: 15) develop the definition of PSM further, describing it as

the belief, values and attitudes that go beyond self-interest or organizational interest, that concern the interest of a larger political entity and that induce, through public interaction, motivation for targeted action.

2.3 Origins and forms

Cambridge economist Ha-Joon Chang (2010: 9) notes that: '...the history of capitalism has been a constant struggle over the boundaries of the market.' He points out that the drawing of the market's boundaries is not due to 'natural' development or objective economic truth but is a result of political decisions. The development of a public service ethos in the UK can only be understood if it is located within the politics of the historic advance (and decline) of the public sector.

Two processes have been at work: one top down, the other bottom up – both are linked to the growth of the public sector. The top down development (and associated emphasis on service to the state) was a move by a section of Britain's ruling elite to improve the quality of the state bureaucracy by ending the market in the buying and selling of government jobs - the Northcote-Trevelyan reforms. This represented an expansion of rational space in a Weberian sense. The other element is associated with the drive for democratic change and the creation of public services as part of a welfare state. In contrast, this represented an attempt by the working class to expand social space.

The third aspect represents a counter movement to both of these processes. It was launched by the first Thatcher government in 1979. Although initially cautious and lacking a coherent policy narrative, Mrs Thatcher's Conservatives became the spearhead of moves to cut public spending, shrink the size of the state, and marketise what remained.

Northcote-Trevelyan in the Civil Service

In the UK, the public service ethos is often traced to the 1854 Northcote-Trevelyan *Report on the Organisation of the Permanent Civil Service*. At the time, the British Empire was the pre-eminent world power and yet offices were routinely bought and sold and civil service

recruitment was often due to the patronage of ministers and Members of Parliament⁴. The results were lampooned by Anthony Trollope in *The Three Clerks* (1858/2006: 163):

It was too notorious that the Civil Service was filled by the family fools of the aristocracy and middle classes, and that any family who had no fool to send, sent in lieu thereof some invalid past hope. Thus the service had become a hospital for incurables and idiots.

There was no formalised separation between the bureaucracy and the political class and under these arrangements it was possible to remain a civil servant if elected as an MP. There was no standardised system of payment for civil servants. The inefficiency and incompetence of the system was exposed during the Crimean War and, although there was resistance from both within the government bureaucracy and from some MPs, the report signalled the beginning of a new system with competitive entry on merit, the separation of the civil service from Parliament, and a formalised career structure based on notions of public service derived from classical philosophy absorbed from a 'public' school education (Horton, 2006; Horton and Farnham, 2005).

The process of creation of the modern civil service and the embedding of a public service ethos took place over several decades. The impact of the social programme of the Liberal Government in 1905 represented a paradigm shift in the role of the state from that of 'nightwatchman' state to social service state. According to Horton (2006: 35) this shift represented the 'final spur and critical juncture in the evolution of the modern civil service'. Between 1919 and 1939, Sir Warren Fisher was Head of the Civil Service and he is regarded as providing the first official statement of the public service ethos in 1928 in the *Report of the Board of Enquiry appointed by the Prime Minister to investigate certain Statements affecting Civil Servants*:

...the Civil Service... has its unwritten code of ethics and conduct for which the most effective sanction lies in the public opinion of the Service itself.... The first duty of a Civil Servant is to give his undivided allegiance to the State at all times and on all occasions when the State has a call upon his services.... the State is entitled to demand that its servants shall not only be honest in fact, but beyond the reach of suspicion of dishonesty... A Civil Servant shall not subordinate his duty to his private

⁴ Local government was as infected by corruption and patronage as central government. In fact, the Municipal Officers' Guild, a forerunner of NALGO (itself one of UNISON's predecessor unions) was set up in 1896, in part, to take a stand against patronage within local government (Spoor, 1967; Maybin, 1980).

interests. He is not to indulge in political or party controversy, must retain a public reticence in discussing public affairs and his position necessarily imposes on him restrictions in matters of business and commerce... The public expects from them a standard of integrity and conduct not only inflexible but fastidious. The public have a right to expect that standard and it is the duty of the Service to see that their expectation is fulfilled (cited in Gladden, 1967, pp.167-69).

In relation to the senior civil service, Richards and Smith (2000: 50) take a more critical view. They see the traditional public service ethos as 'a power/knowledge system which protects a particular elite'. They argue that its threefold notion of integrity – personal, in that officials are not corrupt; political, in that they serve ministers; and financial, in that the purpose of the career is not to make money – creates an image of neutrality and service which provides senior officials with both power and autonomy while denying that they have either.

2.4 Public services and democratic change

The development of a public service ethos was not confined to the central civil service, still less to the senior civil service. By the twentieth century it came to be seen as relevant to a greater or lesser degree across the spectrum of public services. Today, local government accounts for about a quarter of all public spending (Department for Communities and Local Government, DCLG, 2010) but its beginnings were very small. Before the expansion of municipal services in the 19th century, local government was very limited. Its most important functions were: the poor law and highway maintenance which was mainly administered by parishes, and the local courts and prisons which were mainly administered by county quarter sessions) (DCLG, 2010). Contrast this with the situation in the 1920s and 1930s (a period in which Herbert Morrison was mayor of Hackney and his fellow London mayors included Clem Atlee in Stepney and George Lansbury in Poplar):

Whole spheres of public life were owned and managed locally that are now seen as entirely the province of national government or the private sector. Public assistance, for instance: the relief of poverty among children and families, elderly people and widows. Emergency services – police, fire and ambulance. Further and higher education in colleges and polytechnics, as well as most adult education, was a county responsibility. Electricity production was largely provided by borough councils – Shoreditch had been one of the great generating pioneers in the 1890s. So too, outside London at least, was much gas production from coal, and almost everywhere water was supplied by local authorities or their regional amalgamations brought together for that specific purpose. Most important of all, health services were locally supplied. (White, 2005: 75).

But the growth of public services and the creation of the welfare state in the nineteenth and early twentieth century were themselves subject to conflicting pressures and goals. The new industrialists and their political representatives saw them as the essential infrastructure to support a successful market. As the Lyons Inquiry into Local Government (Lyons, 2007: 47) noted:

The motivation for action was a mixture of enlightened self-interest – disease epidemics affected the rich too, and their economic success often depended on an adequate municipal infrastructure – and moral concern for those living in appalling conditions.

On the other hand, many of the advocates of public services viewed them as the development of a new society within the old – the creation of non-market provision based on democratic principles. So, for example, the Chartist leader, William Lovett, saw the struggle for intellectual freedom as bound up with the demand for adult education and public libraries run by the workers themselves (Rose, 2010). Hoggett (2006: 176) describes the modern-day debate about public sector efficiency as obscuring the sector's dual character – as both a means of delivering services and 'as an element of societal self-governance'. Boix (2001) identifies a relationship between democratic regimes with high electoral turnout and the growth of the public sector as the electorate demand collective solutions to social problems such as support for the unemployed and provision for an ageing population. Even in the current period of neoliberal hegemony, (to a certain extent) the public sector remains a site of contestation with a battle between those who see it as the servant of the market and those who view it as the basis for a more democratic society – see the account of the transformation of Newcastle Council's services (Wainwright, 2009). In Marquand's work on 'the public domain' which he describes as 'where the public interest is defined and public goods produced' (2004: 26), he refers to 'an inescapable tension between the egalitarian promise of democratic citizenship and inegalitarian realities of the market domain' (2004: 35).

Many of the early public services exhibited a tension between these emancipatory or democratic aims and a more functional element. Universal healthcare, education and social security systems, became both the vehicle for the delivery of the service but also a site of contention about the purpose of the service and the type of society within which it existed. This can be seen in the history of even the humblest public service, like school meals provision. The labour movement was at the forefront of the struggle for a decent school meals service in

Britain. It is part of the long tradition of collective responses to individual problems. As former Wales First Minister Rhodri Morgan (2002) pointed out, the school meals movement was not simply a battle against malnutrition:

... the Fabian Society launched its pamphlet, *And They Shall Have Flowers on the Table*, in Cardiff at the turn of the last century. The title of that pamphlet made it clear that school dinners were to be a social and educational experience, as well as one which provided food for families where that was badly needed.

However, there were other forces at play as well. Gustafsson (2002) links the introduction of the right (but not the obligation) of local authorities to provide school meals, to the needs of industrialisation and the military demands of empire. Compulsory education was introduced in Britain in 1880 with the Elementary Education Act and the extent of malnutrition in children quickly became evident (Passmore and Harris, 2004). Compulsory education was a response to the need to create the disciplined, literate and numerate workforce required for industrial production, but the fact that many children were 'unable by reason of lack of food to take advantage of the education provided for them' (HM Government, 1906: par 3) demanded action. In Scotland, the provision of hot meals at school was, in part, a deliberate inducement for school attendance and compliance with the Education (Scotland) Act of 1872 (Young, 2002).

In his study of poverty in York, the Quaker philanthropist, Rowntree commented: 'The relation of food to industrial efficiency is so obvious and so direct as to be a commonplace among students of political economy' (Rowntree, 1902, cited in Colquhoun et al 2001). Concern about public health grew as problems relating to army recruitment for the Boer War (1899-1902) showed the poor state of health of working class men. The quality of recruits was so dire that the height requirement for infantry was reduced (Colquhoun et al 2001). Only one in nine recruits were healthy enough to serve in the armed forces (Passmore and Harris, 2004) and the report of the Interdepartmental Committee on Physical Deterioration which was set up in response, led directly to legislative action on school meals.

The 1906 Bill to introduce school meals that became the 1906 Education (Provision of Meals) Act was proposed by a Labour MP (Gustafsson, 2002) and was part of a range of social legislation (including reforms relating to occupational health, housing and national insurance) brought in by the Liberal government. Fred Jowett, elected Labour MP for Bradford in 1906, made his maiden speech on school meals saying: 'Education on an empty stomach is a waste

of time'. The Liberals overcame their fear that provision of school meals could undermine family responsibilities because, as Young (2002) points out: 'the Liberal politicians of that period were... nervous about the developing labour movement'. Therefore, these reforms were, in part at least, a response to trade union pressure from outside Parliament.

The public reform programme that began towards the end of the 19th century and continued into the 20th saw the beginnings of universal education, school meals and utilities. One of the pace-setters in this period of municipal growth was the city of Birmingham. The Liberal Joseph Chamberlain was elected Mayor of Birmingham in 1873, and in three years he municipalised the local gas and water works companies, obliged local landlords to connect to the town water supply, introduced a programme of street paving and lighting, opened public parks, introduced public transport and built a town hall (House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee, 2009: 6). The growth of the public sector was not confined to municipal level. Similar initiatives were taken by national governments, for example the Tory and Liberal governments of Gladstone and Disraeli nationalised the telegraph system and the Tory and Liberal governments of Balfour and Asquith nationalised the new telephone system (Hall, 2003).

Hewitt (2000: 63) claims that before the educational reforms of the 1870s began to have an impact, 'the public library was perhaps the most substantial direct state intervention in the 19th century public sphere'. In some respects, the public library service is a quintessential public service built upon an overt rejection of a commercial ethos. Usherwood (1989: 12) notes that the public library embodies

some of the most important radical ideals – equality, provision for need rather than commercial profit, educational advancement, free access to, and free expression of, information and ideas.

However, even the public library service faced this utilitarian/democratic tension. Many Victorian industrialists supported the setting up of libraries as a counter attraction to the pub for their workers (Black, 1966), while at the same time working class radicals (like the Chartist Edward Edwards, who became first librarian of the Manchester Public Library) saw them as part of the democratisation of knowledge and intellectual emancipation. This tension has continued into modern times. The *People's Network* – launched by the Labour government in 2000 - providing universal access to the internet through libraries (DCMS, 1998), was portrayed

as a modern democratic reform and part of the government's social inclusion programme but Goulding (2001: 3) says that there is another side to this:

a primary, if not the ultimate, aim of government investment in ICT is to benefit the economy through the 'upskilling' of the populace and by enabling businesses to take advantage of new markets brought about by the information economy.

In the absence of public service provision by the state, many working class communities and organisations set up their own organisations – to provide health insurance or libraries etc. Nye Bevan, the architect of the National Health Service, was deeply involved in the miners' welfare organisation, the Tredegar Medical Aid Society, that existed to ensure that ordinary workers had access to healthcare. He drew many lessons from this, but his involvement in what would now be considered a third sector organisation only confirmed his view of the need for a National Health Service run by the state.

The 1945 Labour government's programme of nationalisation and welfare reform massively extended the numbers of workers engaged in public service of one kind or another. As Paul Foot (2005: 323) noted:

...the nationalisations in themselves were a huge democratic advance on the system of private enterprise they replaced... It brought responsibility for the affairs of a fifth of the entire economy into the arena of an elected assembly.

It extended the debate about democracy and public service into new areas of the economy and Crouch (2011: 84) argues that the public service ethos gradually developed with the growth of the welfare state in the second half of the twentieth century:

This became seen by many shades of political opinion, but especially the centre left, as a source of motivation that was an alternative to, perhaps superior to, the profit maximisation of the private sector.

As public services developed so too did the association between public service labour and the 'public good' – at least in the view of many of the workforce and their representatives, the public service trade unions (Gill-McLure and Seifert, 2008).

2.5 Basis of the ethos

In the research comparing the motivation of public and private sector workers, there is considerable evidence – based on both case studies and surveys – which suggests that public sector workers in their jobs are more likely to be motivated by altruism than workers in the private sector (Crewson, 1995; Pratchett and Wingfield, 1996; Houston, 2000; Public Services Productivity Panel, 2002; Norris, 2003; Buelens and Broeck, 2007).

There is some debate as to whether the public service ethos is a result of the nature of the work or the nature of the employment relationship (Grimshaw et al, 2002) – in other words: the job or the fact that it is in the public sector. This is very difficult to answer as some jobs only or mainly exist in the public sector. There is also debate over whether the ethos is restricted to, or found primarily among, professionals within the public sector and/or whether it is related to hierarchy. There are also questions about whether workers self-select to work within the public service because they are already predisposed towards a public service ethos or whether they become socialised into it while working within the public sector.

Perry (1997) found that an individual's public service motivation develops from exposure to a range of different experiences, identifying several different types of socialisation that are relevant: parental, political, religious, professional or educational. Research studies also indicate (Perry and Wise, 1990; Perry, 1996, 1997; Crewson, 1997) that public sector organisations are more likely to employ individuals whose ideals and desires are compatible with the public service mission of the organisation, although there may well be an element of self-selection here as well in shaping the field of applicants. Perry (1997) notes that professions have historically been associated with public service values. But Crouch (2011: 84) argues that: 'Professional ethics are not the same as public service ethics' and that while the former partly developed in privately provided services (albeit protected from the market by legal and associational rules), the latter was a product of the growth of the public sector. Pratchett and Wingfield (1996: 651) do not see the ethos as intrinsic to either the individuals or the profession concerned:

but because their role in relation to the community, politicians and other institutions of government imposes a duty to exhibit such motives.

Thus, their behaviour reflects a 'logic of appropriateness that is conditioned by their existence in both formal and informal institutions' (Pratchett and Wingfield, 1996: 649). In their view the public service ethos is, itself, an institution within the public sector. It meets the criteria set out by Peters (2005:18-19), in that an institution can be formal or informal; 'transcends individuals to involve groups of individuals in some sort of patterned interactions that are predictable based upon specified relationship among the actors'; has a degree of stability over time; must affect individual behaviour; and there should be some sense of shared values.

2.6 The threat of marketisation

This institution of the public service ethos came under threat with the election of the 1979 Thatcher government, a key moment in British history – not least for that government's lasting impact on the public sector. The government may not have come to office with a fully worked out neoliberal programme (this developed almost incrementally). However, it was inspired by a right wing perspective determined to destroy 'socialism' and its twin props – the public sector and the trade unions (Thatcher, 1993: 676):

... one of the central means of reversing the corrosive and corrupting effects of socialism... Just as nationalisation was at the heart of the collectivist programme by which Labour governments sought to remodel British society, so privatisation is at the centre of any programme of reclaiming territory for freedom.

Public sector staffing levels were cut, some functions were ended and some were privatised or contracted out. Between 1979 and 1997 public sector employment fell from 7.5 million to 5.1 million (a drop of 32 per cent or 2.4 million). 1.5 million of this came from the privatisation of various state owned industries (like British Steel and British Airways) and the utilities (gas, water, electricity, telecoms) (Talbot, 2001). Many functions continued but were no longer provided by the public sector, so for example 111,000 posts were contracted out from local government (typically in school meals, cleaning, home helps, waste management) (Talbot, 2001).

But although the doctrine of privatisation and the contracting out of public services is now seen as one of the defining features of late twentieth-century British Conservatism, it began very modestly. As Shaoul (1997) notes, in 1979 there was not a coherent and explicit set of objectives; these gradually evolved. When Mrs Thatcher came to power she may have

instinctively embraced what Leys (2001) describes as 'market-driven politics' but there was no specific mention of competitive tendering or contracting out in the Conservative manifesto of that year.

The 1983 election manifesto referred to tendering for NHS services, central government, local government and transport, but still referred to encouraging rather than requiring local authorities to contract out (Conservative Party 1983). At the time, *The Economist* noted: 'The real purpose of contracting out (as with state industry privatisation) is as much to weaken the unions' monopoly grip as to save money' (17 September 1983). What may have begun as a pragmatic way of meeting a number of different but related objectives (cutting public expenditure, reducing staffing levels in the public sector, weakening public sector unions) came to be seen as part of the emergence of neoliberal ideology at governmental level in the UK (Grimshaw et al. 2002). Buckland (1987) describes contracting out as one of the Conservative government's 'three interlocking mechanisms' used in its attempt to shift the boundary between public and private sector activity (the other two being asset sales of nationalised industries and the transfer of property ownership through council house sales).

The Conservatives enthusiastically embraced contracting out (Davies, 2007a) and a range of other public service reform policies that became known as New Public Management (NPM). Ferlie and Steane (2002: 1461) summarised NPM as a focus on 'managers, markets and measurement'. Hood (1995: 96) identifies seven dimensions of change to NPM:

1. Unbundling of the public service into corporatized units organized by product.
2. More contract based competitive provision, with internal markets and term contracts.
3. Stress on private sector styles of management practice.
4. More stress on discipline and frugality in resource use.
5. More emphasis on visible hands-on top management.
6. Explicit formal measurable standards and measures of performance and success.
7. Greater emphasis on output controls.

Analysing change in the American medical profession using Weberian rationalisation theory, Ritzer and Walczak (1988: 4) argue that professionals' actions are driven by the values of altruism, autonomy and authority over clients. They further argue that commodification reduces the importance of these values. A similar debate holds that the increased use of NPM within

the public sector - deploying market methods, privatisation, and public spending cuts - will seriously damage the public service ethos.

To some, the result is that the ethos is now 'tainted, debased, spoiled and perverted' (O'Toole, 1993: 1). One of the key elements in the justification for the marketisation of the public sector is the view of the public sector workforce associated with public choice theory (Buchanan and Tollinson, 1963) and principal-agent theory. The public sector workforce is assumed to be motivated by the same self interest as those in the private sector and therefore also motivated by the same forms of financial incentives. Competition within and between public sector units and workers will therefore supposedly drive up standards and drive down costs. Ryan-Collins et al (2007: 6) contend that rejecting the public service ethos in favour of motivation based on self-interest and financial incentives

...can have a profound negative effect on the very thing that makes public services work – the caring of their people and willingness to go the extra mile.

They claim that such an approach is likely to be a self-fulfilling prophecy, a point that is also made by Prentice et al (2007: 11):

It is possible that external financial incentives could overwhelm public service motivation, since it suggests to the employee that their employer recognises no association between output and effort other than a pure, market relationship.

On a practical managerial issue, it is argued that contracting out creates problems at both ends of the contractual hierarchy. Rubery et al (2002) identify the presence of multiple employers as a cause of 'contradictory pressures for organisational commitment' (2002). They ask whether employees feel their responsibilities at work lie with their direct employer or with the wider enterprise or network organisation. It is not just the pull of different organisational loyalties that is deemed significant but also the different basic philosophies in the public and private sectors and the 'conflicting priorities' (Hebson et al, 2003: 497).

The House of Commons Public Administration Committee agreed that Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) weakened the ethos. It accepted that deteriorations in terms and conditions of employment demotivated staff and led to long term quality problems. However the Committee speculated that this may have been more to do with CCT's cost-driven private involvement in

public services than from 'any intrinsic link to the private provision of services' and that while 'the profit motive may put it under strain', it felt it was possible for private and voluntary bodies to uphold a public service ethos (House of Commons Public Administration Committee, 2002: 5).

One study of public service job insecurity found that workers' identification with public service goals remained quite robust. However it noted that this could be jeopardised by some aspects of public sector restructuring:

If public service organizations abandon the kinds of employment practice which have differentiated them from their private sector equivalents... such as the avoidance of redundancy, then a likely effect will be a reduction of employee commitment (Heery, 2000: 105).

The notion of the public sector as a 'good' or 'model' employer (Beaumont and Leopold, 1985), was widely accepted until the turn to New Public Management methods in the early 1980s, after which it came under increasing pressure (Morgan and Allington, 2002). The idea of the model employer was rejected by some academics (for example, Thornley et al, 2000) and even among those who accepted it, there was an argument that it 'received more tangible expression in the procedural, as opposed to substantive, aspects of industrial relations...' (Beaumont, 1992: 78). Nevertheless, the relatively favourable conditions of service and work organisation generally associated with the idea of the model employer are seen by some as 'integral' to the development and maintenance of the public service ethos among low paid manual workers (Gill-McLure and Seifert, 2008).

Using a psychological contract framework to understand employee perceptions of the reciprocal exchange between employer and employee, Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler (2003) found that because public sector employees are likely to share a common set of values with their organisation, they might be prepared to overlook shortfalls in the fulfilment of their psychological contract so long as they felt that the organisation is supportive. Given that public sector employees are more motivated by the opportunity to undertake work of social worth than by economic gain and tangible benefits:

Acknowledgement of the employees' worth by the employing organisation is likely to be viewed as particularly important to public servants. If an employee's own employer

fails to recognise such worth, then what chance is there that the rest of society will? (Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler, 2003: 223).

Ferner (1994: 64) argues that commercialisation of the public sector erodes the public service ethos, 'in particular the value of intrinsic, non-monetary motives that have traditionally been important aspects of public sector behaviour'. Hebson et al (2003: 482) argue that contractual relationships with private sector organisations – especially where there is an association with cost cutting and work intensification – 'present a significant threat to the long-term survival of the traditional public sector ethos'. Further, they suggest that, because of the nature of contracting,

the more formal the contractual approach to delivering services, the more likely it is that accountability to objectives shaped by changing political policies will be threatened by accountability to shareholders (Hebson et al, 2003: 487).

The perceived root of the problem is the way that the market approach changes the values and norms that are the basis of the public service ethos. It replaces public service with private gain, introduces personal accountability instead of collegiate responsibility and discretionary, individual remuneration in place of uniform and transparent pay and promotion structures (Hebson et al, 2003).

Some see this as the corruption of public service (O'Toole, 1993: 5):

The collegiate way of making decisions has been replaced by an emphasis on personal accountability... Competition not co-operation is the watchword. All fit in with the prevailing attitude amongst ministers that business methods are best... Personal gain and private profit will have replaced public service.

Bach (2000: 11-12) argues that

It is no coincidence that in countries which have enthusiastically embraced market style reforms, including the UK and New Zealand, attempts to formalize public service values and ethical standards of behaviour have proceeded furthest, to protect these traditional work values being undermined by the pressures of marketization.

Sheaff and West (1997: 204-205) claim that the codification of NHS business ethics is a recognition of this tension and 'an attempt to buttress the public service ethos against the increased moral strains of a quasi-market'. Kernaghan (2000) details the attempts made by a

range of different countries (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the UK among others) to manage this potential 'value conflict' through written codes, rules and guidelines.

A contrasting view is taken by Brereton and Temple (1999). In their opinion, increased involvement of the private sector in the provision of public services means that what they describe as the *public sector ethos* (associated only with public sector providers) should be replaced with the notion of a *public service ethos*, which could be associated with either public or private sector providers and has a focus on consumer needs:

[Co-operation with the private sector] is forging a new public service ethos rooted in public notions of, for example, honesty, impartiality and community service and private notions of, for example, competition and consumer choice (Brereton and Temple, 1999: 466).

This new concept would reflect the importance of the consumer, synthesising 'formal regulation and clear lines of accountability, suitably informed by the new consensus currently being forged across traditional private/public divides' (Brereton and Temple, 1999: 472). The shift from procedural matters to concern with outputs is, they argue, 'a defining aspect of the new public service ethos' (Brereton and Temple, 1999: 460).

2.7 The continued survival of the public service ethos and resistance

Even after 30 years of marketisation and privatisation, one in every five British workers is employed in the public sector (Office for National Statistics, ONS, 2010). The current government's austerity programme cut thousands of public sector jobs in the first two years and aims to cut many more but with just under six million workers, the public sector remains an important part of the economy. The breakdown of sectors within overall public sector employment is shown in Table 2a below.

Table 2a: Public sector employment 2012 (first quarter)

Level	Headcount
Central government (1)	2,763,000
Local government (2)	2,647,000
Public corporations (3)	489,000
Total public sector	5,899,000
(of which Civil Service)	464,000

Source: ONS (2012)

(1) includes Civil Service, NHS, HM Forces

(2) includes teachers and police

(3) includes Royal Mail and London Underground as well as Bradford and Bingley plc classified as a public financial corporation from 26 September 2008, Royal Bank of Scotland Group; and Lloyds Banking Group classified to public sector from 13 October 2008

The imposition of private sector style reforms associated with NPM has gone alongside the deployment of rational choice theory as an explanation for the behaviour of public sector employees. Using the principal-agent model, its adherents argue that public sector workers are in a position to serve their own self interest to the detriment of, and in divergence from, the interests of the public that they are supposed to serve. This is done through empire building, perks, setting their own goals rather than those of the elected authorities and avoiding work. In Le Grand's terms, they are more like 'knaves' than 'knights' (2003). Critics point out that public service marketisation promotes organisational 'knavishness' rather than individual 'knavishness', encouraging workers to put the needs of their organisation above those of the public that it serves (Hoggett, et al, 2006). Others, like Crouch (2011: 91), claim that the professional and public service ethics are not replaced by the market but by the ethics of politicians and private sector management consultants. In any event, as Dilulio (1994: 281) points out, rational choice theory and the principal-agent model may help to explain why some bureaucrats shirk, subvert and steal, but has

little to say in the presence of bureaucrats who strive (work hard and go "by the book"), support (put public and organizational goals ahead of private goals), and sacrifice (go "above and beyond the call of duty") on the job.

He describes these public sector workers as 'principled agents'. They do not shirk, subvert, or steal even when there is little to stop them from doing so, and often perform

"thankless tasks" and make virtual "gifts" of their labor even when the pecuniary and other tangible rewards for behaving that way are highly uncertain at best (Dilulio, 1994: 282).

There is a body of evidence that behaviour is conditioned by more than financial reward and that non-monetary rewards based on altruism, ethics, goodwill, moral sentiments and trust (Mahoney et al, 1994), building social relationships (Williams and Windebank, 2001) and other intrinsic rewards (Kirton, 2001) are also important. Research also consistently shows that public sector workers are more likely than private sector workers to be motivated by intrinsic rewards and much less likely to be motivated primarily by financial reward (for example, Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler, 2003; Houston, 2000; Pratchett and Wingfield, 1996; Rainey, 1982; Rainey and Bozeman, 2000; Wittmer, 1991). If the public service ethos causes agents (the public service worker) to define their own interests in line with those of the principal (the public) then potential problems of moral hazard are reduced with gains on all sides – both to the public organisation and to the public service users.

With the failure of rational choice theory to explain pro-social behaviour, the notion of the public service ethos retains its strength. However, an explanation is required as to how (or if) the ethos can survive the threat posed by the marketisation of public services. Hebson et al (2003) note that an observer might expect the public service ethos to have been damaged because it was premised on the provision of decent working conditions (the 'good' or 'model' employer) in return for high levels of commitment. However, despite increased job insecurity and a generally negative view of public service 'reform' among public service workers, their 'values of public interest and altruistic motivation seem relatively resilient' (Hebson et al, 2003: 498). They explain these continuing high levels of commitment to the public service ethos with reference to research which shows that 'social values' are important to public sector workers (Gallie et al, 1998; Guest and Conway, 2001; Morgan et al, 2000).

Contractual arrangements may have been expected to work against the PSE. And, in mimicking private sector techniques, public sector managers may also have threatened the traditional values associated with the public service ethos. However, the workers have retained a commitment 'in a way that extends beyond their work activity as specified in the performance

contract' to the 'traditional principle of working for the public interest' (Hebson et al, 2003: 493-494).

In a study of Toronto public service workers, McDonough (2006: 630) unexpectedly found a 'fierce loyalty to public service' which not only rejected the dominant 'common sense' discourse of the superiority of the market but also went beyond self interest. Far from the introduction of NPM eroding their sense of the public service ethos, their commitment to their clients and their adherence to the ethos remained intact.

The 2008 British Social Attitudes Survey (BSAS) (Natcen, 2008: 6) reported that the public service ethos is 'alive and well' with public sector employees exhibiting 'a clear public service ethos'. Interestingly, the BSAS showed that the adherence to the public service ethos was particularly prevalent among public sector employees aged under 35. Two thirds (65%) of these felt strongly that their job is useful to society – more than four times the rate found among the equivalent private sector age group (14%). This contrasts with previous research such as that of Pratchett and Wingfield (1996), whose study of local government workers found that

the age of respondents was an important factor with 79 per cent of those aged over 40 expressing a belief in the PSE and a descending scale amongst younger respondents (Pratchett and Wingfield, 1996: 645).

John and Johnson (2008: 115) note the decline in interest and participation in conventional politics by young people and the growth in interest in 'non-conventional' forms of politics and then speculate:

Perhaps a new idealism has fostered an interest in public sector work among some young people, perhaps as an alternative to the more 'selfish' careers in finance and management?

The BSAS (NatCen, 2008: 6) found that public sector employees are twice as likely as private sector employees to say that it is very important to them that 'a job is useful to society' (32% against 15%); are more likely than private sector employees to say that it is very important that a job allows them to help other people (27% compared with 18%); and are less likely than private sector employees to say that a high income is very important (12% compared with 18%).

Not only did the BSAS uncover a completely different attitude among young people but 'the public service ethos seems to have increased over the last decade, despite changes in management and procedures' (NatCen, 2008: 6). In addition, the difference between public and private employees has grown over the previous ten years and much of this change is as a result of change among young public sector employees. The views of private sector employees have hardly changed.

John and Johnson (2008) note that the impact of marketisation has not resulted in a reduction in the difference in attitudes between public and private sector employees. In fact the difference has widened since 1997. They examined three possible reasons for this finding: a changing experience of work in the public sector; a changing composition of the public sector workforce; and a change in the nature of the young people entering public sector employment.

None of these provided a definitive explanation for the continued vitality of the public service ethos, still less for its growth. However, the authors believe that it is possible that with a convergence between public and private sector management-style, and the fact that the public sector tends to pay less, only people already committed to the public sector are likely to join it – 'there is something special about the young people entering public service today' (John and Johnson, 2008: 121).

They examined a series of other factors around working in the public sector. They found that it:

is related to a wider set of values than purely the public service ethos of wanting to do a socially useful job. In particular, it seems to be related to a more general belief in the importance of work, a pride in the organisation and a feeling of having something in common with colleagues (John and Johnson, 2008: 119).

All of these factors fall within a collective or social approach to work and fit within the idea of the public service ethos. However, John and Johnson (2008) were unable to satisfactorily explain the basis of the survival and strengthening of the public service ethos in the face of the neoliberal onslaught.

McDonough (2006: 630) claims that the weakness of much of the work on the 'fate' of the public service ethos rests on a deterministic view of how NPM affects workers, 'in which

individuals react passively to the market-oriented discourses imposed upon them'. She refers to debates which emphasise how

new managerialist discourses are appropriated, contested and transformed as individuals come to know and challenge the ways in which their identities are redefined (McDonough, 2006: 630).

She believes that this approach is welcome but limited by its reliance on identity construction and instead advocates using the work of Bourdieu, to develop a way to understand the continued commitment of public service workers. Her argument has three components. First, public service workers' narrative reflects their socialisation in the public service habitus from which they derive a notion of the public good with an altruistic idea of public service, which involves defending and implementing the democratic principles that protect the interests of every citizen (McDonough, 2006: 631). Second, when they come into contact with the neoliberal idea of the commodified public good, they will fight to defend the traditional vision. And finally she argues that, in their daily work in the public service, they reproduce this traditional idea of the public good.

She points out that workers 'do not uncritically accept the new organizational discourses' (McDonough, 2006: 632). In line with this, a study of women academics and NPM in British universities Thomas and Davies (2002: 393) illustrated that 'these women are not passive recipients of NPM' and discovered 'a complex picture of accommodation and resistance'. As McDonough (2006) argues, the new orthodoxy of NPM is not simply mapped on to the minds of docile public service workers. They have adopted and adapted the notion of a public service ethos and having created their own vision of the ethos through their own experience – an experience that defines the public good through public, rather than private, service delivery, they are also prepared to defend it. Similarly, in their study of 'Northcity' a large city in the north of England, Gill-McLure and Seifert (2008: 19) reported how the workers through their union

linked the attack on pay and conditions to deteriorations in public service, while highlighting the importance of the public-service ethos of caring for the community.

The public service ethos therefore 'is not a reified concept, but one that changes in the light of ongoing struggles' McDonough (2006: 642). Hoggett et al (2006: 759) describe public service work as 'value saturated' in which workers are caught between competing claims from various

sources (the employing organisation, the public, individual service users, their profession). Street level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 1980) are able to navigate these difficult waters, exercising discretion and judgement, by engaging their own values of what constitutes the public good and the public service ethos. When confronted with the neoliberal public service reform programme, in which workers feel that the organisation – or at least its leadership – ‘no longer stands for the values and principles which originally attracted them to it’ (Hoggett, 2006: 189), then the public service ethos can become part of workers’ language of resistance. This moves the understanding of what motivates public service workers far away from what Hoggett et al (2006: 759) describe as Le Grand’s ‘individualised notion of altruism’, which they see as an impoverished individualism divorced from the values, emotions and identities of public service workers. Instead, they argue that the crucial point is ‘the way in which altruism becomes connected to broader notions of group and community’ (Hoggett et al, 2006: 760).

Public service workers negotiate the everyday tensions thrown up by their work in a process that Hoggett et al (2006: 769) describe as ‘justice with care’. What constitutes the public and the public good are not immutable but subject to a process of discussion, debate and struggle. Workers bring to this a solidaristic ethic from their own backgrounds and experience and appropriate the public service ethos as their own. As part of this, workers see close links between the quality of service that they provide and the conditions under which they work (Pillinger, 2001). Hoggett et al (2006: 769-770) see the idea of ‘the public’ as being a discursive space as critical:

Protecting such spaces from processes of managerialist rationalization or privatization then becomes crucial. And perhaps this provides us with a glimpse of the way in which the notion of a public service ethos could be re-articulated, as an ethos of inclusive and transparent argument and debate.

What is interesting here is how (or if) this is reflected through public service workers’ own collective organisations – their unions. At the workplace, the unions play a socialisation role across different occupational and professional groups and adhere to values that chime with the public service ethos. One of the questions to be addressed is whether the unions are able to become the vehicle for a re-articulation of the public service ethos in the face of neoliberal attacks. This partly depends on how they negotiate their own internal tensions of ‘vested interest’ and ‘sword of justice’ (Flanders, 1970). It is to them that the next chapter turns – to

examine the nature of public service trade unionism and how they increasingly interact with service user groups.

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the different understandings of what the PSE is and its origins, particularly within public services within the UK. It is a notoriously difficult concept to define in a way that is either universally applicable or which commands a consensus of views. Nevertheless, there are a series of features which are generally recognised as belonging to the concept, and which are discussed in this chapter (equity, democracy, justice, fairness, universality etc).

Its origins lie in the development of the country's public service infrastructure as the UK state moved – sometimes slowly, as in the 19th century, sometimes rapidly, as after 1945 – from a 'nightwatchman state' to a welfare state. It was a contested area from the beginning with the contrast between the Northcote-Trevelyan idea of a competent, merit-based, honest and (relatively) independent elite serving the imperial state and the democratic notion of a public service workforce serving the greater good.

The survival of the PSE in the latter sense is remarkable, even as Governments of different political complexions have attempted to move back in the direction of the 'nightwatchman state' over the last thirty years.

Chapter Three: Politics, power and public service union mobilisation

3.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the position of public service unions, their origin and development and then goes on to look at their traditional sources of power, the impact of changing circumstances in weakening their 'institutional embeddedness' and their search for alternative sources of power. This has led to the beginnings of a change in approach, embracing the principle of alliances with service users which go beyond workplace issues of jobs, pay and conditions as unions increasingly recognise that there is a connection between their aims in relation to the workplace and their wider social policy goals. The public service ethos could act as a bridge to coalitions with service users as well as providing public service workers with an alternative vision and a basis around which to mobilise.

Terry (2000a: 3) identifies three distinctions between private sector and public sector trade unionism. In the public sector, unions are obliged to intervene in, and try to influence, an essentially *political* rather than economic process. Secondly, they are closer to single industry unions than most unions in Britain and this has provided a basis to attempt to engage employers with a broader agenda than just jobs, pay and conditions. Finally, the contrast in the nature of the employment relationship between public and private sectors is reflected in the existence of a public service ethos, based on a difference in employees' orientations to work and in the 'psychological contract' which, in turn, rests on the 'differences between working to produce a free public good as opposed to a private commodity exchanged for cash' (Terry, 2000a: 3).

In some respects, the corollary of this is the unique role of the state as an employer (Bach, 2010: 152) in that, unlike other employers, government – whether at a local or national level – has to be sensitive to its electoral constituency and needs to reconcile the different interests of multiple stakeholders, at least to a degree. In his study of state enterprises in the UK and Spain, Ferner (1988) calls this 'political contingency'. To a certain extent, privatisation and contracting out are attempts to avoid this issue by placing 'at one remove the political character of decision

making' (Burnham, 2001: 128). Peck (2004: 394) forcefully argues that neoliberalism 'seeks to establish market deference as a necessary (pre)condition, attempting to renaturalize - and therefore insulate from earthly politics' - economic relations, particularly the role of markets. The record of scandals and failures in privatised services and subsequent government intervention shows the limits of this strategy.

Efforts to import private sector methods into the public sector continually come up against the different logic of the public sector, whereby goods and services are supplied in the main by democratically accountable bodies that have their priorities laid down by elected politicians – in other words, a political process rather than a purely market one (Ferner, 1994).

All unions, public and private sector, bargain with employers and represent individual members at work in such areas as grievances and disciplinary hearings. However, the strength that different unions possess (and the basis of it), the resources that they are able to draw upon and the strategic and tactical options available differ markedly. This goes beyond the issue of union density in any particular workplace and relates, in part at least, to whether the union operates within the public or private sector.

3.2 From staff associations to unions

In their early years, many public sector unions were far from radical. One of the founders of NALGO (a predecessor union of UNISON) in 1905 was Herbert Blain, who later became Sir Herbert Blain and Principal Agent of the Conservative Party (Spoor, 1967). In 1911, NALGO's first full time secretary, Levi Hill wrote: 'Anything savouring of trade unionism is nausea to the local government officer and his Association' (cited in Spoor, 1967: 47).

Public service workers were latecomers to 'unionateness' (Blackburn, 1967). Blackburn used this concept to distinguish unions from other organisations or movements that might appear similar in their membership or some of their activities. He identified seven elements to unionateness, three connected with organisational behaviour and four with the level of identification with the labour movement. He saw collective bargaining or having the aim of collective bargaining as a definitive function of a union; independence from the employer; militancy – or 'the extent to which an organisation will go in asserting the interests of its members against employers' (Blackburn, 1967: 31); openly declaring itself to be a union;

registration as a union; affiliation to the TUC; and affiliation to the Labour party. The last characteristic meant considerably more in 1967 than it does now. Some of the most militant unions in the UK today have either been disaffiliated from the Labour party or never were affiliated, e.g. RMT, PCS, FBU. In their study of white-collar trade unionism, Prandy et al (1983: 22) draw a distinction between what they call 'enterprise unionateness' and 'society unionateness'. The former relates to 'the degree of militancy that would be contemplated in collective bargaining' while the latter refers to the 'extent of identification with the wider labour movement'. In the case of local government workers, there are a number of significant landmarks: national bargaining began in 1946 with the extension of the Whitley system; it was as late as 1961 that NALGO adopted a strike clause in its constitution (Maybin, 1980); NALGO did not affiliate to the TUC until 1964 and did not agree to a stewards system until 1977 (McIlroy, 1995); NUPE, another predecessor union, led the first national strike in local government in 1970; NALGO's first major industrial action involved its London members in 1974 but it was not until 1989 that NALGO involved all its local government members in a national strike (Thornley et al, 2000).

Prandy et al (1983) found that 'enterprise unionateness' and 'society unionateness' were mutually reinforcing tendencies. In their view, public sector white-collar workers were not only better organised than those in the private sector, but they also 'shared interests with other employees' (Prandy et al, 1983: 23). They explained this by pointing to the fact that public service workers were both users and providers of public services and:

To the extent that this provision represents gains for general social interests, public sector employees will tend to identify with economic and political organisations dedicated to such gains (Prandy et al, 1983: 23).

This understanding of how the position of public service workers as providers of public services impacts on their 'unionateness' has significant implications for any reassessment of the basis of public service union power and the potential relationship between the public service ethos and union mobilisation. It draws a connection between how they view their work (as a public good) and their union as an organisation that fights for 'general social interests.' As we shall see, this is an identification made by union members in this study, and relates to their perception of the connection between the PSE and the union.

3.3 Sources of public service union power

In his discussion of power (which draws heavily on Lukes) Sisson (2010) emphasises the asymmetry of power within the employment relationship. He argues that the logic of collective action is based on the ability of the union to provide a countervailing power to the unequal power relations within employment. He outlines two types of power – ‘power to’ and ‘power over’. The former he describes as ‘the capacity or ability to get things done’ (Sisson, 2010: 117), a positive power. The latter he describes as being about ‘domination’ – both in terms of decision-making and in agenda-setting.

In his critique of Lukes, Edwards (2006) takes the debate further by pointing to the inter-relationship between these ‘types’, the dynamics of power in the workplace and the role of ideology. He argues that, for all the claims made in the 1970s about the power of trade unions, in fact they were too weak rather than too powerful. He explains that it is

not that unions necessarily lacked ‘power over’ management in the sense of pursuing wage claims or bargaining on the shop floor. The point, rather, is that unions lacked ‘power to’ press through a programme of modernization that would secure their members’ long-term interests. This lack embraces the ideological dimension to the extent that there is an absence of concepts that can challenge the prevailing orthodoxy (Edwards, 2006: 580).

This very much fits in with Hyman’s claim that unions were essentially able to deploy ‘a negative or oppositional power’ or ‘veto power’ in defence of living standards, jobs and conditions,

but they lacked the organisational capacity and for the most part the will to seek to translate this into a more positive strategy for economic transformation (Hyman, 2001: 102-103).

Perhaps even more severely, in the wake of a series of industrial defeats in the 1980s (British Leyland, steel, mining, the print industry), McIlroy (1995: 398) described trade unions as having ‘a secondary, derivative, negative, limited power, severely circumscribed by economic change and state initiatives’.

Wright (2000) takes a different approach to workers' power. He identifies two forms: associational and structural. He defined associational power as that which derives from the collective organisations of workers – this includes unions but also other forms of worker organisation. Structural power refers to 'the power that results simply from the location of workers within the economic system' (Wright, 2000: 962). Neither of these forms is fixed and both could be applied to certain degrees at different times to local government workers in general, and certain groups of workers within local government. A tight labour market at a particular moment in time will increase the structural power of a particular group of workers, as would their strategic location. For example, in-house IT staff are often in a powerful strategic position; on the other hand, many local authorities have had recurring staff shortages for social workers in recent years and, to a certain extent, this has increased their structural power.

During the long post-war boom, local government unions negotiated, defended and extended national agreements. Their ability to do so partly rested on the post-war consensus about the value of the public sector and the (admittedly flawed) notion of the public sector as a 'model' or 'good' employer (Symon, 2011: 191). But it also relied on the political pressure that unions could apply. In their study of the Post Office, Batstone et al (1984: 200) saw this in terms of 'electoral arithmetic' – union ability to influence voting behaviour among members and their families and friends; potential electoral damage as a result of service disruption; and the ability of union leaders to intervene in important political networks – both locally and nationally.

There were always limits to this, however. The threat of the impact of disruption on electoral prospects clearly depends on members' 'willingness to act' (Offe and Wiesenthal, 1980: 80), and many public service members were (and are) acutely aware of the potential conflict between their commitment to the public service and its users, and the impact of industrial action upon them. It also assumed that the political connections of those unions affiliated to the Labour party were consistently helpful. They were not always so and, in any event, NALGO was never affiliated to Labour. Today, the policy consensus among all political parties on many issues, the popular cynicism about politicians in general and the union experience of New Labour in particular, makes it more difficult for unions to mobilise their membership to vote for Labour. Nevertheless, as Batstone et al (1984: 302) pointed out, public sector unions are 'inextricably enmeshed in political activity'. This is clear from the early history of NUPE (one of UNISON's predecessor unions) and its campaigns in local government for recognition of a public service criteria in contrast to a commodity-based criteria for the public delivery of public

services (Dix and Williams, 1987). Public service unions need to influence the political process because of the effects that it has on members' working lives and on the services that they deliver. The question for public service unions is not why they should influence the political process but how; and this leads into a discussion of a strategy of alliances.

3.4 Recognition of the need for alliances

The shift in the 1980s to neoliberal policies by governments all over the world, but led by the UK and the USA, had a number of consequences. One was to delegitimise the trade union movement as a social actor – what Sisson (2010: 281) describes as the ‘undermining of the “legitimacy power” of trade unions and collective bargaining.’ In the cliché of the British tabloid press, it signalled the end of beer and sandwiches at No. 10, with ease of access for unions to ministers. As Coates (1999) points out, the influence of the unions on even Labour governments is exaggerated, but it was certainly the *objective* of union leaders to gain access to the corridors of power. In 1963, the then TUC general secretary, George Woodcock, summed up this view when he told the TUC annual conference:

We left Trafalgar Square a long time ago. ... We have to deal ... with affairs of the moment in committee rooms, with people who have power (TUC, 1963: 390).

And he added, later in the debate in response to criticism of this remark:

But the movement *has* left Trafalgar Square. If you are keen on demonstrations perhaps you had better get a new General Secretary, because I am no good at demonstrations. I thought this was the trade union movement – that we worked best in committees (TUC, 1963: 407).

Over the last thirty years, neoliberal governments in many countries have expelled unions from the committee rooms of the corridors of power (or curtailed their limited access even further) (O'Brien, 2000). This is especially the case in countries like the UK where unions have historically had a weak institutional position – unlike the tradition of institutional embeddedness in Germany and the Scandinavian countries. Writing in 2000, Terry claimed that the Conservative governments of the 1980s eliminated ‘the unions’ scope for influencing policy regarding service provision’ (Terry, 2000a: 7). Arguably the UK New Labour government re-opened the door a little to the unions, promising ‘fairness but no favours’ (Labour party, 1997) but this has now been firmly closed by the current government.

In such a situation, Turner (2006: 86) says that unions will increasingly opt for 'grassroots mobilisation and expanded coalition building'. He emphasises that:

... given contemporary circumstances, unions and workers cannot mount the necessary counterpressure alone. Expanded coalition building thus becomes an essential element of renewed mobilization and sustained participation (Turner, 2006: 85).

Clawson (2003) goes even further, claiming, that to revitalise the US labour movement, unions must merge with social movements so that they share the same goals to their mutual advantage. Turner uses Frege et al's (2004) distinction between 'coalition of protest' and 'coalition of influence' and relates this to the institutional position of unions within particular countries. So he notes that the weak institutional position of US unions means that coalition building begins, at least, with a coalition of protest whereas in Germany, as 'labor institutions incorporate unions more fully in the political economy', unions are able to build coalitions of influence (Turner, 2006: 92). He gives as an example, the labour-environment coalitions that German unions have built with employers, the state and other social movements at national, local and firm level. For Turner, this reflected his view that the German unions had a more advantageous institutional position than the American unions.

However these positions are not static and Baccaro et al (2003) point to the dilemma facing German unions, in that having had a strong institutional position, and focussed on social partnership, they have not encouraged the mobilisation of participation necessary to maintain this strong position. In changed circumstances they face decline, unless they re-emphasise membership activism. In other words the 'opportunity structure' (Heery and Adler, 2003: 57) faced by unions provided by the institutional opportunities and constraints that exist may change and the unions need to be able to adapt to that change. This tension between the institutional dimensions of trade unionism (participation in industrial relations institutions and negotiating order) and the movement dimensions (mobilisation) is a constant theme in the history of trade unions (Webster, 2004) and is brought into particularly sharp profile as conditions change in the national or global context (Von Holdt, 2002).

Behrens et al (2003: 39) make a similar point, claiming that German unions

...have allowed an imbalance to grow between their capacity for autonomous action and organisational independence on the one hand, and their embeddedness in an extensive array of institutional arrangements on the other...

Lévesque and Murray (2002) also see coalition building as important in realising the power resources available to unions under the changed conditions of globalisation. They remark that local unions could previously achieve many of their aims with a more limited range of power resources. Globalisation has changed the rules of the game to the extent that unions must now develop the resources that they control and mobilise them more effectively. Their analysis identifies three parts of 'a strategic triangle for local union action' (Lévesque and Murray 2002: 45): proactivity, internal solidarity and external solidarity. Proactivity refers to unions' ability to create and put forward their own distinct agenda, rather than simply defensively responding to the employer's agenda. Apart from the 'vision thing', it also obviously implies developing strategies for achieving it and the means of effectively communicating it. Internal solidarity is about internal democracy, the relationship between the members and the union, the methods of accountability, elections, stewards' structures, communication and the cohesion of the union. External solidarity is about the union's ability to work both within their local community at large and to build horizontal and vertical links within their own union and with other unions – something that Holgate and Simms (2008) note is increasingly called for in the UK. This virtuous circle of the three points of the triangle or three levers of power are 'mutually reinforcing' (Lévesque and Murray 2002: 46). It is the third point of 'external solidarity' that fits in with Turner's (2006) ideas of coalition building.

Flanders' (1970) identification of the tension between the two roles of unions as 'vested interests' and 'swords of justice' has already been noted. It is Turner's view that in the changed circumstances of globalised liberalisation of the economy, it is not possible to consistently meet the objectives of the vested interest other than through the sword of justice. By this he means that progress on bread and butter workplace issues is often more easily achieved when placed within a broader campaign aim. This is a view that has gained wider support within the UK trade union movement in recent years (TUC, 2010).

Like Lévesque and Murray (2002), Turner (2006) emphasises that unions are not just prisoners of circumstance but are able to make strategic choices that can have a direct impact on their position. The literature on union involvement in coalition building (as well as organising) is strongly influenced by that on social movements. This was made clear when Hyman (2007:

206) called on unions to ‘...turn (or return) to a self-conception as organisations campaigning for rights’ and engaging in what Tarrow (1998) calls ‘contentious politics’.

As unions have entered into coalitions with other social movements, they often borrow some of the ‘repertoires of contention’ (Tilly, 2006: 30) of these groups – methods of operating and forms of action developed in the past, that provide ‘scripts’ for the future and which are fluid and continually under innovation (Tilly, 2006: 184-5). Hyman (2007: 207) identifies three key elements to these ‘repertoires’: ‘*identity*’ or the assertion that those involved are a group with distinctive interests and the capacity to pursue these vigorously; ‘*standing*’, which refers to the insistence that these deserve to be taken as seriously as the claims and interests of other more powerful socio-economic groups; and ‘*programme*’, an integrated set of demands around which the group can campaign.

Turner (2006: 86) identifies a causal chain in coalition building for unions. It begins with unions making a strategic choice to take the option of coalition building, often involving a new leadership with a desire to introduce different methods of working and identifying common interests with other groups. This may come through some kind of defining moment – perhaps a victory, defeat or organisational crisis, but leads to a decision for sustained coalition building. Although the initial coalition may have been around one particular issue, the mode of working is carried over into other issues so that one coalition campaign leads to another. Turner (2006) describes this process as ‘spillover’ in which networks are extended and reinforced and lessons from one campaign applied in others. Sustained coalition work can move from campaigns to institution building in which common interests are translated into more lasting organisations with a wider brief. Finally, from this coalition campaigns approach comes observable outcomes – whether these be successes or failures – applied both to individual campaigns and to the expansion of union influence in the wider society. Turner (2006) also distinguishes between several different types of coalition, which can be seen to be more or less likely at different points in the causal chain outlined above. Following Tarrow (2005), he differentiates events, campaigns and institutional consolidation.

These discussions have real implications for public sector trade unionism. The election of the Conservative government in 1979 – with its twin antipathies to the public sector and trade unionism – created a new situation for them. Terry (2000b) argues that this, and the consequent cuts to public services, began to change the relationship between public service

unions (as the representatives of the providers) and public service user groups. Prior to this development, public service unions had often attempted to influence what public services were delivered, how they were delivered and to what standard. However, as Terry (2000b) recognises, the responses of public service senior management were generally negative, if not downright hostile. Managers defended their 'right to manage' and the elected politicians insisted on their right to decide policy. This tended to reinforce a conservative approach among union officials. As a consequence, alliances with service users were rare and, as a result, they often came to see unions as defenders of the status quo. There were exceptions to this, such as the campaign against NHS pay beds in the mid 1970s led by NUPE (Williams and Fryer, 2010). The campaign was successful in that it resulted in action from the Labour government of the time to gradually reduce the numbers of pay beds. This was quickly stopped and reversed when the Conservatives were elected in 1979 (Pollock, 2004).

The threat to the very existence of much public service provision altered this situation in a fundamental way, creating a new political opportunity structure (Meyer, 2004). In this context, public service unions (in the UK and elsewhere) began to see that

...protecting jobs requires unions to engage in coalition politics, sometimes in pursuit of social goods that have benefits beyond the interests of union members (Greer, 2007: 193).

In some respects, the very creation of UNISON in 1993 was a recognition that '...there was a need to campaign in ways that cemented alliances between users and providers in the public services' (Carpenter, 2000: 193). This is reflected in the union's rulebook (UNISON, 2011a: 2), where its Aims and Objectives include:

8. To work to achieve equal access to public services for all and to ensure that all users of public services are treated with dignity and respect, irrespective of race, gender, sexuality, gender identity, disability, age or creed.
9. To promote greater employee, consumer and user involvement and representation in the delivery of public services, irrespective of race, gender, sexuality, gender identity, disability, age or creed.
10. To work with all other interested parties, individuals and organisations to maintain and improve the quality of services to the public.

Terry (2000b: 215) sees this as another indicator of the 'fundamental difference between public and private sector unionism' and notes that private sector unions do not generally incorporate into rule any commitment to the quality of the employer's product or service. Carpenter (2000) argues that in the years leading up to the creation of UNISON, its component unions were already developing a new form of public service unionism: for example, NUPE led the ambulance dispute in 1989-90 drawing on strong public support; many social workers who were NALGO members began to regard themselves as allies of the clients rather than servants of the state; and COHSE (the third UNISON predecessor union) advocated a shift to community care in mental health despite the threat that this meant to its membership levels in hospitals.

A strategy of alliances with public service users is all the more relevant given the changes since Batstone et al (1984: 200) wrote of the unions' political influence deriving from 'electoral arithmetic'. The pre-election diplomacy from the Conservative 'ambassador to the unions', Richard Balfe, and the softer tone adopted by Cameron before the election helped to persuade some academic observers that the leopard might have changed its spots (Williams and Scott, 2010). But since the election, the Tories have increasingly revealed an anti-union agenda – or at the very least, a willingness to consider hostile actions and ignore conciliatory voices within the coalition (Taxpayers' Alliance, TPA, 2010; Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, BIS, 2012; Churchard, 2012; Halfon, 2012). Of course, dealing with an unsympathetic national government is not a new experience for trade unions that came through the 1980s. However, the economic crisis is far more severe today and the unions are politically weakened by the changes in their relationship with the Labour party. During the 1980s and 1990s, the key strategic objective of the unions, including the public service unions, was the election of a Labour government. Although this would remain a preference, the experience of New Labour – particularly for many public service unions (Bach, 2002; Smith and Norton, 2001, 2006) – means that there is considerably less enthusiasm and little conviction that such a change would resolve their problems. For example, the Blairite Lord Lipsey (in Black and Pemberton, 2009: 557) described New Labour as 'simply the postwar settlement with no trade unions', and although the current party leadership has tried to distance itself from New Labour – or at least what it sees as its mistakes – there does not appear any great desire to work closely with the unions. Theoretically, this could provide the unions with some room to manoeuvre – both in terms of action and policy initiatives. As yet, there are few signs of this developing into a new phase of trade union mobilisation, but the possibility remains. In any event, the fact that Labour

is no longer in government removes any dilemma (Bach 2002) that may have existed for unions in opposing Labour policy while attempting to remain close to ministers.

3.5 Beyond defensive alliances to proactive coalitions

One of the lessons of the 1980s and 1990s for trade unions is that many workplace conflicts that may appear to be based on industrial issues are actually political. Therefore, crucially, they involve a battle of ideas as well being trials of strength measured in numbers on strike, strike days lost, or numbers of offices closed. This is especially the case in the public sector. Unions ignore this piece of the puzzle at their peril. To a considerable degree, the unions underestimated the Thatcher government's ability to exploit tensions between public and private sector workers (Carpenter, 2000: 201-2) and between workers on strike and the general public, with their attacks on 'producer domination'. Simple opposition to the cuts was not enough, there needed to be a credible, alternative narrative. That becomes more effective if it is shared in an alliance with a wider social group beyond the union or unions. In the 1980s and 1990s, some alliances *were* built with community groups and service users but they were essentially *defensive* coalitions. They tended to focus on defending current provision rather than a vision of future provision. There were some successes throughout this period but these were often episodic and temporary.

In this context it is not surprising that they failed to move beyond defensive coalitions with user and community groups. Terry (2000b: 226) is no doubt right to assert that 'the challenge is to move into a more proactive engagement within the same alliances' to develop an independent agenda on the purpose, structure, funding and quality of public services as the best way to both improve services and members' employment conditions. However, it is clear that (for all their undoubted strengths) the unions were not equipped to deal with the power of the ideological offensive. The contemporary terrain however is different.

The upturn in the economy and expansion in public expenditure during the period of New Labour government changed the priorities of the unions for a while but the onset of the financial crisis and the austerity programme begun under New Labour and extended and deepened under the Conservative-led coalition government has revived many of the debates and issues from the 1980s. This includes discussions about alliances with service users. But this is not just a repetition of an old song. For one thing, the scale of the attack on public services is on a

scale probably never seen before. Secondly, the unions are more politically open to the idea of alliances – partly because of recognition of their weakened position, partly through a changed political viewpoint. Thirdly, there has been a huge growth in social movements in the last thirty years (often among public service users) engaging millions of people in forms of non-party political action. Fourthly, the unions remain the largest, mass membership social movement of them all. Therefore, although the situation looks extremely bleak from one perspective, from the point of view of building alliances it looks much more promising than in the past.

3.6 Overcoming conflicts of interest

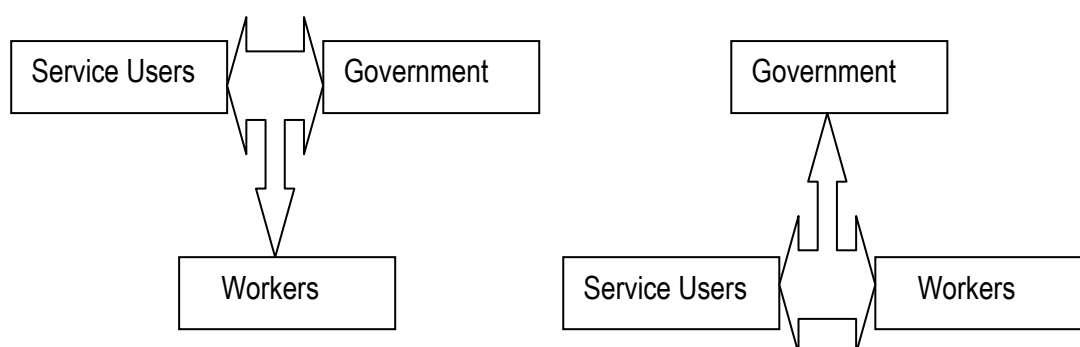
To build coalitions with service users requires a re-focussing of union campaign activity around the quality of service. It also requires an awareness of the potential for conflicts of interest in such alliances and the will to overcome them or at least minimise them. A necessary first step is to undermine the perception (often played up by hostile media and politicians) that public service workers see themselves as the key beneficiaries of public services – or are ‘knaves’ in Le Grand’s lexicon (2010).

The last Labour government’s (Cabinet Office, 2008: 12-13) analysis was in tune with both their Conservative predecessor and Conservative-Liberal Democrat successor governments in arguing that:

Too many services are still designed around the needs of the service provider rather than the service user...

Governments in all three periods have attempted to portray themselves as the defenders of public service users against the incompetence, inefficiency or selfishness of public service workers. If it is possible to create a coalition of interest between the service users and the service providers against the government’s policy choices, then the political opportunity structure would be changed – perhaps decisively. As Figure 3a illustrates, it would change the dynamic between the three key actors in public services.

Figure 3a: The changing dynamics of alliances



Union recognition of the need to augment workplace power and to draw on the resources of alliances built with citizen and community groups presupposes changes in strategy and tactics and a basis on which to build both support for the strategy among members and a bridge to the community groups to form a coalition. The public service ethos has the potential to act as a key factor in this process.

Although the 1978-79 public sector disputes are widely seen by politicians and commentators as being hugely damaging to the unions and of contributing to Labour's electoral defeat in 1979 (e.g. Bach, 2010), it does not follow that all public sector disputes have been or will be unpopular, and there is an argument that the facts behind the 'winter of discontent' have been lost in the rush to make political capital out of these events (Cronin, 1984; Hay, 2009; 2010; Williams and Fryer, 2010). And, as Winchester (1983: 161-162) shows, there was a series of public sector disputes a few years earlier between 1970 and 1972 which although they 'had a direct and visible impact on public safety or convenience, yet the government was unable to achieve widespread support for its policies'.

Nevertheless, there is a tension between certain kinds of union action and the commitments embodied in both the public service ethos and in being in coalition with service users. A strike against a programme of library closures which temporarily closed a library, for example, might be seen as in conflict with the PSE and unlikely to gain the support of library users. It might also be seen to be counter-productive in terms of the objective – keeping the libraries open. This does not mean that industrial action in the public services is always in conflict with the PSE or necessarily likely to produce a hostile response from service users. There are a number

of factors that affect this – the public view of the particular group of workers, the effectiveness of the case made by them, the impact on the public and the nature of the action – a strike is not the only form of mobilisation available to unions. This is an area that is producing discussion among public service trade unions in several countries. A recent paper by two senior Canadian trade unionists drew attention to examples of actions aimed at uniting public service users and workers that have been tried or discussed in Canada (Hurley and Gindin, 2011). When the federal government cut unemployment insurance, and tightened the rules for qualification, thereby pushing the claimant count down, the staff's union – the Public Service Alliance of Canada – produced pamphlets advising claimants how to answer questions to avoid being disqualified from benefits. Actual benefits staff were obviously unable to distribute the pamphlets so union members from outside the department and paid officers distributed them outside the unemployment offices.

On another occasion, despite being on strike, members of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, delivered pension cheques without pay to show that they did not wish to see pensioners inconvenienced by the strike. The government responded by stopping the postal workers delivering the pensions and made the pensioners queue at a warehouse to get their cheques. The postal workers' response was to attend the queues, not as pickets, but to distribute water and provide garden chairs to pensioners forced to queue in the summer heat.

Also discussed by the Canadians was the idea of transit workers in dispute showing their support for free and accessible transit by not collecting fares. Another case involved health workers discussing how to take action that avoided or limited negative impacts on patient care and the consequent potential loss of public support. They examined a new tactic: a work-in rather than a strike. Off-duty members would come in to work on a particular shift so that each area of the hospital was staffed at the level that union members thought was needed in order to illustrate both the shortfalls in current staffing levels and the increase in service quality that would occur with adequate staffing levels.

The options for worker action within public services do not necessarily focus only on the withdrawal of labour. Nevertheless, it is also the case that, despite the professional commitment of a particular group of workers (or even the legal position), there is not an infinitely elastic level of tolerance for continual attacks on both the service and the service providers. This can be seen by the first ever Coastguards strike in 2008; the Prison Officers'

Association's defiance of the ban on them taking action; the British Medical Association's sanctioning of industrial action; the Royal College of Nursing agreeing in principle and then seriously discussing whether to ballot for a strike; and even the Police Federation balloting its members on whether police should have the right to strike.

3.7 Mobilisation

By highlighting the workers' commitment to the service provided, an emphasis on the PSE can provide a point of contact for public service unions with service user groups, but arguably it can also play a role in mobilising the union's membership. It is here that mobilisation theory offers some insights. In his study of the application of mobilisation theory to industrial relations, Kelly (1998) draws on the work of social movement theorists – particularly Tilly (1978) – to discuss the social processes involved in interest definition. He focuses on how and why people acquire a sense of injustice and how they develop a collective sense of the grievance and argues that the explanation partly lies in 'the ways in which employees think about workplace and employment issues' (Kelly, 1998: 27, 52) – how workers 'frame' an issue or event.

The PSE can act as such a frame (Goffman, 1974: 6) for public service workers in how they make 'sense out of events' at the workplace and provide them with a means of organising their experience and understanding it. It could also lay the basis for a collective definition of interests as an important step towards mobilisation (Kelly, 1998). The PSE can become part of workers' language of resistance or their 'vocabularies of motive' (Mills, 1940: 906). Adherence to the PSE by workers would represent a rejection of the ideology of the market – at least in relation to public service. Therefore it also potentially represents an ideological shield against acceptance of neoliberalism as the 'norm' and is something that the union could deploy more widely. Articulated by the members, it could feed into the process by which people gain a collective sense of who they are – a process of social identification in which members 'develop a sense of themselves as a distinct group' (Badigannavar and Kelly, 2005: 527). In one sense that is what unions continually do when they organise in a workplace. They identify common interests at work that differentiate the workers from the employers and then act upon them. This is not necessarily a straightforward process and they may highlight some interests and ignore others. In addition as Hyman (2001: 35) points out, in the public sector 'the employer is not easy to identify'. In a local government context, is it senior management at the council or the ruling party on the council or both? Or is it actually central government (that controls most

of the funding)? Within that, is it ministers and officials at the Department for Communities and Local Government or the Cabinet as a whole? The 'Local Government Employers' (LGE) organisation in England and Wales states that it works 'with local authorities, regional employers and other bodies to lead and create solutions on pay, pensions and the employment contract' (LGE, 2012). Its staff work to a Board composed of councillors from across the political spectrum. Most local authority staff might well see this model as applying to their employment situation in which senior management work under the direction of the elected leadership of the council, and together they form 'the employer'. In the past, the public service ethos was arguably shared by all local government staff from the Chief Executive downwards. Given many local government senior managers' wholesale embrace of New Public Management techniques and, in some cases, extensive privatisation, it is increasingly difficult to make this claim today.

Identifying common interests among the workforce that differentiate them from the employer is important but it is insufficient in itself. According to mobilisation theory, it needs to be linked to and combined with a belief that membership objectives can be achieved by collective action and an organisational form through which to mobilise. The union is the obvious focus for this in the first instance and, as Hyman (2007: 205) argues, 'trade union strategic capacity can be, and needs to be, enhanced through internal dialogue, discussion and debate'. This requires an intervention by the union leaders – either national or, more likely, local – to frame this 'internal dialogue.' McAdam et al (1996: 6) define framing as

...conscious strategic efforts by groups of people to fashion shared understandings of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action.

By articulating and reinforcing membership commitment to the PSE, the local union leaders (the stewards or reps) can assist in strengthening the positive image of the union which, as Kuruvilla and Fiorito (1994) argue, is a key part of increasing members' attitudinal commitment to the union and therefore their willingness to actively participate. With a 'pivotal role' in membership socialization (Fullagar et al, 1994: 530) the reps are vital local leaders in any union. In UNISON they are the key actors in both workplace organising and wider campaigning (UNISON, 2010c). Kelly (1998: 127) emphasises the role of workplace leadership – the 'small but critical mass of activists' – in transforming a set of individuals into a collective actor. They can act as the institutional memory of the union at the workplace in much the same way as the

Ford shop stewards committee in Beynon's study – 'it embodies the lessons learned in past struggles and ensures that the embers never become cold' (1984: 232).

3.8 Discussion

Public service unions have a very different history to private sector unions, for obvious reasons. Although they share many of the roles of their equivalents in the private sector in the sense of individual representation and collective negotiation, they also differ in both the basis of the relationship with the employer and the sources of power available to them. Public service unions are obliged to engage in the political process, whether or not that involves party-political activity, because their pay and conditions are closely determined by the political process. Despite the turn since the 1980s to the use of private sector management methods in the public sector, the state as an employer (in its various forms) is fundamentally different to private sector employers. The key is the different logic of the public sector, in which goods or services are provided by bodies which – to a greater or lesser degree – are democratically accountable and have their priorities determined by elected politicians.

Unions in the public services have looked to augment traditional sources of union power by making common cause with service users, the citizens supplied with the service provided by public service union members. The degree and extent to which unions have seriously taken up the approach of building coalitions varies, both within and between different national labour movements. In their comparison of union revitalisation in five countries - Germany, Italy, Spain, the UK and the USA - Baccaro et al (2003: 120) comment that the major difference between them, and the key factor in explaining different responses, is the degree of 'institutional embeddedness' of national labour movements (by this they mean that union strength is partly dependent on institutional arrangements rather than solely on membership or labour market strength). They suggest that those labour movements that are in a weak institutional position such as the Anglo-American unions are more likely to look for support and leverage outside the workplace.

To a certain extent, the turn to build coalitions with other social actors is in response to the weakened position of unions. But a position of strength can be developed from a position of weakness. In the past, even at their most influential, unions failed to develop a coherent positive vision – the 'alternative utopia' of which Hyman (2001) speaks. The public service

ethos represents a counter to that of the neoliberal market cult. Deployed by the unions, it could act both as the basis of a bridge to the service user and as a 'credible mobilising rhetoric' (Hyman, 2001: 173) among the membership. By recognising that the best means of acting as a 'vested interest' is to focus on their 'sword of justice' role, and by engaging with service users in the building of a coalition, unions have the opportunity to extend their power and begin to influence the agenda in public services.

Chapter Four: Researching the Union

4.1 Background

This study builds upon many years of working closely with UNISON, the UK's largest public sector union. This lengthy working relationship forms the backdrop to the thesis and also helps to explain its focus and some of the methodological issues involved. Consequently, this Chapter begins with a brief discussion of the reasons why social scientists have developed research through working with unions in general and why UNISON was chosen for this particular study.

There is a long tradition of engagement between sociology and the labour movement in the UK (Beynon, 2011), and this can be seen as an example of public sociology in action. My own work with UNISON is in that tradition and falls into the category of what Beynon (2011: 21) describes as 'public sociology from below' or what Burawoy (2004: 1608) calls

grassroots public sociology that engages the particularistic interests of more circumscribed publics — neighborhood groups, communities of faith, labor organizations, and so on.

The importance of this form of sociology is that it is based on a dialogue – an organic relationship between the sociologist and the particular public addressed. This can be justified in the way that it makes access to potential respondents and data easier but there are more important benefits. The relationship (of being an 'insider') also allows for a deeper understanding and knowledge of the subject of study to develop - to understand more clearly the work and attitudes of, in this case, library service workers and their trade union representatives. In fact, the process of dialogue itself provides information of value to the research project, because it familiarises the researcher with the structures and methods of operation, the internal culture, the leading personalities and the politics of the organisation to which the subjects of the study belong.

I have worked with UNISON on issues relating to public service reform since 2005. This grew from personal contacts with UNISON officers made while I was a paid officer of another public service union (now called PCS) which worked closely with UNISON. After leaving the union, I

worked for an independent research unit (PSIRU) which was funded by a variety of different union organisations and which did a range of research work for UNISON, among many other union bodies. Personal knowledge of individuals, structures, methods of operation, objectives and power relationships within the union was absorbed through regular, sometimes daily, contact with UNISON officers and activists at UK level over many years. A similar close relationship was built up with the Wales region, with its offices based in Cardiff. The rapport and trust that stemmed from this undoubtedly assisted in gaining the confidence of a wider group of UNISON paid officers and through them, lay activists and members.

Although I had worked with UNISON on several projects before the launch of the library campaign, my involvement with the union on the public library service represented a fundamental shift in the relationship and way of working. Instead of a straightforward commission to write a report, since 2007 I have been closely involved with the library campaign work, producing reports (Davies, 2008b; 2010b), addressing conferences, seminars and meetings of library service activists and UNISON paid officers, as well as being able to engage in both formal and informal discussions with library service activists. As part of the research process I have been a part of discussions about the library campaign itself and the role of research within the campaign.

All of this provided me with a level of 'insider knowledge' and access that would have been difficult, if not impossible to gain any other way. As one UNISON officer said in an interview 'you've been involved in the campaign since the beginning' and this participation in the campaign provided invaluable lessons about priorities and sensitivities within the union on the issue of public libraries and wider related topics and helped in negotiating the day to day interaction and workaday compromises involved in such a research project.

My experience confirmed Beynon's observation that (1988: 21) research into 'trade union organisations can be an extremely sensitive business'. Adopting a form of action research in work with, and on, UNISON's library service members I gained the co-operation of UNISON paid officers and was able to overcome any potential reluctance of activists and members to take part in the project. My links with UNISON through working with and for the union on various projects over a long period have facilitated an unusual level of access to officials, activists and members, to the extent that paid officers encouraged activists and members to

take part in the research. For example, one steward emailed me, volunteering to be interviewed, writing:

I received the email from [UNISON HQ] about the research you have done for UNISON. Like many colleagues I am very concerned about the way things have gone in libraries, and would be very happy to speak to you about our local situation.

Another agreed to take part in the study and referred to the presentation that I gave at a UNISON annual conference fringe meeting:

I was at the fringe meeting and I would be very pleased to talk to you.

After that conference fringe meeting I spent some time informally discussing the issues with a group of the library stewards and one emailed to say:


Good to chat on Sunday after the fringe event. Happy to help out in any way I can with your research - just drop me a line.

So I was able to develop a very positive relationship with UNISON and to approach the research for this thesis in a very different way than had I begun as a complete outsider. Based on my experience with UNISON and other unions, and drawing on the public sociology debate, the next section examines, in a more general way, the issues raised for researchers working with trade unions.

4.2 Working with unions

Some academics conduct research into trade unions in the same way that botanists study exotic flora – as a fascinating subject for study, but not something with which there is any interaction or dialogue. There are other possibilities and these have been highlighted in the debate over ‘public sociology’ pointing to a range of different potential relationships between researchers and unions. These are represented in the graphic below (Figure 4a). These three relationships broadly fit with Burawoy’s (2004) categories of Professional, Policy, and Public social science.

Figure 4a: Research and unions

Research on unions	Research for unions	Research with unions
		
Union as subject	Union as commissioner	Union as partner
Professional	Policy	Public

Forrester and Thorne (1993) describe research for and with unions (rather than on unions) as research as engagement. In a recent consideration of the literature on trade unions, Huzzard and Bjorkman (2012) argue that most of the papers involve research *on* unions conducted by professional social scientists for a largely professional audience. They argue for the exploration of more creative relationships between academics and trade unions. Such relationships can take different forms but most will be placed along the continuum between *Commissions* and *Partnership*. It is this range of relationships with unions that is discussed in the next section within the context of Policy and Public Sociology.

Huxham (1993) suggests that partnership is appropriate where seeking to achieve objectives that no single organisation can achieve alone. She uses the term 'collaborative advantage', to describe a situation where, through the collaboration, something is achieved that no organisation could achieve on its own, and where individual organisations also achieve their own objectives better than they could alone. Part of the basis for successful work with unions is to identify some common objectives, not necessarily always an easy task. Referring to problems in gaining access to companies, Beynon (1988: 23) notes that reluctance to assist academics 'derives from the fact that the organisations and the researchers have different goals.' Even when they agree to work together, researchers can have different objectives to unions in any collaboration (see Table 4a below).

Table 4a: Objectives in collaboration

For researchers	For unions
Funding	Research capacity
Access	Expertise
Material for research and publications	Speed of response
Opportunity to develop wider networks	Credibility
Chance to engage in public debate and influence outcomes	Material to assist in bargaining, organising or campaigning

Unions frequently look to researchers for access to research capacity and expertise that they do not possess in-house. But even those unions, like UNISON, that do have some research expertise, often use outside academics in order to provide some distance between themselves and the research output and thereby (they hope) gain additional credibility for the results of the research. Obviously their aim is to receive research that is ‘positive’ from their point of view and useful to them in negotiations or organising and, as Beynon (1988: 25) points out, unions – like companies – ‘are no less sensitive to detailed research on their operations.’

Researchers have a different set of aims in working with unions. There is the possibility of funding (although UK unions lack the sort of resources necessary to fund large scale research projects). More importantly, there is the attraction of the union opening doors for the researcher and facilitating access. This, in turn, offers the possibility of carrying out research that might be difficult or impossible without ‘insider’ assistance. It also provides researchers with opportunities to build up networks of contacts for further research and to enter into public debates from a position of knowledge and authority based on research.

There are several (obvious) potential disadvantages for academics in collaborative work with unions. A key issue, perhaps *the* key issue, for researchers is the need to ensure that there is no compromise on the integrity and quality of the research. Possible problems can be split into less and more important categories. There are three in the former category. First, there are limited funding opportunities as UK unions are not wealthy institutions (Wilson, 2009). Second,

unions often operate on short lead times with high levels of urgency associated with negotiating or organising timetables. Consequently they almost always want quick results, and this can limit the range of research options available. Third, because of the urgency associated with union research objectives, there is rarely the opportunity for long term planning and therefore there may be a lack of researcher capacity and flexibility to respond to union needs in the timescale required. Much more important potential problems for researchers are the danger of 'capture' and the possibility of clashes over results (content, timing, use, interpretation etc). Almost all trade union officials and activists see themselves as involved in some sort of clash with the employer(s). This ranges from the business unionism of the wage militant to the transformationist politics of the socialist revolutionary, but rarely do any of them welcome research which is perceived as undermining the union's bargaining or organising position.

These issues are similar to the methodological challenges of action research with unions identified by Huzzard and Bjorkman (2012: 166). They highlighted five possible problem areas. First, there is the risk of 'going native', blurring the perspective of the researcher and compromising the need for critical distance. Secondly, what they call the 'helping approach', which can result in 'too much action, too little research'. Third, if the researcher adopts the 'consultant role', it may result in the avoidance of criticism and a tendency towards 'telling success stories'. Fourth, researchers need to be aware of the need to balance knowledge encapsulating the local perspective and practice (something they term mode 2 knowledge), with that of generating more generalisable mode 1 knowledge (theory). And finally, they need to temper the strategic interests of the intervention and change process with certain ethical judgements.

In this case, there were no pre-conditions placed by UNISON in order to gain their collaboration with the research project. As for the risk of 'capture', awareness of the danger is the first step to avoidance. This is a difficult area for the union as much as for the researcher. Unions obviously want research output that is helpful to their position. At the same time, any research value is completely undermined if opponents of the union can point to a lack of rigour and argue that it is the work of a union's 'pet researcher'. And while there is no attempt to conceal my pro-union stance, neither has there been any effort to paper over any examples of where the union's practice fails to measure up to its policy positions and so I have worked to retain critical distance from the subject.

Bryman (2008: 131) refers to the 'research bargain' whereby the researcher engages in a negotiation with a 'gatekeeper' in order to gain access to participants. In this instance, the 'bargain' was with UNISON, the library staff's trade union. The survey grew out of work carried out with UNISON and included both fields of particular use to UNISON for its *Inquiry into the Public Library Service* as well as those identified as of interest to my research.

As Humphries (2003: 83) notes, 'research is not a neutral activity, but that what is researched and how, are political decisions'. The values of the researcher influence research in many ways and, in this particular case, access was undoubtedly eased by the trust that has been built up between myself and the union over many years. The dispute between Becker and Gouldner in the 1960s illustrated some of the issues around this. Becker (1967: 239) argued that it is not possible 'to do research that is uncontaminated by personal and political sympathies' and so, the question is not *whether* to take sides but *which* side the researcher should be on, and that the sociologist should take the side of the underdog.

As early as 1961, Gouldner (1962: 199) argued that Weber had created a myth that 'social science should and could be value-free.' But in response to Becker, Gouldner (1968: 103) complained that the myth of the value-free social scientist was now being replaced by another myth – that it is only possible to do partisan research. He felt that Becker had exaggerated the problem. Liebling (2001: 473) agreed that it is impossible for a researcher to remain neutral but felt that 'it is possible to take more than one side seriously, to find merit in more than one perspective...' and argued for 'prudent, perhaps reserved, engagement' (Liebling, 2001: 483).

Hammersley (2001) takes a different approach, suggesting that Becker is much more ambiguous about the partisan nature of social research than is generally accepted. He argues that what Becker was really getting at was that 'sound scientific sociological research... [has] radical political consequences' but that this is inadvertent if desirable (Hammersley, 2001: 107). I bring with me pro-union values and sympathies but have aimed to carry out Bryman's (2008: 25) exhortation 'to ensure that there is no untrammelled incursion of values in the research process.'

4.3 Policy sociology - writing for the union

One-off commissions are the commonplace forms of relationship between academics and the unions. This becomes vulnerable to the critique suggested by Burawoy of policy sociology – that it becomes strait-jacketed by the requirements of the funder. From this point of view there are advantages in deepening the relationship and extending it into a form of partnership. This is dealt with later, but just as there are different relationships between researchers and unions, so too there are different types of writing for unions. These can be placed into five categories (see Table 4b). These are not mutually exclusive categories. For example, a document ostensibly written to influence policy may, equally importantly, be suitable for an internal audience. This is not always explicit in the commission, but will influence how the piece is received. Good working relationships are needed to discuss this sort of issue.

Table 4b: Types of writing for unions

Type	Purpose	Target
Bargaining support	To assist in negotiations	Employers
Public document	To influence public policy debate	Opinion formers, politicians, media (and to certain degree general public)
Discussion document	Aid internal debate	Senior activists, secretariat and National Executive Committee
Membership literature	To set out union policy on a particular issue in popular form	General membership
Submission	To influence legislators	Politicians

All of the above types of work broadly fit within the commissioning relationship but the research behind them can form the basis for a more discursive, challenging form of sociology – particularly the sort of work that forms the basis for a union discussion document or public

document. One of the earliest examples of this was the 1970 report on pay and profitability in the British car industry carried out for the TGWU by John Hughes and colleagues from Ruskin College, *The Ford Wage Claim* (Beynon, 1984: 293). There are other examples cited in the collection edited by Forrester and Thorne (1993). The growth in the use of research by unions in the 1970s – both through the commissioning of external ‘experts’ and through the development of in-house research departments - was seen as worthy of academic comment (Grayston, 1974). By the mid 1980s, there was a trade union researchers group (which I attended) which met in London and drew together members of union research departments and staff from the Labour Research Department in a network which was part social, part work-related.

4.4 Partnership – a form of Public Sociology

The differences between the researcher-union relationship based on a commission and that based on a partnership are outlined in Table 4c. They are similar to the differences identified by Burawoy between policy sociology and public sociology. As with Burawoy’s categories, there is no watertight distinction (Burawoy, 2004); sometimes the one overflows into the other.

Table 4c: From Commission to Partnership

Commission	Partnership
Short term	Long term
Research subject area identified by client	Research subject area jointly identified through dialogue
Narrowly defined subject area	Several areas or wider role in longer term project
Episodic source of funding	Reliability of funding
Limited opportunities for building networks	Trusted partner with ease of access to union’s network

If the relationship that is built up during a commission is seen by both sides as positive and beneficial, then it can gradually evolve into more of a partnership arrangement. This replaces

the simple, fee-based contractual relationship in which the 'sociologist, thereby, cedes independence to the client' (Burawoy, 2004: 1608).

Building a relationship

This process of change occurred in my relationship with UNISON, as a standard commissioning process developed and evolved into a deeper, longer term relationship. What began with a one-off commission in 2005 on hospital contract cleaning (Davies, 2005a), continued with research reports on the school meals service (Davies, 2005b); third sector provision of public services (2007b); the public library service (Davies, 2008b); hospital contract cleaning (Davies, 2009); government policy, recession and the voluntary sector (Davies, 2010a); the public library service (Davies, 2010b; 2010d); and provision of public services by mutuals (2011a).

Publicly available documents were produced for UNISON on all of the above and these form part of the union's campaign material on the subject. However, there have also been unpublished reports, for internal discussion only, that have been written for UNISON on several subjects on which the union either did not possess the relevant expertise or wanted an outsider's perspective on a critical issue facing the union.

These projects have included presentations to a variety of different audiences ranging from press conferences, breakfast briefings for ministers and parliamentarians, document launches at the House of Commons, UNISON Service Group Executives, UNISON Service Group Conferences, UNISON occupational conferences, UNISON national conference fringe meetings and UNISON fringe meetings at TUC conference. The work with UNISON also led to an invitation to speak at a Public Services International Conference in Geneva and to a two week speaking tour of Canada organised by UNISON's Canadian sister union, CUPE. These illustrate the degree of trust built up with UNISON, as it was their recommendation, following a request from CUPE for a speaker, that led to the invitation to undertake the speaking tour.

In the course of this developing relationship, the emphasis changed gradually, as both the volume of work and the level of trust increased. It became a conversation about research priorities and possible projects rather than a crude purchaser-provider split. The relationship with UNISON is such that it is now possible to ask UNISON to actively assist in research with

their membership on a subject of my choice rather than theirs. Obviously, this may be of interest to them as well. One such example is the work conducted for this thesis on the way that members perceive the notion of the public service ethos, how that is seen by union reps and whether (and, if so, how) this notion has potential for the union as a tool of mobilisation. In fact, this shift from commissioned reports to this thesis is itself, an example of a move from policy sociology to public sociology. UNISON assisted initially by agreeing to include a section on the public service ethos in a library service membership questionnaire designed by me and then by strongly recommending that activists within the library service put themselves forward as volunteers to be interviewed.

4.5 Research Questions

The aim of the study was to examine the attitude of a group of public sector union members towards the public service ethos. One of the observations made by Prandy et al (1983: 2) in their study, *White Collar Unionism*, was that classical theories of trade unionism took it for granted that 'the phenomenon they deal with is specific to the manual working class.' This may have changed, but it is still the case that public sector trade unionism is relatively under-researched despite the efforts of a number of scholars (e.g. Terry, 2000a; Corby and Symon, 2011; Bach and Kessler, 2012) and the fact that although the public sector employs around a fifth of the workforce (Matthews, 2010), public sector workers account for over 60 per cent of trade union members (Brownlie, 2012). With a few exceptions (e.g. Maidment, 1976), there is little research at all on trade unionism in the UK public library service. This compares unfavourably with the position in the US, where there exists a considerable literature (for some examples, see Berelson, 1939; Chaplan, ed. 1976; Lilore, 1984; Rosenthal, 1985; Todd, 1985; Latham and Ditzler, 2010). On the other hand, research on the public service ethos (in both the UK and the USA) has tended to take place through a political science or public administration lens. This study aims to make a contribution to righting these imbalances.

An additional objective was to consider the attitudinal question relating to the PSE against the context of union membership and campaign strategy. So the thesis focuses on a series of research questions:

- Has the public service ethos survived? And if it has, what does it mean for workers?

- Is there a relationship between commitment to the public service ethos and union membership and activism?
- Could the union utilise the ethos in its campaigning? And, if so, how?

4.6 Research setting

Choice of the public library service

The context of the study is the UK public library service and the workers within it. A study of attitudes towards the public service ethos could, of course, have focussed on any one of a number of different public services. Having carried out research previously on workplace issues within the Civil Service (employment-related services), the NHS (hospital cleaning) and the school meals service, I could have called on a range of contacts through which to gain good levels of access. However there are a number of reasons that make the library service a particularly interesting part of the public services to examine in this context.

As one of the oldest public services in Britain, the development of the public library service is intertwined with the movement towards democracy and civil rights in the 19th and early 20th centuries and it is strongly associated with the notion of the 'public good' (Moore, 2004).

Although there were already scattered instances of public library provision before 1850 (as well as some voluntary or charitable provision), the first relevant piece of legislation was the 1850 Public Libraries Act, which placed responsibility for library services firmly at local level, and permitted, but did not oblige, councils to provide library services. This began the process of building a national public service network of libraries.

From its history, purpose and traditions one might expect the notion of a public service ethos to have some resonance within the library service. However, it is also a public service under threat as a result of the austerity cutbacks. All local government spending is under pressure but many in the library service view it as particularly vulnerable because it is seen as a 'soft target' by some councils (Reading Agency, 2010). The service is also of interest because it brings together both professionals (those with a professional librarianship qualification, often members of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, CILIP) and non-professionally qualified staff. In addition, it provides access to both managers and managed.

Most importantly, it was also a service in which the union representing library staff (UNISON) was taking action, first with various local level campaigns against the closure of particular libraries, then through a nationally co-ordinated campaign focussing on cuts and closures. I was involved in the national campaign from the very start and, given these facts, it was an ideal service in which to examine whether the public service ethos retains any hold on the workers and what that means for union mobilisation.

On the other hand it is a discrete and relatively small part of local government. In England and Wales around 2 million people are employed by councils (about a million of which work in schools, including half a million teachers) (Local Government Association, 2011). Over 800,000 work in other local government services (excluding police, fire and social care staff) and with less than 25,000 full time equivalent (FTE) library staff, it could be argued that the library service is atypical within local government, never mind the rest of the public sector. Therefore any findings may have limited generalisability. Nevertheless, this should be balanced by the fact that it is institutionally embedded within local government and has many of the characteristics of public service employment more widely: for example, it is a predominantly female workforce, a majority of whom are older workers, the workforce is long serving, and it has a relatively high proportion of professionals (in this case, those with a professional librarianship qualification). In order to understand both the views and actions of the library staff as well as the relationship between myself and the staff's union, it is necessary to understand how UNISON operates within the library service and beyond.

UNISON: organisation and structure

UNISON has 1.4 million members (Certification Office, 2011), primarily workers in health and local government (442,500 and 714,000 members respectively), and substantial membership in the utilities, further and higher education, the police service, transport and the voluntary sector (UNISON, 2011b: 11), Two thirds of UNISON's members are women.

UNISON is the union that organises public library staff⁵, and it claims to represent a majority of those working within the public library service (UNISON, 2011d). It is a vertical union

⁵ To my knowledge the only exception to this is in the Greenwich Library Service, where library staff are now organised by UNITE. This followed an internal dispute within UNISON, after which members left to join UNITE en bloc (UNITE, 2012; Callanan, 2012)

representing both those with and without a professional librarianship qualification, and both local library managers and their staff. Staff in public libraries represent a small proportion of UNISON's membership. According to a survey carried out for the union in 2009, 'Libraries' as an occupational group account for just 4.3% of the membership (and this includes those who work in school and university libraries) (UNISON/IDS, 2009).

As part of local government, the library service operates within a culture in which there is (or certainly has been) a tradition of employer support for union membership (Terry, 2000b). Within local government, UNISON organises on a local authority basis with branches matching council boundaries. One branch organises virtually all non-manual occupations and grades in all departments within the council. Sometimes UNISON also organises manual occupations within local authorities. More often this is done by UNITE or the GMB. Although it is the dominant union in local government, UNISON has not been immune to the impact of a generally challenging organising environment since its formation in 1993, and in 2011 reported that 'union density continued to be below 50% in the majority of councils' (UNISON Local Government Service Group, 2011a: 5).

Members are represented in their work group or workplace by an elected representative (rep) or steward. Every branch has a branch committee on which sit one or more stewards from each work group. Stewards deal with grievances, disciplinary proceedings in addition to representing members in disputes or negotiations at the level of the work group or workplace (UNISON, 2011a). Within the library service of each local authority, the aim would be to have a steward for every large library workplace.

Above branch level the union is structured into the following Service Groups:

- Community
- Energy
- Health Care
- Higher Education
- Local Government
- Police and Justice
- Water, Environment and Transport.

There is a Service Group annual conference and executive and, subject to national rules and national policy decided by the national annual delegate conference and interpreted by the National Executive Council, the Service Groups have autonomy over general policy specific to the Group and negotiations within their area of responsibility. This covers: pay and conditions of service; professional and occupational rules, standards, conditions and policy; industrial and other relations with employers; representation of members and participation in any joint negotiating machinery with powers in these matters; and the settlement of any disputes arising from the employment of its members.

Each Service Group has its own cadre of paid officers with responsibilities for different elements of the work. Within the Local Government Service Group, there is an officer with responsibility for public libraries. There is no separate structure for public library service members but the union does run an ad hoc series of seminars and conferences aimed specifically at library members.

Alongside its sectoral structure, the union is organised on a geographical basis and all branches belong to one of 12 regions/nations: Eastern; East Midlands; Greater London; Northern; Northern Ireland; North West; Scotland; South East; South West; Cymru/Wales; West Midlands; and Yorkshire and Humberside. Each region of the union has its own Service Group Regional Committee and a regional official with responsibility for it.

The union also has a structure of 'self-organised groups' for four specific groups of members named in rule (women members; black members; disabled members; lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender members) (UNISON, 2011a). From the creation of UNISON, the promotion of equal opportunities and fair representation was seen as central to the union and reflected in its organisational structure at all levels, through reserved seats and various rights to representation (e.g. conference motions and delegates). It is seen as particularly important for the union to use its structures to recognise that two thirds of its members are women. This is reflected in this study in that 84% of the survey sample are women (16% men); of the reps interviewed, 70% are women and 30% men; and all of the four headquarters officers interviewed are women.

4.7 Research design

The study adopts a multi-faceted, mixed methods approach, combining a large online survey of UNISON members, a smaller online survey of library campaign groups, a series of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with UNISON reps and UNISON paid officers, participant observation – particularly at a UNISON library members’ seminar (at which a short questionnaire was circulated) and document analysis. As is clear from the above, the research strategy adopted ‘involves the researcher in an open and positive relationship with one of the groups or interests involved in the industrial enterprise’ (Beynon, 1988: 29) – in this case UNISON within the public library service. As Beynon (1988) explains, this approach resolves some of the problems (like access and legitimacy) associated with research into industrial organisations.

In his *New Statesman* column, Peter Wilby (2012: 8) reported that on being interviewed by ‘a media academic’, he was asked if he minded *not* being quoted. The academic told him ‘that this was how social science tries to proceed. It wants to be like the physical sciences, achieving results that can be replicated.’ Wilby thought that this formalism was amusing and completely pointless as journalists like him try extremely hard to make sure that their names are published regularly. In a situation with a severe power imbalance like an employment relationship - especially when there is the perception (or actuality) of conflict - it is neither formalistic nor pointless to take care that respondents are not harmed by participation in research. Trust plays a large part in the success of a study like this – the trust of the union in the researcher and the trust of the respondents and interviewees in both their union (in recommending the researcher) and consequently in the researcher as well. Participants are less interested in whether university ethics guidelines and procedures⁶ were followed (although they were) than they are in being reassured that they can speak freely without any negative consequences.

As Oakley (2000: 310) points out, the ‘first do no harm’ precept is as valid in social research as it is in medical practice. There was no risk of physical harm to participants in this study, but a very real potential source of harmful consequence was the identification of respondents

⁶ I was guided by the procedures and guidance of the Cardiff School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, the British Sociological Association (BSA) Statement of Ethical Practice (2002/2004) and the ESRC Framework for Research Ethics (and its predecessor, the Research Ethics Framework) (ESRC, 2010; 2006). In addition, I was mindful of the relevant terms of the Data Protection Act (1998).

associated with critical remarks about their employer. This concern came up on more than one occasion in interviews and in open ended responses. Therefore the questions of anonymity and confidentiality were taken very seriously, even though this has meant that the details of particular work places have had to be concealed.

4.8 Data collection 1: the online membership survey

Introduction

The decision to carry out a survey came from a reflection on the best means to develop an analysis that explained how the union and its members related both to the public service ethos and the public service itself. The trust built up with the union made this a realistic strategy. So the first phase of this study was an online survey of UNISON members within the public library service through a self administered web-based questionnaire. The survey had a dual purpose in that it was aimed at providing data for this research study as well as collecting data of more specific operational relevance to UNISON for their *People's Inquiry into the Public Library Service*, with which I was involved. The survey was seen as an integral part of the union's campaign and was designed to elicit opinions on the nature of the job in terms of the public good as well as information on terms and conditions and how these were changing (if at all) under public sector 'reform' and the developing programme of cuts and closures. There was no problem in including questions of relevance to the study and, if anything, the collaborative goal meant that the union put a great deal of effort into ensuring the widest circulation within the target population.

Survey design

In line with Fowler's (2009: 115) suggestions about questionnaire development, the survey format and questions were discussed in advance with informed insiders – in this case, UNISON paid officers with responsibility for the library service. The aim of these discussions was to ensure the relevance and comprehensiveness of the questions and to confirm that all library staff would have online access.

The questionnaire was piloted with a convenience sample of a small group of leading activists in the library service and relevant paid officers. The combination of the discussions and pilot

ensured that the questionnaire was designed with a clear understanding of the work context of UNISON members in the public library service; that the questions were appropriate to the range of workers likely to be covered by the survey; and that respondents would be capable of understanding and answering the questions. This dialogue with paid officers and activists on the questionnaire came out of the long period of engagement with the union in the lead up to the study.

Following the pilot, some minor amendments were made in consultation with the pilot participants. The feedback was invaluable in assessing the value of the questions and possible responses as well as the likely time commitment being asked of respondents. The survey was analysed using SPSS. It included both closed-ended items and a number of open-ended questions which were coded for analysis.

The identities and records of all individual participants were held securely and confidentially. No names or other identifying data were used in the writing up of the research. Data from the questionnaire survey are held on a password protected Cardiff University computer and the password protected survey account on the Bristol University and Qualities servers.

Survey distribution

Members working in the library service were identified from the union's membership database and those with an email address registered with Membership Records were circulated with an invitation to take part in the survey. To pick up those that had not registered an email address, 270 hard copy letters were sent out by UNISON HQ, and all branches with library service membership were circulated by the UNISON Head of Local Government and asked to cascade information down to membership level. In addition, information was carried in the UNISON weekly email bulletin for activists, reps and stewards (E-focus), and on the union's library service page on the national website.

All prospective participants in the questionnaire survey received a letter from the UNISON National Secretary, Local Government Service Group, inviting them to take part in the survey. It outlined the practical steps necessary to access the online survey and explained that the survey was confidential and that their names were not required to complete the survey.

Respondents self selected to take part and were directed to an introductory web page on the Bristol Online Survey (BOS) facility that provided further details of the research.

The fact that the union closely associated itself with the survey and urged members' participation would have minimised any concerns from potential participants about the receipt of 'junk' mail or 'spam' with attendant security issues. There are obvious cost savings involved in using an online survey compared with a postal survey and also time and cost savings in having the returned responses already in an electronic format (Kaplowitz et al, 2004). There are, of course, some disadvantages and these are discussed below.

All respondents voluntarily opted into the survey and were told, both in the invitation circular and in the introduction page to the online questionnaire, that their replies were in confidence and that all responses would be anonymised when written up. Respondents were invited to contact me if there was any issue related to the survey on which they required clarification. Self selection for respondents obviously carries risks in terms of validity – it is possible that those with a predisposition to assist the union would take part in a survey disseminated by the union. However, the scale of response and size of the survey should minimise the problem.

The survey used the Bristol Online Survey (BOS) facility and ran from 12 – 29 January 2010. This web survey avoids several of the problems identified by Cooper (2000) as there was an identifiable frame of UNISON members in the library service, all of whom were web literate as part of their job and also had online access. There were a small number of cases notified in which a local authority's security software prohibited access to secure websites (which BOS uses). These were resolved after a brief email exchange, by either the council temporarily removing the security block or by the respondent accessing the website from a home computer. In the fast-moving world of software, the BOS facility already looks and feels a little dated compared to more advanced facilities like Qualtrics with its extensive functionality and the capacity to accommodate visual methods, allowing respondents to tag images and comment on video/audio. Nevertheless the software used was perfectly adequate for the tasks involved in the study.

Response rate and sample characteristics

UNISON's membership database recorded 9,965 members as working in the public library service. All of these were contacted by union headquarters and invited to participate in the survey. There were 2,750 returns, which suggests a response rate of 27.6%. However, on examination of the dataset, a small number of respondents (82) had to be removed because they were school or university library staff. Removing these from the overall total provides a new total of 9,883, valid returns of 2,668 and a revised response rate of 27%.

In contrast to Bryman (2008: 653) who says that 'typically, response rates to online surveys are lower than those for comparable postal questionnaire surveys', Kaplowitz et al (2004: 100) found that an online survey could achieve a comparable response rate to a postal survey 'when both were preceded by an advance mail notification'. Although this survey did have the equivalent of such an advance mail notification, it appears to be a low response rate and inevitably raises questions about the representativeness of the sample. We do not know whether non-responses are random or not. This is especially problematic as there are no official figures on the demographics of the public library workforce with which to compare⁷ and UNISON's membership database does not hold the range of data necessary for a comparison either.

There are two issues worth noting here. First is how this study compares to other online surveys and secondly, whether there are any factors particular to this study that may help to explain the response rate. On the first point, Cook et al (2000: 829) carried out a meta-analysis of response rates in online surveys and found that 'the mean response rate for the 56 surveys reported in 39 studies with no missing data on 16 variables was 34.6%.' This is still a higher response than this study but there is a second point to be made. That is, there is no way of knowing how many of the non-respondents did not respond because they were incorrectly categorised as public library staff on the UNISON membership database. So it may be that the response rate is actually better than it appears.

⁷ The annual CIPFA returns on the public library service carry data on the numbers of Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staff and the breakdown within that of professional and non-professional staff, but that is all the detail that is collected.

This reliance on the quality of the union's membership database is a problem. Union membership is dynamic and therefore the snapshot of membership data held on the database may not be accurate at any one time. And while trade union membership records have improved considerably in recent times, there are still difficulties in breaking down membership into relatively small occupational groups. Categories created for union organising or bargaining unit purposes may not be appropriate for this type of study on a smaller group within a large sector. CIPFA (2011c: 2) reported that the total number of Full Time Equivalent staff employed by public libraries in 2010-11 was 23,662.8 but UNISON record only 9,965 members as working in the public library service. Given that UNISON claims to have a majority of library staff in membership, this suggests some (enormous) discrepancies within their membership records. It is highly likely that many library service members are 'lost' by being placed in the general category of 'local government'. Categorisation issues can be a problem for researchers in any large scale use of databases compiled by a third party for a different purpose. It is compounded by the fact that it was not possible to 'clean' the data as it would have been necessary to contact thousands of individuals to do so – even if the union was prepared to grant the sort of access to the membership records that this would require (which it was not).

Nevertheless, confidence in the data can be gained from the fact that there were responses from workers in every library authority except four (202 out of 206) which means that UNISON members from the library service in almost every part of the UK took part in the survey.

4.9 Data collection 2: interviews with union reps

The second phase of the research consisted of semi-structured interviews with trade union activists, conducted by telephone (lasting up to an hour). This was negotiated with the union and HQ officers facilitated the contacts. While the general survey was concerned with issues relating to public service provision and how employment and employment relations were changing within the library service, the interviews were used to gain a greater understanding of the role that the trade union played in the local library, in relation to preserving public service delivery and more detailed attitudinal information from the reps.

All members on the UNISON library activists contact email list (together with those reps who have not registered an email address) were circulated in June 2010 and asked if they were prepared to take part in an interview. They were given my email address and asked to contact

me directly. I wrote the email request (see Annex 3) but it was circulated by UNISON, so email addresses were not provided to me. The contact list was composed of union representatives and some activists without a particular position within UNISON in the public library service.

All prospective respondents received an outline of the research together with assurances which clearly stated that the usual research rules on privacy, anonymity and confidentiality would apply. In other words, participants would not be identified and any use made of the information or comments made in discussions would be anonymised. An exchange of emails then took place to arrange the interview. Prospective participants were, once again, taken through the aims of the research, the issues of anonymity and confidentiality and told that there was no compunction to answer all of the questions posed. Permission was sought and gained for the recording of the interviews. They were offered an opportunity for a face-to-face interview in which I would travel to a venue of their choice, or a telephone interview. They all preferred a telephone interview – both female and male reps. In discussion with several interviewees, this choice was influenced by the fact that they were so busy in their working day or that they felt the distance from Cardiff was too far to justify a journey for a 30 minute interview. One interviewee explained as follows:

I'm quite happy to meet if necessary but I think a phone call would probably do. Don't want to drag you down to xxxx, lovely as it is. I really can't guarantee a time when I will be free to talk during the day. Our timetables are very strict and liable to change every day, especially if someone calls in sick.

Of the 32 responses, despite best efforts, it was not possible to interview seven (three female and four male) of these for various reasons, so 25 interviews took place. The fact that the request to participate in the survey came from the respondents' union was clearly helpful. Many of them were also aware of my previous work on the library service and longstanding relationship with UNISON. For example, one female rep (R20) had been at the conference fringe meeting at which I spoke and emailed to agree to be interviewed, and emphasised the importance of the report I wrote for the campaign (Davies, 2008b):

I was at the UNISON conference and fringe event, I'm more than happy to talk to you about our library service... Thanks again for doing this, the report is being avidly read by other staff now I've brought a few home with me, and it's really making people feel a bit more positive – they're glad to know that more than just the general public actually CARE about them. Most of the time we feel like the people who make decisions and influence policy just don't give a damn (not unreasonably I think).

All of this assisted in gaining the confidence of interviewees, and led to relaxed and open responses. The interviews took place in October and November 2010. Of the 25 interviewed, 18 were female (72%) and seven male (28%). All interviews were recorded, transcribed and coded for analysis.

UNISON reps (and one activist who currently does not hold a rep's position), rather than general members, were chosen for the interview phase because of the greater insight they were likely to possess in relation to the way the union operates within the public library service and the possible implications of the public service ethos. The reps are a key element of the research project for several reasons. As Kelly (1998) recognises in his development of mobilisation theory, workplace leadership ('the critical mass of activists') are hugely important. For most members, they *are* the union; they are the workplace face of the organisation and the initial contact point for information and problem resolution; they are the link between the local membership and both the wider union and the national leadership. But they are also the main point of contact for the national leadership in its dealings with the wider membership (although obviously there is a certain degree of direct contact between union headquarters and individual members). So the reps have key roles as local leaders; workplace organisers; workforce representatives in local negotiations, grievances and disciplinary procedures; and act as a two way transmission belt within the union structure. Consequently their understanding and assessment of the public service ethos was seen as significant.

I am the only individual to have access to the raw data. I conducted and transcribed the interviews myself. The audio files are held on a password protected Cardiff University computer. Hard copies of the interview transcripts are held in a locked filing cabinet.

4.10 Data collection 3: interviews with UNISON paid officers

In order to understand the view of the union centrally, a series of semi-structured interviews were arranged with the key officers involved in the library campaign. Four officers (all female, three from the Local Government Service Group and one from the headquarters Public Policy Unit) were interviewed by telephone in 2012. These were the officers who had essentially planned and run the campaign from the national headquarters. The interviews lasted between 40 and 50 minutes and were recorded, transcribed and coded.

The objective in this set of interviews was to encourage them to review and assess the library campaign - its successes as well as difficulties - and to place it in the context of union policy more generally. I was particularly interested to explore their views of working in alliances internally within the union with the Service Groups and externally with library campaign groups; how the commitment to public service and the public service ethos fitted into this (if at all); what they had learned from the library campaign; and whether this had broader application across the union.

4.11 Data collection 4: the survey of library campaign groups

During the course of the research, a number of campaigns were established in defence of local libraries, as well as some national umbrella groups and campaign organisations which began to pull together the different local campaigns and bring in relevant national organisations (UNISON was one of the prime movers in the creation and support of *Speak Up for Libraries* for example). A sample of library campaign groups, 'Friends' organisations and library user groups was created, based on those groups that had presented written evidence to the 2011/12 Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee Inquiry into Library Closures (House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2012) (see Annex 5). The fact that there was a Select Committee Inquiry is a measure of the scale of concern about library closures and the impact of the various campaigns (including that of UNISON's). Using the fact that they submitted evidence as an indicator of activity, those campaign groups that had an online presence (providing either an email contact address or a web form) were contacted and invited to participate in a short online questionnaire survey exploring their interaction (if any) with UNISON in library campaigns.

Some of those that were listed by the Select Committee did not appear to have an online presence and so could not be contacted, others were contacted but did not respond. There was an additional minor snowball effect as some of the campaign groups alerted other groups to the existence of the survey and these then asked to be a part of it.

An online survey was set up using the Qualtrics⁸ software. The reason for the switch from the BOS software in the online survey of members to the Qualtrics software in the survey of campaign groups was simply that over the period covered, Cardiff University negotiated a

⁸ <https://www.qualtrics.com/>

contract with Qualtrics to use its superior system. The survey took place in 2012. Prospective respondents were emailed a URL and given two weeks in which to complete the survey. The aim of this survey was to explore whether or not UNISON had become involved with these campaign groups, the nature of UNISON's involvement and to examine the assessment that these groups made of this involvement.

The result was 33 responses to the survey. Of these, four were nationally-based campaigns of different types but the rest (29) were local library campaigns. Although this is a relatively small sample, the way that the sample was constructed provides data from some of the most active library campaigns.

Precisely because of the relatively loose nature of these campaign groups, it is difficult to know how representative of the group's views as a whole were those of the person completing the survey. It was usually the secretary of the campaign or other officer. Nevertheless, these accounts provided some indicative data on the campaigns being run at local level in various parts of the country and of the nature of the relationship between these campaigns and UNISON.

4.12 Rationale for choice of research methods

Quantitative research design – the web-based questionnaire

The study uses two different forms of self-administered web-based questionnaire with both closed-ended and open-ended questions for the purposes of gathering data. Each element of this design has a number of (different) strengths. As closed-ended questions have a limited set of answers, this lends itself to statistical analysis and comparison. It also means that – given known limits of error – it is possible to generalise to a larger population (Brewerton and Millward 2001; Fowler 2009). Surveys also provide a useful method of assessing a range of different variables in a standardised way at the same time as controlling for others. It allows the possibility of testing hypotheses about the relationships between the different variables.

One of the main criticisms of this form of quantitative research is that respondents are channelled into preset categories, and the researcher thereby is unable to access potentially valuable subjective views of respondents that could have been accessed by the deployment of

qualitative methods (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2003). To a certain extent this study meets this criticism by the use of the open-ended sections of the questionnaire, but also – and more substantively – through the series of semi-structured interviews outlined in the next section. There is also evidence that online surveys produce a better response to open-ended questions than postal surveys (Bryman, 2008: 653) and as will be clear from the later sections of the thesis, there were very many extensive responses to the open ended questions. This thesis also makes use of word clouds for the presentation of some of the responses to open ended questions. Word clouds, or text clouds, are visual representations of text, weighted by font size or colour. They allow the reader to visualise at a glance the frequency of use of particular words in a given text (or in this case, a series of responses to open ended questions). A very simple form of word cloud is used here, although there is increasing interest among scientists and social scientists in more sophisticated usage (e.g. Weiwei Cui et al, 2010).

Qualitative research design – semi-structured interviews

The sample of volunteers from among UNISON's reps in the public library service is highly relevant to the research objectives of examining the possible use of the public service ethos in the union's campaigning work. By creating such a sample, the study was able to probe reps' opinions and experiences, eliciting 'tacit knowledge and subjective understandings and interpretations' (Marshall and Rossman 2006: 53) of how UNISON's lay activists see the public service ethos and associated issues. The much smaller sample of UNISON paid officers included all the key officers involved in the campaign at headquarters level and so was able to build a picture from several different perspectives informed by their engagement with the campaign.

The use of the semi-structured interview method provides the flexibility to develop lines of inquiry that emerge during the interview and to deviate from the interview schedule in a way that deepens and enriches the data gathered. The use of an interview schedule ensures that the researcher is able to cover all the relevant areas but the flexibility of the form also allows respondents to focus on issues they considered to be of importance and I was able to seek explanations and clarifications where necessary. As May (2001: 120) explains: 'interviews yield rich insights into people's biographies, experiences, opinions, values, aspirations, attitudes and feelings.'

Given the relationship already established between the union and myself, it was possible to very quickly put the respondents at their ease, establish a rapport and engage in a conversational style to develop the interview. However, interviews have a number of important limitations: respondents may not be telling the truth; they may exaggerate or underplay their role in any events that they recount. Therefore interviews cannot be relied upon as a sole source of data but can be an extremely valuable part of a multi-method approach.

Telephone interviews

There are some obvious advantages in using telephone interviews compared with face-to-face interviews – not least the issue of cost and time involved. This is particularly the case with a sample which is very widely geographically dispersed. Although the UNISON reps interviewed were scattered around the country – in the north, south, east and west of England; Scotland and Wales - cost and time were not factors in the choice of telephone interviews in this study. All of the participants were offered a face-to-face interview but all preferred to do the interview over the telephone. All respondents consented to the recording of the interviews. All of the respondents were asked whether they preferred to be interviewed while at work or at home. All but one chose work. In most cases, respondents were able to have sole use of an office for the duration of the interview. None of the interviews suffered from interruptions from the respondents' work colleagues or service users. The relative informality of the interviews and the sense of ease felt by interviewees (stemming from my involvement in the campaign) meant that many of them contributed anecdotes and comments that would have been difficult to obtain through other means.

There are also some limitations to telephone interviews as a research method. Some of the obvious possible drawbacks – the fact that some people might not have access to a telephone or that people with hearing impairments might find it difficult – did not apply as the choice of method was made by the respondent. Nevertheless, Frey's (2004) observation that telephone interviews are unlikely to last longer than 20-25 minutes, was borne out in this study in the case of the UNISON reps. While the longest interview was just under 30 minutes, the average was just over 20 minutes. This was not the case for the UNISON paid officers, where the interviews lasted between 40-50 minutes.

Face-to-face interviews offer the interviewer the opportunity to respond to the body language and facial expressions of respondents, possibly prompting the interviewer to rephrase a difficult question. Clearly this response to observation is not available to the telephone interviewer. Similarly, it became clear fairly early on in the programme of interviews that it is necessary to take extra care in articulation and pronunciation than would probably have been the case with a face-to-face interview - something that was noted by Stephens (2007: 210) in his remarks about telephone interviews with elites.

On the other hand, a telephone interview avoids or reduces some of the potential problems of face-to-face interviews. For example, respondents may tailor their replies to questions in ways they think will meet with the approval of the interviewer, based on their impressions of their personal characteristics. Bryman (2008: 198) argues that:

The remoteness of the interviewer in telephone interviewing removes this potential source of bias to a significant extent.

Given that the respondents in this study are a specialist group, self selected and therefore motivated to participate, is likely to reduce many of the noted possible problems associated with telephone interviewing.

Analysis of the data from the interviews was carried out in the following way. The theories which guided the aims and objectives of the project, together with my own expertise and experience, were used to generate an initial set of categories, which were then used to code the interview data.

These categories were derived from the research questions and can be grouped under three themes. The first concerned whether the public service ethos has survived, and if it has, what it means for workers. The second concerned whether there is a relationship between commitment to the public service ethos and union membership and activism. The third theme concerned the potential for the union in the use of the public service ethos. An iterative process was used, under which the categories were applied to the data and amendments to them were made in accordance with what the data revealed.

Participant observation

I was involved in UNISON's library campaign from a very early stage. It began - with the sort of internal dialogue that Hyman (2007) advocates – with a UNISON library members' seminar in London in October 2007. I attended, made a presentation, took part in group discussions and distributed and collected a short questionnaire seeking information about changes in the library service. We discussed the situation across the country in terms of cuts and closures, conditions and working practices, what sort of campaign was needed and how the research could fit in to the work in the branches and at the workplaces. The informal discussions between sessions were almost as valuable as the formal sessions. Both the short questionnaire returns and the discussions – both formal and informal - were very helpful in identifying key issues within the service and for gaining an understanding of change, perceptions of what this meant from the staff point of view and what union activists at the workplace were doing about it.

This engagement has continued throughout the campaign with regular formal research meetings with UNISON officers, informal discussions with UNISON paid and lay officers, and attendance at various UNISON conferences. I spoke at the *Libraries Big Conversation* in 2008 at the House of Commons where my report for UNISON, *Taking stock: the future of our public library service* (Davies, 2008b) was launched; at the *Love Libraries Conference* organised by UNISON and held at the British Library in February 2010, and at a fringe meeting on libraries at the 2010 UNISON Annual Conference.

4.13 Bibliographic searches

A bibliographic search was conducted in databases including ASSIA, SCOPUS, Sociological Abstracts and Google Scholar. Additional research articles were collected from conference proceedings, books and journal articles as appropriate. A range of search terms were used in the literature searches including public service ethos, PSE, public service motivation, PSM, mobilisation theory, union revitalisation, among others. A total of 954 articles was included in this review. Care was taken to see that a balanced representation of articles was presented.

As well as the relevant academic literature, documentary analysis covered government and parliamentary papers, media reports and documents produced by industry bodies, consultants and trade unions.

4.14 Potential problems

Some of the problems or potential problems in working with unions have been outlined earlier in this chapter. The issue of the 'typicality' of the library service and, therefore, the generalisability of any findings has also been noted earlier. However there are a number of other relevant issues here.

As this is primarily a study of union members, clearly there is no cohort of non-union members with which to compare. This might have been a problem if the only objective was to examine the commitment to the public service ethos of public library service staff. However, this was not the objective, given that the focus is on the relationship between union membership/commitment, the public service ethos and the potential for union mobilisation.

A second potential problem is one of bias. It could be that union members are responding in the way that they think the union would like them to respond. This is a possibility of which I was acutely aware throughout the study. The invitation to participate in the survey was circulated through union channels. However, the fact that the survey responses were not collected or analysed by the union and the anonymity and confidentiality of the survey should go some way to avoiding this problem. Secondly, judging from some of the responses to open-ended questions in the questionnaire and the comments of some interviewees, there was no reluctance to criticise the record or performance of the union.

A further issue is the concept of the public service ethos itself. It can obviously mean different things to different people. In the membership survey, those respondents that agreed that a public service ethos existed were asked to list words or phrases that they associated with the concept in an open-ended question. The text from these answers was then used to construct a wordcloud to graphically illustrate the importance that respondents placed on particular elements of the ethos. The concept was explored further in the interviews with reps.

PART TWO: CHANGE IN THE LIBRARY SERVICE

Chapter Five: The UK public library service

5.1 Introduction

Britain's public library service has served as a 'street corner university' (Broady-Preston and Cox, 2000) and community centre for over 150 years. Cubitt (2006: 581) claims that the 'modern library derives from a vision of public service developed in the 19th century' and since then the public library service has made an essential contribution to the social, educational, cultural and economic well-being of local communities throughout the UK as it evolved from an ad hoc network of local initiatives into a nationwide municipally provided service governed by Act of Parliament. Located in every part of the UK, people in both town and country are able to access new worlds through their local branch as part of the public library service – 'perhaps the most genuinely popular of all cultural institutions' (Frow, 1996: 102).

This chapter examines the public library service to see how it has developed and, in particular, how it has been affected by the last three decades of neoliberal policy of UK governments. This places a review of the current position of the service in the context of its history over the last century and a half as a backdrop to a discussion on the public service ethos among library staff.

Moore (2004) divides this history into four periods, beginning with the passage of the first piece of legislation – the 1850 Public Libraries Act; followed by the years from the beginning of the 20th century until the end of the First World War as the period of early growth; then the consolidation of the service from 1920 until 1964 with the modern public library service coming into being under the Wilson Government. But this fails to highlight the major changes of the last three decades. Therefore, Moore's periodisation is used in this chapter as the basis for a more detailed and updated chronology of the UK public library service, in which its history is divided into two broad periods, with a number of key phases in each.

Birth, growth and development

- 1850-1900: Origins
- 1901-1919: Early growth

- 1920-1964: Consolidation
- 1965-1978: the Golden Years

In decline and under attack

- 1979-1996: 'Malign Neglect'
- 1997-2009: Squaring the circle – a social democratic neoliberalism?
- 2010-date: An existential threat

There are, of course, different segments within these broad time periods, as well as a 'pre-history' before the first legislation. In fact, Moore (2004: 28) argues that the 1850 Public Libraries Act 'was, in many ways, giving legitimacy to provision that had already been made'.

Key features of each of the chronological phases are discussed within the two broad periods. The second period from 1979 is of particular importance in understanding the current attitude of workers within the library service towards the public service ethos, and so is covered in considerably more detail. One of the research questions is about the survival of the public service ethos and so there is an emphasis on the similarities, differences and, especially, the continuities of the three different periods of government (Conservative, Labour, and Coalition) from 1979 to date. In bringing the picture up to date, the next chapter includes a review of the key metrics by which the performance of public libraries is measured.

5.2 Birth, growth and development

1850-1900: Origins

The parliamentary pressure for public libraries legislation came from the radical Liberal MPs William Ewart and Joseph Brotherton, helped by the Chartist Edward Edwards (a former bricklayer who became first librarian of the Manchester Free Library). Just as support for the Act came from the political left, opposition to it came from the political right:

...people have too much knowledge already: it was much easier to manage them twenty years ago; the more education people get the more difficult they are to manage (Conservative MP arguing against the passage of the 1850 Public Libraries Act. Quoted by Lord McIntosh in Lords debate, Hansard, 2004).

Another Conservative MP, Richard Spooner of North Warwickshire warned ominously that 'these libraries might be converted into normal schools of agitation' (Kelly, 1977: 15). As Cubitt (2006: 583) points out:

Early debates on the merits of public libraries focused on the dangers of a literate and well-read population becoming like the French artisans who led the revolution in Paris in 1789 or the large number of print workers who signed the manifesto of the First International.

Hewitt (2000: 62) argues that during the nineteenth century, 'the combined impact of the spread of literacy and the dominance of the voluntary principle brought an unparalleled multiplication of library provision'. He might have added that for working people, the 'voluntary principle' was a matter of necessity in the absence of any provision by the local or national state. The demand for (and provision of) public libraries was often associated with working class organisations like the trade unions. For example, almost thirty years before the Public Libraries Act, the Maryhill Public Library near Glasgow was established and paid for by the miners of Maryhill (Hendry, 1998). The growth in public libraries after 1850 was a small but significant part of the same Victorian public reform programme that saw the beginnings of universal education, school meals and municipal utilities. As Frow (1996: 101) put it:

Public libraries as we know them came into being as part of that massive expansion of state institutions in mid-nineteenth century Europe and North America that also produced the public schooling system, post offices, railways, and public hospitals, and which set an ethos of public service against the monopolistic tendencies of the uncontrolled market.

In fact, Hewitt (2000: 63) claims that before the educational reforms of the 1870s began to have an impact, 'the public library was perhaps the most substantial direct state intervention in the nineteenth-century public sphere'. As Birdi et al (2008: 580) point out: 'Ideologically, the public library service in England [sic] has been regarded as serving the "public good" since its inception.' Although associated with working class 'self-improvement', they were supported by some Victorian industrialists as a counter attraction to the pub for their workers (Kelly, 1977) and also widely used by the middle classes more generally (Black, 1966).

While many industrialists could see the value of a literate and numerate workforce, if only to operate the machinery of the mills and factories, and there were others who saw public libraries

as an extension of citizenship, there were some who drew the line at their taxes paying for reading for pleasure. Opposing the Bill, Tory MP Sir Frederick Banbury, said:

My experience is that public libraries are places where, if the weather is cold, people go in and sit down and get warm, while other people go in to read novels. I do not believe, speaking generally, that public libraries have done any good. On the contrary, they have done a great deal of harm, because the books read, as far as my information goes, are chiefly sensational novels, which do no good to anybody (cited in Kelly, 1977: 216).

The Public Libraries Act 1850 applied only to England and Wales; equivalent Acts were passed for Scotland in 1854 (Osborne, 2008) and Ireland in 1855 (Northern Ireland Assembly, 2007). The original legislation did not direct councils on the setting up of a library service. Rather it *permitted* them to do so within very severe constraints. Responsibility for the decision was located at local level and the national legislation simply allowed councils to provide library services to the public if they chose to do so. However, this was only for local authorities with a population of over 10,000 (this was later reduced to 5,000). Units of local government were much smaller at this time than they are today, so it had a limited potential. The council could 'adopt library powers', but were not committed to actually providing the service and for many there was quite a long delay between adoption and provision of the service.

Although national government did not want any involvement in the service, it placed financial limits on the extent to which councils could spend on a library service. Expenditure was limited to halfpenny rate and the finance raised could only be used for accommodation – nothing was to be spent on either books or staffing. This illustrates the continuing influence of the voluntary principle of Victorian public services in that it was clearly understood that libraries would be staffed by volunteers and books would be donated (Moore, 2004: 28), an approach which has clear parallels with the 'Big Society' thinking of the 2010 Coalition Government. Given the timidity of the legislation and the various hurdles placed in front of councils, the provision of library services did not advance quickly. The 1855 Public Libraries Act removed some of the restrictions, for example raising the expenditure limit to a penny rate. Nevertheless, progress was slow: by 1868 only twenty-seven libraries had been opened (Bowman, 2005) and in the first thirty years of the legislation, just seventy four councils had adopted library powers – mostly in the industrial north and Midlands (Moore, 2004).

Philanthropy continued to play a major part in the early growth of the library service with many councils receiving donations for their library service from two particular benefactors - Andrew Carnegie and Passmore Edwards. The first Carnegie library was opened in Dunfermline in 1883, at which time less than a quarter of the British population had access to a public library service and there were just two libraries in Scotland, one in Wales and one in Ireland (Macdonald, 2011).

1901-1919: Early growth

Moore (2004: 30-31) records that by Carnegie's death in 1919 'more than half the public library authorities in Great Britain had received grants and over 380 public library buildings in the UK as a whole were associated with his name'. By the time the Carnegie UK Trust wound up its work on libraries in 1950, this had increased to 660 (Macdonald, 2011: 2).

The 1919 Public Libraries Act removed the penny limit and also extended the reach of the library service beyond the industrial conurbations to rural areas by allowing counties to become library authorities. Progress was slow and, in some places, non-existent. Where that was the case, local movements grew up – often led by trade unions - and set up their own institutions or lobbied for the creation of municipal ones. In the absence of public service provision by the state, many working class communities and organisations set up their own services. For example, as late as 1934 there were over one hundred miners' libraries in the Welsh coalfields, many of which were part of larger institutes with a wide range of cultural opportunities on offer – from amateur radio to drama, from photography to opera as well as political and trade union education:

The miners' institutes of South Wales were one of the greatest networks of cultural institutions created by working people anywhere in the world (Rose, 2010: 237).

1920-1964: Consolidation

During the 1920s, 57 out of 62 counties adopted the Public Libraries Act, and by 1926, 96.3% of the population of England and Wales was covered by library areas. This did not mean either that these people all had access to a library service or that what services existed were of a high quality (Ellis, 1970).

Unsurprisingly, the library service suffered from the effects of depression and war throughout the period until the end of the Second World War. However, despite slow growth and shortages caused by economic restrictions and wartime rationing of paper, the library service was firmly established and gradually expanded its coverage. Early attempts to codify the level of resources required by libraries were made by the Library Association, recommending that 'a public library required a minimum stock of 250 books per 1,000 population' (Moore, 2004: 33).

The stagnation of the 1930s was followed by the shortages of the 1940s but after the end of the war, reconstruction of the library service became a part of the general recovery of the country's infrastructure. The establishment of the welfare state and improvements in education and health introduced by the post-war Labour Governments affected demand and provision of library services. After the 1958 lifting of building restrictions, a new library building programme, increased spending on books and a growing relationship with schools all assisted in laying the foundations for a modern library service.

1965-1978: the Golden Years

Moore (2004) traces the modern British library to 1965, the year that the 1964 Public Libraries and Museums Act came into force. The new reforming Labour Government brought with it an expectation of change captured in Prime Minister Wilson's phrase about the 'white-heat of technology'. The new Act rested on reports published under the Conservative governments of the late 1950s and early 1960s and illustrates the extent of cross-party consensus over the public library service. The most important of these reports was the Bourdillon Report which systematically set out a series of recommendations for the level of resources required by a public library. These included:

- annual additions to stock should be not less than 250 volumes per thousand population
- at least 90 of the 250 should be adult non-fiction
- one member of staff for every 2,500 population served
- 40 per cent of staff should be qualified librarians
- no one, except in rural areas, should live more than one mile from their nearest library service point.

National averages at the time just about met these targets (although there were wide variations across the country) but this simply illustrates the fact that these were recommended minima to provide a basic service. Obviously an authority that wished to provide a good or excellent service would be expected to exceed these minima.

The Act itself had four key elements: the provision of a 'comprehensive and efficient' public library service became a statutory requirement; the basic lending and reference services should be free at the point of use; In England and Wales the Secretary of State was given responsibility for supervising and promoting the service; and the effective lower residential population limit for a public library authority was set at 40,000. In addition, the Act also required libraries in Wales to take a responsibility for promoting the Welsh language and culture (De Almeida, 1997: 145).

The impact of the Act was such that Moore (2004: 41) describes the decade that followed as 'the golden age of public libraries in Britain'. A massive infusion of resources took place - in England for example, councils increased library spending by over 50% in real terms, staff grew by 40%, training provision for professional librarianship expanded, book stock increased, and there was an increase of almost 60% in the number of libraries open for more than ten hours a week. Within this picture of general growth there was also a greater diversification of services with an expansion of children's and reference library services (especially technical and commercial information services); better school support, particularly in the rural areas; the widespread availability of sound recordings collections and the establishment of programmes of extension activities.

This 'golden age' was soon brought to a halt by economic crisis, with first an end to expenditure growth followed by actual cuts. Economic problems exacerbated by the oil price rises of the mid 1970s saw governments of both major parties look to public expenditure restraint.

5.3 In decline and under attack

1979-1996: 'Malign Neglect'

In its final years, the Labour Government elected in 1974 introduced some public spending cuts but the election of Mrs Thatcher's Conservatives in 1979 changed everything. Instead of being

a reluctant response to temporary economic problems, cutting public expenditure became a matter of principle. At first, local authorities found it easier to make cuts quickly by cutting back on books and materials rather than on staff, and authorities also hoped that the cuts would be reversed and therefore were reluctant to lose staff (engaging in 'labour hoarding'). In the meantime an effort was made to keep the recently expanded range of service points open, even though there was reduced expenditure. However, natural wastage through retirements and staff leaving meant that staff numbers dropped as posts were left unfilled. Books were replaced less often meaning that their condition deteriorated. Service points declined slightly but opening hours declined markedly.

During the 1980s and 1990s, under what Hendry (2000: 442) calls the 'malign neglect' of the Conservatives, the service first stagnated, then declined. The proportion and number of qualified staff fell as a cheaper skills mix was adopted by many authorities. Loans began to fall, raising the average cost of borrowing. The 1990s saw the beginnings of major decline. Expenditure on materials fell and the number of books bought dropped. This resulted in the rate of additions per 1,000 population plummeting to 184 which Moore (2004: 46) describes as 'quite possibly the lowest rate in the post-war period and well below the Bourdillon standard of 250 additions per thousand population.' Overall spending in real terms fell by over 10%, with books and other materials carrying a disproportionate share of the cut of over 25% (Moore, 2004: 45).

In an effort to counterbalance the effect of reduced expenditure, libraries bought more paperbacks, a short term solution to a longer term problem. For the very first time the number of books in stock in the public library service actually fell. The number of visits to libraries, the number of staff overall, the number of professional staff, the proportion of professional staff to all staff, the number of loans and the average number of books borrowed per person all fell during the 1990s.

The current debate on increased marketisation and involvement of the private sector is not new. Over the last thirty years it has periodically reappeared, usually because of financial cutbacks. Much of what New Labour considered was discussed earlier by the Conservatives and now again by the Coalition. For example, over twenty years ago the Office of Arts and Libraries (1988), published a Green Paper which examined four questions related to financing the library service: whether library authorities should be given wider powers to charge for some services;

how public-private joint ventures could be encouraged; whether there should be further moves towards the contracting-out of all or parts of library services; and what action was required to correct the anomalies and inconsistencies in the power of library authorities to levy charges. The law on charges was amended but there was no large scale shift to private sector provision.

The Conservative government's White Paper, *Competing for Quality* (HM Treasury, 1991) boosted the drive to contracting out public services and the library service came under the spotlight like many others. It recommended the extension of Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) to the library service and in 1992 the Department of National Heritage (DNH) commissioned consultants KPMG to produce a report (DNH, 1994; 1995) on the introduction of CCT to public libraries. KPMG found that although CCT was feasible in the library service, it was unlikely to produce either cost savings or service quality improvements (Hendry, 2000: 443).

KPMG found that there was a strong case for library service provision to remain essentially within the public sector and that there was no natural market for alternative providers (Grimwood-Jones, 1996). Experience at the time was also generally negative, even from those local authorities that favoured contracting out library services. When Westminster first attempted to contract out its stock services, it received no bids at all (ibid). It made two further unsuccessful efforts to contract out (Ball et al, 2002: 12).

Despite this, just before the 1997 election, DNH produced its report on the broader issues facing the library service and among a long list of recommendations were several that are almost identical to those favoured by the current government. It suggested that libraries improve value for money:

by contracting out and development of library trusts; by raising sponsorship from the private sector and applying for National Lottery and EU funds 'where they can' (Hendry, 2000: 443).

1997-2009: Squaring the circle – a social democratic neoliberalism?

In 1997, the year that the New Labour government was elected, UNISON (1997, cited in Hendry, 2000: 442) published a report with the Local Government Information Unit and the Library Campaign, which commented:

Many parts of the free public library service feel increasingly caught in a twilight world where the cumulative effects of cuts has led to an unbreakable cycle of reduced opening hours and fewer branches, fewer book issues and reduced usage. The library service feels that local authorities see themselves as being in a position of having an obligation to provide a statutory service but without the necessary means.

Because of the long term nature of the impact of decisions over expenditure, building, staffing, training and so on in the library service, the problems that began in the 1970s were only fully revealed as a crisis in the 1990s. Despite this, in 2002 the Audit Commission (2002b: 14) described the library service as 'one of the most valued and high profile services that councils provide'. Yet the Commission also said that it was 'a service under pressure' (ibid) and the House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee described public libraries as a 'service in distress' (2005a: 14).

The root of this 'distress' lay in the fact that for almost twenty years - between 1979 and 1997 - library services, like other parts of local government, faced growing problems as Conservative governments turned to cuts in public spending, commercialisation and privatisation. The service survived two decades of 'malign neglect' (Hendry, 2000: 442) under the Conservatives and library staff expected to see a new approach as well as new money under New Labour. Unfortunately, while public services did see an increase in funding, much else of what followed was a repetition of some of the tired and failed ideas of the previous administration – in terms of commercialisation and contracting out. Hall (2012: 17-18) goes so far as to declare that New Labour

abandoned Labour's historic agenda and set about reconstructing social democracy as 'the best shell' for a New Labour variant of neoliberalism.

Confounding the expectations of many of its supporters, New Labour's public sector reform, in many respects, continued and deepened the policies introduced under the Conservatives (this

is well illustrated by the government-commissioned PricewaterhouseCoopers report on the library service that is analysed in some detail later). The increased role of the private sector (and to a growing degree the voluntary sector) as a provider of services; the purchaser-provider split and the introduction of internal markets within public services; and latterly the squeeze on public spending were all too familiar to public service workers in general and library staff in particular.

This went hand in hand with ever greater demands on the library service. Although it is true that, to a certain extent at least, libraries have always been about more than just books, they faced ever greater pressure from government and users to provide a range of different services and to meet a variety of different objectives. Chris Smith MP (then Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport) noted that:

Libraries contribute to four of this Government's most important policy objectives. They underpin education, providing essential support for school children, students, and lifelong learners; they enhance public access to the world's storehouse of knowledge and information; they promote social inclusion, by helping to bridge the gap between those who can afford access to information and those who can't; and, increasingly, they have a role to play in the modernisation and delivery of public services (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, DCMS, 1998: 1).

The tension at the creation of the UK public library service between the democratisation of knowledge and intellectual emancipation on the one hand and its use as a form of social control and economic investment on the other, remains today. For example, the People's Network⁹ allowing universal access to the internet through libraries was portrayed as a modern democratic reform and part of the Labour Government's social inclusion programme but Goulding (2001: 3) argued that the purpose of such ICT investment is economic – upskilling British workers, and assisting UK business to compete in the global economy.

Research evidence suggests that libraries do a good job in meeting the varied demands placed upon them, particularly in certain areas like adult education (Ashcroft et al, 2007). It also suggests that 'the record of UK public libraries in serving users across a wide socioeconomic

⁹ The People's Network was set up to provide ICT learning facilities in all UK libraries and to train library staff in ICT skills. It was funded with £120 million from the New Opportunities Fund and managed by the MLA. In 1999 the MLA also received a donation of £2.5 million from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation for IT learning centres in public libraries. The People's Network means that all public libraries are now able to provide internet access and online services with trained library staff available (Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2005a: 34).

spectrum is already good' (Hawkins et al 2001: 258). The then Minister for Libraries, David Lammy MP (2006), emphasised that:

... libraries are not just about books. They never have been. And the digital resources at our disposal today have broadened immeasurably the kind of public services that they can provide.

The Commons Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee's view was:

We are in no doubt that, while libraries are about more than books (and newspapers and journals), these traditional materials must be the bedrock upon which the library services rest no matter how the institution is refreshed or re-branded in the light of local consultation (House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2005a: 18).

The PricewaterhouseCoopers proposals – prelude to the Coalition?

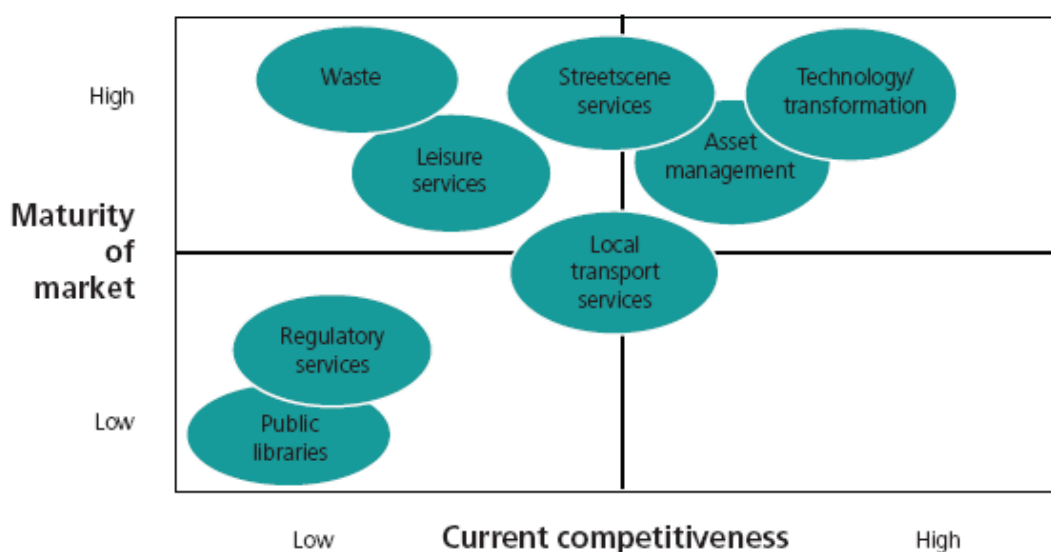
Much of the Coalition Government's focus on markets and competition in the provision of public services was foreshadowed by the last Labour Government. In 2006 the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) published its White Paper, *Strong and prosperous communities* (DCLG, 2006a). At the same time it published a commissioned report from PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) on *Developing the local government services market to support a long-term strategy for local government* (DCLG, 2006b). The then Minister for Local Government, Phil Woolas, said that the timing was 'no coincidence' as 'it is an essential companion report' (DCLG, 2006b: 3) to the White Paper. As part of the commission for the overall report, PricewaterhouseCoopers also produced a series of service-specific working papers, one of which was on *New ways of working and new models of provision within the public library service* (DCLG, 2007a). Although these publications refer specifically to the public library service in England, they inevitably have an impact to a certain degree in the devolved administrations because of the sheer size and influence of the English service.

The authors of the main PwC report were particularly exercised about what they saw as the failure to create markets in particular services and thus sufficient competitive pressure to drive up efficiencies. They took it for granted that competition would lead to higher quality service and asserted that the key drivers for improved competition in the library service were:

Challenging the current pattern of service delivery by introducing a range of alternative providers, expertise, and new ways of working for different parts of the service, maximising resources on frontline delivery and making the services much more responsive to users (and non-users) (DCLG, 2006b: 86).

The libraries paper (DCLG, 2007a: 3) summarised one of its goals as considering ‘the potential for the introduction of new models of service delivery’.

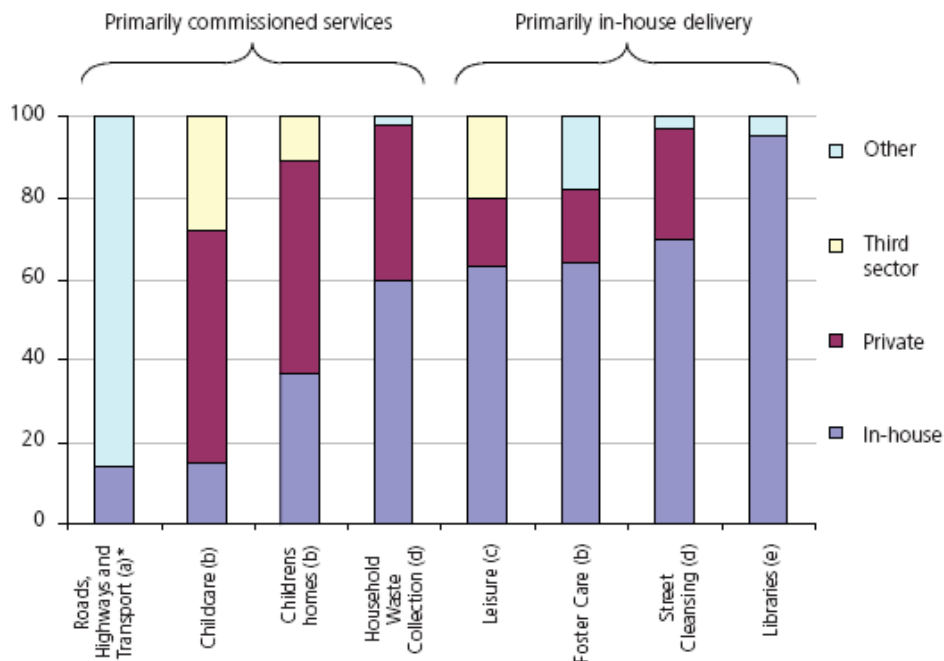
Figure 5a: Competitiveness and maturity of key local government market sectors



Source: DCLG (2006b: 85)

In contrasting the different levels of competition in selected local government services, PwC (DCLG, 2006b) highlighted the public library service (see Figure 5a above), firmly designating libraries as a service in a market with low maturity and low current competitiveness, which the authors believed was self-evidently a bad thing. Not only that, it therefore represents a tempting market opportunity with a potential £1 billion budget. As Figure 5a illustrates, PwC contrasted library services unfavourably with other council-funded services – such as waste, local transport and technology/transformation - that operated in ‘mature markets’ and/or in markets with high levels of competitiveness. No data was provided about the quality of service or level of user satisfaction in relation to these outsourced services.

Figure 5b: Overall trends in procurement expenditure in local government



Source: DCLG (2006b: 32)

Figure 5b illustrates the degree of outsourcing for a range of different local authority services. The overwhelming dominance of in-house provision in library services was noted but not explained by PwC – other than as some kind of oversight. The circular rationalization for this situation given by PwC was that because pressures to outsource library services core delivery functions ‘have historically been absent’ (DCLG, 2006b: 33), even during the CCT period, there has been no development of an outsourced market for this service. The extent of this ‘failure’ can be seen in Figure 5b in contrast with the relative ‘success’ of childcare, children’s homes and household waste collection.

PwC identified a series of ‘key challenges’ facing the sector. These fell into two categories. The first included the fragmented nature of the sector in terms of policy, funding and delivery which they argued ‘makes strategic change difficult to plan and execute’ (DCLG, 2006b: 54); financial pressure; a ‘lengthy and fragmented supply chain for book procurement’ (ibid); a limited use of technology in delivery; and ‘the need’ to tackle the performance gap between the highest and lowest performers in the service. Whether all of these are really ‘challenges’ or simply PwC’s policy prescriptions is perhaps debatable.

What is indisputable is that the second group of 'key challenges' was actually a political manifesto for cuts and the commercialisation and privatisation of the sector dressed up as technocratic observations. These include PwC's claim (DCLG, 2006b: 54) that the challenges included a 'need to consider the implications for current delivery models of the changing role for library services', as was the fact there were 'limited examples of alternative delivery models and sources of supply'; support and engagement is needed for (some) library authorities and the private and third sectors so as 'to develop propositions for the new ways of delivering the library service'; and the need to 'consider the future role of branch/community libraries' given the liabilities associated with them and the 'need' to generate savings.

Amidst the over-excited management-babble about changing focus, new perspectives, shifts in mindset, radical new thinking on delivery vehicles for 'policy outcomes for local communities' (DCLG, 2006b: 54), they disparagingly dismissed 'traditional "bricks and mortar" library services' (ibid), by which they presumably meant books. No hard data were provided to support the policy proposals outlined in either the main PwC report or their library service working paper. In fact, although the library paper recommended that policymakers consider how to begin a new discussion on alternative models and identify private and voluntary sector organisations that could deliver such an alternative, there was precious little evidence in either paper that this would have a positive impact on the library service. PwC conceded that there are only 'a few recent examples of externalization such as in the London Borough of Haringey' (DCLG, 2006b: 53). Despite this, they made the unsubstantiated claim that

evidence from a variety of market sectors, for example libraries and regulatory services, is that trading and franchising deals involving high-performing services have the potential to increase the overall capacity and capability across these sectors and may bring other benefits as well (DCLG, 2006b: 60).

In 2002 Ball and Earl (2002: 197) claimed that the 'environment is substantially different now from 1995' when KPMG reported to the Government. They argued that attitudes have changed and a market has been built up as libraries, museums and archives have increasingly contracted out various functions. They included a range of library-specific functions, including: the recovery of library books from defaulters; the provision of mobile services by one authority for another; the outsourcing of the supply and operation of transport, usually as part of an authority-wide process; micro-franchising, i.e. the operation and management of a branch library by a lesser authority (e.g. a parish council taking responsibility under a formal

agreement for the operation of a small library); the delivery of the house-bound service being undertaken as part of a contract for the delivery of home meals; the outsourcing of call centres, including a library telephone enquiry service, and the outsourcing of business information services.

Some of these are relatively marginal to the work of the library service, and no details about the extent of such contracting out were provided. In addition they conceded that they could not find a single example 'of whole-service outsourcing to a commercial supplier' (Ball and Earl, 2002: 199) – although Instant Library did briefly run Haringey Library Service - and only one example of a whole service outsourced to a Trust (Hounslow, although the council subsequently dropped CIP, the not for profit provider). Ball and Earl (2002) referred to the existence of a variety of different co-operative arrangements between library authorities and distinguished these from contracting out but noted that such co-operation could be threatened by the implementation of contracting out because of the impact of commercial pressures. They also felt that the development of arm's-length delivery systems had the potential to cause problems through the loss of control of the service. They expressed concern about diminution of service and at the volatility in the commercial sector and noted that at the time of writing, there was 'considerable turbulence in the book and serials supply markets' (Ball and Earl, 2002: 205). Perhaps most importantly given the claims made for contracting out, they agreed with the earlier DNH report that the 'prospect of significant reduction in cost is limited' (ibid).

In a report for *Resource*, Ball and colleagues (2002) identified a series of potential problems and questions associated with contracting out a library service: the threat to staff in terms of professionalism and job quality as well as job security; the danger of undermining inter library co-operation; uncertainty about what happens if the contractor goes bust; an over-dependence on the supplier and of being locked in to a contract; lack of influence on supplier service levels and a loss of control over products and services; length of time required to getting the contract right; the abandonment of specific capabilities to the supplier which reduces the capacity for innovation and the development of new products and services; a general loss of learning opportunities; a diminished ability to respond rapidly to change through the loss of expertise; potential disputes over ownership of the physical infrastructure; privacy requirements; possible conflicts of interest; and uncertainty over whether the contractor would fit in with other local authority objectives like equal opportunities, access, equity, regeneration and lifelong learning.

An American project which examined a series of case studies of the outsourcing of public library management was also unenthusiastic. It found that claims related to achieving gains in efficiency and improved citizen use and satisfaction are 'somewhat questionable' (Ward, 2007: 646) and Ball et al (2002: 11) reported that in 'the USA federal libraries are actually reversing some of the drastic outsourcing decisions implemented in the 1980s.'

PwC (DCLG, 2007a: 10) divide the library service into four areas, and suggest that this provides 'a useful way to structure future discussion about the suitability of new delivery models, new ways of working and alternative providers': the core library service, with associated management and branding; the library 'back office', book purchasing, support services and finance; the library property portfolio; community functions, including links to lifelong learning, community support and wider service information

Fragmentation, compartmentalisation and commercialisation of services, separating 'core' from 'non-core' functions has been a key element of NPM thinking since the influential work of Osborne and Gaebler (1992), and is associated with preparations for privatisation. It is related to the notion that the public sector should 'steer not row', commissioning rather than delivering services.

That this is at the heart of PwC's thinking is revealed by a passing reference that the library service has missed out on the wider trend in public services for a 'mixed economy of delivery' (DCLG, 2007a: 12) – public, private and voluntary sectors – and thereby also missed out on the 'stimulus to make best use of scarce resources, leveraging capacity and innovation' (ibid) that PwC asserts is associated with such 'mixed' provision.

PwC (DCLG, 2007a: 13) conceded that the marketisation of library services is 'viewed with scepticism by stakeholders within the practitioner community', by which they presumably meant library staff. They suggested that this could be because it is an untried concept and that a market might imply a focus on private sector providers. In an attempt to reassure staff they suggested that there could be a variety of options (such as syndication, franchising, trading and other forms of joint working) that would involve local authority providers as well as possible involvement for private and voluntary sector providers.

However, joint working with other local authorities could very easily lead to private sector contracting out. PwC note that one of the disincentives to potential alternative providers is the fragmented nature of the potential market – that is, the large number of library authorities. The introduction of joint working and the amalgamation of functions across authorities could remove, or diminish, that obstacle and increase the value of individual contracts and potential margins for possible contracting out at a later stage.

PwC provide three new models of library service provision to be considered along with the proposals for integrated stock procurement and supply chain management in two related MLA (Museums, Libraries and Archives Council) reports (2005; 2006), one of which was also produced by PwC: joint working, inter-authority ‘trading’ and shared services; an increased contribution from the private or voluntary sector in service delivery; increasing neighbourhood ownership and/or management of local branch libraries

PwC convened a roundtable discussion of interested parties (government bodies, local authorities, librarian organisations and private companies) to discuss these proposals. They report that the roundtable identified three risks in arrangements in which one local authority supplies part or all of the library service to another or others. The first is that there is no evidence about the effectiveness of such models; secondly it might actually reduce managerial capacity in the sector rather than enhance it; and third, the ‘local’ nature of the library service makes it an unsuitable candidate for transfer from one authority to another (or from an authority to another body).

PwC made the telling point that these various forms of joint working (syndication, franchising etc) may be useful in overcoming initial resistance to change, with the implication that contracting out to the private sector could follow:

Importantly, such models may also prove a useful way to challenge existing orthodoxies in relation to ways of delivering public library services; they might represent the ‘acceptable face’ of new methods of service management and delivery (DCLG, 2007a: 18).

In examining the possible involvement of the private sector in delivering services, PwC (DCLG, 2007a: 23) suggested that potential candidates might come from: high street book retailers and supermarkets; publishers and wholesalers; professional support & managed service providers;

or specialist information providers. Those who wish to see outsourcing and the private provision of library services often claim that private sector retail outlets like bookshops provide essentially the same kind of service and that libraries have a lot to learn from them. Very rarely is any reference made to the serious commercial difficulties that most bookshops are facing. The success of Amazon and, more widely, online sales, has had a major impact on bookshops (Flood, 2011) and the economic downturn has affected printed book sales with concern that expanded e-books sales have not compensated for this fall. The Publishers Association (2012: 1) reported that the 'invoiced value of UK publisher sales of books fell 2% in 2011 to £3.2bn with a 5% decrease in physical book sales outweighing a 54% increase in digital sales'. UK publishers' volume sales to both the home and export markets also fell by 5% and consumer spending on books dropped in both 2010 and 2011 (ibid).

PwC (DCLG, 2007a: 24) proposed a range of different delivery models that could be applied to one or other of the four elements of the current library service (as identified earlier). They claimed these had a number of potential benefits (based on experience in other public services, although not a single reference to any data was provided). Benefits claimed were: innovative thinking and creativity in service delivery models, given that much of the value-added element of the public library service is analogous to working practices in the retail sector; additional working capital to modernise services and infrastructure, as has been seen elsewhere in local government; and more efficient back-office processes, for example in relation to stock management and procurement.

PwC (DCLG, 2007a: 25) reported that the roundtable response was unenthusiastic about increasing the involvement of the private sector, and the paper highlights four 'key issues' that the roundtable members identified as militating against such involvement. First, the attractiveness of the libraries sector to potential private sector suppliers was disputed. Secondly, there was concern about the extent to which the private sector would be able, and interested in, supplying services beyond back office 'routine' functions. Third, there was disagreement over the suitability of using the private sector to supply services that are closely linked to the community and strategic 'core' of local government. Finally, many felt that there were risks to the neutrality of public space and cultural space, presented by greater involvement of private sector 'brands' in the provision of services, particularly in the case of co-location or direct delivery by 'blue chip' high street retailers and supermarkets.

The PwC paper also discusses the option of voluntary sector provision, particularly through the vehicle of mutual trusts. Although there were few library trusts at the time, there were already many operating in leisure services. Some take the legal form of an industrial and provident society (IPS) while others are companies limited by guarantee (CLG). There are problems with the Trust option as was found out in Scotland due to the lack of clarity over the law – in particular the statutory duty of local authorities to provide library services. PwC point out that one of the financial advantages that trusts have is preferential treatment on business rates and VAT, although income (and therefore VAT) is less of an important factor in the library service. Therefore, they suggest broadening the responsibilities of a trust so that it includes leisure, libraries and museums. However they add a note of caution. Echoing the concerns of the CBI (2006), they say (DCLG, 2007a: 27) that a number of factors including the preferential tax treatment received by trusts means that ‘the use of trust status has created a significant entry barrier to further private sector investment in the UK leisure market’.

The other option considered is that of ‘increasing community ownership and management’ (DCLG, 2007a: 27). The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) identified this as a cause of concern to be examined in the Conway Report (2008) because of the danger of reduced accountability and the creation of a possible two tier service. This section of the PwC paper is vague but identifies three different possibilities with variations in the degree of transfer of day to day management control. One option was for community groups to temporarily host libraries – using volunteers and/or library staff to reach out to specific communities of interest such as ethnic minority groups and other hard-to-reach groups. The second suggestion was for community groups to establish new libraries which function as part of the overall service, perhaps in new settings for the service in terms of physical presence in the community, but also alongside other community functions (and not just ‘public services’). The third option was for community groups to ‘take over’ the day-to-day management of individual libraries, again functioning as part of the overall service (DCLG, 2007a: 28). The influence of these ideas on the current Coalition government’s approach is clear.

The authors admitted that there are risks of further fragmenting the library service when there are already concerns about variations in the standard of service. As Conway (2008: 17) observes, this could result in ‘a parallel public library service to some communities.’ There are difficulties in securing the involvement of a genuinely representative cross section of library users when they do not necessarily live in the same area as the library itself. Also there are

potential threats to local democratic accountability. Finally, transfer of assets and responsibilities is not straightforward (Conway, 2008: 17). Not only are there complicated legal and personnel questions, but there are also issues about the relationship with the local council, eligibility for financial support and sustainability. Library users in some parts of the country may face the Hobson's choice of a library branch run by volunteers and local parishes (with all of the potential problems associated with that) or seeing another branch closure.

Having outlined the three options above (of which PwC clearly favoured the increased use of the private sector) the authors of the paper discussed how the library service should take the debate forward. They explained that these options should be seen within the context of DCLG's *local:vision*, especially the emphasis on user focus, partnership working, efficiency and new models of delivery. PwC approvingly quoted the Lyons report's exhortation that local authorities must go beyond their narrowly defined service responsibilities in order to take on a place-shaping role and a wider 'responsibility for the well-being of an area and its communities' (Lyons Inquiry into Local Government, 2006: 8). Predictably, they interpreted this in a very particular way, claiming:

This also potentially marks an important shift from the predominant focus on delivery, to a focus on strategic commissioning (DCLG, 2007a: 32).

Needless to say, it is assumed that this would improve services. However tucked away in the middle of this evidence-free landscape were proposals that would effectively abolish the library service, such as the authors' suggestion:

For the library service this provides opportunities to adopt an alternative perspective focused on the optimum way of commissioning lifelong learning and other community outcomes, rather than traditional 'bricks and mortar' library services (DCLG, 2007a: 32).

The PwC paper (DCLG: 2007a: 3) urged

moving the debate forward from one focused on what to deliver, to initiatives tackling how to deliver new objectives and new services.

But this assumes that it is possible to separate the purpose of a library from the service it delivers and the way in which it does so. In fact they are inextricably linked. And it appears that this remains a widespread view. Library historian Alistair Black and Melvyn Crann (2002: 152)

argue that 'the general public views the public library less as a site of commercial exchange than as a neutral, democratic territory' - a citizen's approach rather than that of a consumer.

Nevertheless, the entire PwC document is filled with assertions about how services could be improved under 'alternative', i.e. private delivery models. Admittedly these assertions are padded with a whole thesaurus of conditional language (the paper uses the word 'potential' on 64 separate occasions, 'option' 41, 'may' 40, 'could' 22, 'might' 21 and 'possible' 9). Almost all of the routes to improved services identified by PwC lead to considering new modes of delivery, developing new methods of delivery, using new vehicles of delivery - all of which appear to mean private sector delivery of one or more elements of the library service (in other words, partial or full privatisation).

It is impossible to miss the connections between the PwC proposals and the Big Society options for shrinking the state put forward by the Coalition with the emphasis on mutuals, private sector provision, local community provision, and the use of volunteers in the provision of public services.

2010-date: An existential threat

The economic crisis brought on with the financial collapse of 2007- 08 and the response to it of the Coalition Government that took office in 2010 has produced a new level of threat to the library service as the deepest cuts in local government spending for generations hit home. Some cash strapped councils see libraries as a soft target for cuts (Topping and Page, 2011), so it has never been more true that '...in the UK at least, the public library is a service that constantly has to defend its right to exist' (McMenemy, 2007a: 273). In March 2011, CILIP, the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (the professional librarians' body), estimated 'that over 600 libraries in England could close' (CILIP, 2011) as a result of the cuts – obviously libraries in the devolved administrations are also at risk.

Proponents of library cuts focus on a narrative of decline but this needs to be placed in perspective. The library service continues to be used by millions of people, offering access to books and other reading material, reference and local studies services, online access, children's services, involvement in adult education and wider literacy initiatives like its lead role in the 2008 National Year of Reading. In 2010-11 there were 314.5 million visits to over 4,500

public libraries; 114.7 million visits to public library websites; over 300 million book issues from a total stock of over 98 million books; 24.5 million audio, visual and electronic issues; with just under 12 million 'active' borrowers¹⁰ (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, CIPFA, 2011c).

There have been warnings about the library service spreading itself too thinly (House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2005b: Ev 2) and these are partly based on the fact that during the period of the last Labour government, while book funds were in decline, money spent on ICT increased. Undoubtedly questions of balance need to be addressed but perhaps the real issue is the overall funding of the service. That was an issue even before the current financial crisis. Today, the library service faces an almost existential challenge in the light of the Coalition's public spending cuts.

5.4 Discussion

This chapter aimed to place the current position of the UK public library service in its historical context. It illustrates the development and decline of the service and shows the concerted attack on the PSE represented by the three decades long embrace of neoliberalism in public sector reform that covers three different governmental periods – Conservatives from 1979-1997; Labour from 1997 to 2010; and Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition from 2010 to date.

It illustrates very clearly the breakdown of the post-war consensus on public services within one specific service, and furthermore, shows the creation of a very different neoliberal consensus since the 1980s.

In reviewing the impact of government policy over this period, the chapter examines in some detail the thinking behind the policy prescriptions. It analyses the influential PwC report commissioned by the last Labour government – a report that is effectively being implemented by the Coalition. That report presaged the current government's focus on the market and its desire for the introduction of private sector providers.

¹⁰ CIPFA defines an active borrower 'as someone who has borrowed at least one item from the library during the year' (CIPFA, 2011c: 126).

The historical review of the public library service helps to understand the deep roots of the public service ethos within the libraries workforce, and the scale of the threat to it given the undermining of the public service employment bargain that some argue sustained the ethos. The next chapter continues this with an examination of the metrics used to measure the value of the public library service in the context of the period of public sector reform.

Chapter Six: Measuring a public good – development and decline in the language of metrics

6.1 Introduction

The notion of the library as a public good (Birdi et al 2008; Hendry 1998; Johnson, 2010; Sheppard, 2009) has frequently bumped up against the metrics routinely used to measure the success or failure of the public library service. Over the last three decades of public service reform this has increasingly become an issue as much of the public sector has moved over to market measures or proxy measures for the market. This is important for any discussion about the public service ethos because, as is clear from the data that follows in later chapters, many library staff believe that the current government thinking on the library service is an example of ‘the expansion of markets, and of market values, into spheres of life where they don’t belong’ (Sandel, 2012: 7).

This chapter follows on from the previous one with an examination of the governance of libraries and a review of the key metrics by which the performance of public libraries is measured.

6.2 Governance and funding

The administration and funding of public libraries in the UK is not a straightforward issue. The library service is essentially a local government service (except in Northern Ireland where, since 2009, there is a regional public body responsible, the Northern Ireland Library Authority - known as Libraries NI) and there are 206 library authorities in the UK (see Table 6a). Within local authorities, libraries often come within the broader remit of Leisure and Culture. Conway (2008: 12) notes that library services are increasingly, though not always, grouped with Adult Services or even within a wider brief including economic development, environmental services, regulatory services as well as leisure and culture. Conway (2008: 19) argues that while there is ‘a high degree of natural coherence’ in placing the library service within a Culture/Leisure/Community Services Directorate, there are problems in placing it within a much broader service grouping that includes a focus on Adult Social Care.

Table 6a: Distribution of UK Library Authorities

Geographical unit	Number of authorities	Number of service points* (of which, mobile libraries)
England	151	3,469 (350)
Scotland	32	619 (74)
Wales	22	378 (52)
Northern Ireland	1	126 (27)
Total	206	4,592 (503)

* Service points includes both static libraries (buildings housing central or branch libraries) and mobile libraries.

Source: CIPFA, 2011c

The 1964 Act applies to England and Wales only (Scotland and Northern Ireland have separate arrangements that predate devolution). The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport exercises authority under the Act for England; in Wales, this authority is devolved to Welsh Government Ministers. Policy, funding and oversight are distributed among different government bodies. As well as the local authorities within which library services are located, in England the other arms of government involved include the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), the Department for Education (DfE), and Arts Council England (ACE). The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) was abolished by the Coalition Government in October 2011 and its libraries responsibilities transferred to ACE with a budget of £3 million compared with the £13 million that the MLA enjoyed. This transfer took place despite the opposition of the House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee (2011a: 40):

We are concerned that the Arts Council does not have the expertise or the resources to carry on, adequately, the functions of the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council. We welcome the Arts Council's commitment to retain key MLA staff. However, given the reductions the Arts Council is having to make in its own operating costs, it is unrealistic to expect that the Arts Council can carry out the role as effectively as the MLA. We recommend that the Government review the Arts Council's museum and library functions and consults libraries and museums in 2012.

The Chair of Arts Council England, offered these comments to the Select Committee on the changes:

The funding that comes through us for libraries is minute - I am only just coming to grips with libraries, but it does seem to me that the disposition of the responsibility for libraries is weird. There's a statutory responsibility in the Department, then it's all devolved with a legal responsibility to local government. We have a small sum of money, about £3 million, to do something with the libraries. We clearly can't run libraries on that basis. We can only do something to try to enhance the value and the activity that happens with the libraries (House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2011b: Ev 125).

The devolved administrations of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have their own equivalents responsible for policy and funding. DCMS and equivalents set policy, standards and have responsibility for the library service but no direct executive authority over library services. Funding comes through the Revenue Support Grant for local authorities via DCLG and equivalents, but they do not set the goals of the library service. DfE has financed programmes in libraries (as has the National Lottery) and has a direct interest in the library service through initiatives like the National Literacy Strategy and the National Year of Reading programme. However, it does not have much influence over the library network as a whole. In England, the Advisory Council on Libraries provides advice to the Secretary of State.

ACE describes itself as now having the role of 'the development agency for the library sector' (ACE, 2012), operates under a Royal Charter and takes funding decisions at arm's length (independently of, following guidance) from Government. It is funded by the Government through DCMS and is also the body responsible for administering National Lottery arts support. The equivalent Scottish organisations are the Scottish Museums Council, the Scottish Library and Information Council, and the Scottish Archives Council. Wales has CyMAL: Museums Archives and Libraries Wales, a policy division of the Welsh Assembly Government. In Northern Ireland the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure carries out this function. There is also a joint forum bringing together all of these bodies across the UK. The Audit Commission examines value for money issues in the library service in England. This role is carried out by the Wales Audit Office, Audit Scotland and the Northern Ireland Audit Office for the devolved administrations. The fragmented nature of the sector (DCMS, 2005a: 8) is recognised as a problem, and is a legacy of the key piece of modern legislation – the 1964 Public Libraries and Museums Act - which requires local authorities

to employ such officers, to provide and maintain such buildings and equipment, and such books and other materials, and to do such other things, as may be requisite.
[Section 7]

In order to fulfil its duties and comply with the Act to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' service, a library authority is obliged to keep adequate stocks of books, other printed matter, pictures, records, films and other materials in sufficient number, range and quality to meet the public's requirements and the special needs of adults and children [Section 7(2)(a)]. In addition, library authorities are required to encourage and advise adults and children to maximise the use made of the services [Section 7(2) (b)].

Section 10 of the Act allows for central government action if library authorities default in their obligations to the public. However, this power is rarely used, partly because it clashes with the notion of the library service being a local service and therefore the responsibility of locally elected representatives. The then Secretary of State told the House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee (2005a: 23):

I simply do not have the levers to compel local authorities to...observe [library standards]. This is arguably an area where one thrust of policy in relation to local authorities—to free them up from a lot of red tape and the targets and the centrally determined obligations that have been the source of controversy—swims against the policy of my department exercising leverage in relation to libraries.

Conway (2008: 11) claims that local authorities are well aware of this unwillingness to intervene and 'know it is most unlikely any real action will be taken by DCMS as a consequence of a reduction in service standards.' However, the Secretary of State did intervene in 2009 and ordered a local inquiry into the library service provided by Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council. The inquiry was held under section 10(1) of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 to gather information to help decide whether the council's planned cuts in their library service were consistent with their statutory duty to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' service. With the publication of the Inquiry Report (DCMS, 2009), the council withdrew its programme of closures.

6.3 Measuring value and quality

Despite noting that more people visit libraries than either football matches or the cinema (DCMS, 2003: 6), the last Labour Government accepted the view of the Audit Commission (2002b: 14) that it is 'a service under pressure'. The long term decline in book issues and visits are usually cited as evidence and 'the emphasis on costs has dominated all recent studies of the performance of UK library systems' (Bawden et al, 2005: 459). National statistics did not become available until 1975-76, and for much of the past twenty years, although funding increased during the period of the last Labour government; almost all of the other measures have shown a steady decline. The House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee (2005a: 14) summarised the position as follows:

We believe that a situation in which core performance indicators, and gross throughput, are falling—but overall costs are rising—signals a service in distress.

Several doom-laden predictions have been made about the future of libraries. Commentator Tim Coates (2004) warned that unless fundamental structural problems are addressed, there may be no public libraries left in ten or fifteen years time, while the Audit Commission (2002b: 9) itself cautioned that if present trends continue, loans of books and other materials will drop to zero in around 20 years.

Like other parts of local government, libraries were subject to the Best Value regime brought in to replace the discredited Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT). However, as Bawden et al (2005) point out, the effectiveness of Best Value for library services has been subject to criticism. Trickey (2003: 183) saw it as a bureaucratic system which absorbed a lot of resources, which could otherwise more usefully be deployed actually delivering a service, to collect data that was not particularly useful in identifying shortcomings or assisting in improvement.

In an attempt to set measurable targets for the library service, the last Labour Government used a variety of different methods. In 1998 Annual Library Plans were introduced to help library authorities focus their resources and to spell out what was meant by the statutory obligation of the 1964 Act to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' public library service. In 2001 twenty six Public Library Standards were introduced in England. In 2002 the Annual

Library Plans (ALPs) were replaced by Public Library Position Statements and in 2004 ten Public Library Service Standards replaced Public Library Position Statements and the original Public Library Standards for all English public libraries.

The launch of *Framework for the Future* (DCMS, 2003) also saw the introduction of a series of national offers, which set out the standards of service expected of all public libraries. The national offers defined what libraries can do best for particular user groups; listed specific service actions; and outlined a three year plan to achieve them. The first three plans covered: young people aged 11-19; adult basic skills; and reading clubs.

Not surprisingly, the Culture, Media and Sport Committee criticised the Government for repeatedly 'chopping and changing' (House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2005a: 10) the regulatory framework for public libraries in England. The Committee questioned 'the wisdom of abandoning an improving product' like the ALPs (House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2005a: 9). Goulding (2006: 4) suggests that these were 'discontinued as one of the measures to free local authorities from excessive bureaucracy by introducing a 'lighter touch'.

However, the Committee was unimpressed and claimed that this was a detrimental move. It also described the Public Library Service Standards as having 'rather limited ambitions' (House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2005a: 3), complaining that there were serious omissions, and that there were not effective mechanisms to drive up performance or even to ensure compliance.

By 2005, the Standards and Impact Measures were incorporated into performance indicators for the Culture Service area in the Comprehensive Performance Assessments (CPA) by which English councils were assessed. The Public Library Service Standards were subsequently revised in December 2007. They provided library authorities with a set of targets across ten core provision areas, and were complemented by the Public Library Impact Measures. In addition, several authorities identified as likely to benefit from additional help participated in the programme of Peer Reviews to stimulate and support improvement. From 2008, Local Area Assessments replaced CPA and a single National Indicator replaced the standards and impact measures. Conway (2008: 18) regards this as a cause for concern, arguing that the previous systems – for all their shortcomings – did drive up standards.

The standards that were introduced in England 2001 were removed in 2009 to be replaced by a set of voluntary benchmarks from the MLA (which has now been abolished by the Coalition) and Libraries Minister Ed Vaizey confirmed in a parliamentary written answer that the government would not be reintroducing standards for public libraries (Hansard, 2012). Wales continues to have its own Public Library Standards.

The difficulties in designing appropriate and useful measures for a service with a wide range of different stakeholders is perhaps illustrated by the frequent changes in recent years in the various standards imposed by the UK government on the English library service. This can create problems and there is a danger that such regimes can degenerate into box ticking and form filling rather than service improvement. The attempt to measure performance can 'feel like an industry in itself that detracts from service delivery, and the development of internal quality culture regimes' (Rowley, 2005: 508-509). Usherwood believes that both policy makers and even some library professionals fail to recognise the value and values of the public library – to the extent that many public librarians 'appear to see themselves as a cross between a retail manager and a computer operative' (Usherwood, 2007: 675).

In their study of the unintended consequences of performance measurement in public services, Adcroft and Willis (2005: 386) argue that the most likely outcome of widespread use of performance measurement 'is the commodification of services which will be delivered by an increasingly deprofessionalised public sector workforce'. The approach adopted in the public library service is part of the general shift to NPM summarised by Ferlie and Steane (2002: 1461) as a focus on 'managers, markets and measurement'. Toyne and Usherwood (2001: 144) note that while it is important to know how many books are issued to what section of the community, from what types of background, this only provides a very incomplete picture and that these statistics are a blunt tool for evaluating a library service:

... such figures tend only to deal with inputs and outputs, and there is a danger that politicians will only measure what is measurable, and thus miss what is important about the library service. In evaluating the value of imaginative literature, people's experience of using the service, and their perceptions of it, should be used to evaluate outcomes.

McMenemy (2007a: 274) agrees, asking: 'How can book issues in an inner city community tell us anything of what those books are being used for when borrowed?' He calls for more use of

methodologies like the social audit that Linley and Usherwood (1998) used in their study of Newcastle and Somerset library services, which they argue makes visible the way that libraries enrich people's lives (Linley and Usherwood, 1998). They describe it as a means of evaluating the social impact of libraries through qualitative methods to 'cross-check the views and perceptions of different stakeholders in order to obtain as full a view as possible of the social aspects of public library activity' (Linley and Usherwood, 1998: 10). They point out that identifying the stakeholders is an integral part of the technique. They used elected members; library staff; and groups of library users and non-users, but commented that with hindsight and increased resources they would have widened the range of stakeholders in future work. Such an approach does not ignore the metrics of visits, book stocks and so on, but examines a range of other indicators, both relating to a library's established role (culture, education, reading and literacy, and information) and its social and caring role and economic impact.

Morris and colleagues (2002) believe that it is possible to examine the economic value of libraries through a series of different measures. They argue that costs and benefits of book borrowing are different for different groups of people according to a variety of factors including their education, wealth, age, and personal interest. This results in a mixture of educational, informative, cultural and recreational benefit (Morris et al, 2002: 85). They conclude that

the economic value of the public library service is thus considerable yielding both public good and merit benefits which are enjoyed by all ages and across all socio-economic groups. Undoubtedly, this value will increase as lending operations become more efficient and as developments in networked information and electronic literature modify the role of libraries in the future (Morris et al, 2002: 86).

There are criticisms of a more fundamental nature however. McMenemy (2007a) accepts that it is important to measure the impact that public libraries have on their communities but rejects the idea that this can be determined by quantitative measures. He argues that a number-driven evaluative framework that mirrors the private sector – where numbers reflect sales, profits and so on – is not very helpful in the library service (McMenemy, 2007b: 446):

The belief that numbers can tell us anything about a service that is driven by social educational goals is fundamentally flawed in its reasoning, since it seeks to break down the human and their experience into cold hard statistics.

Broady-Preston and Cox (2000: 157) claim that qualitative market research methods and performance indicators are more reliable than quantitative methods 'in assessing the social value of a service', despite the fact that they are more difficult to use and more time consuming than the 'number-crunching' option.

As Moore notes (2004) library statistics can conceal as much as they reveal, particularly if one measure is given priority over all others. Yet, public libraries are routinely judged on a series of measures: funding and costs (including income through charging etc); visits and usage; book stocks and issues; library facilities (including number of service points and library opening hours); and staffing (including number of professional staff and total number of staff).

These measures are very crude instruments for assessing the impact, effectiveness and value of the public library service. Linley and Usherwood (1998: 84) argue that while there is widespread agreement that public libraries enrich the lives of many people, the current measures of success or failure do not capture this information, but that 'the social audit technique makes that enriching process visible'. Nevertheless, the measures listed above are routinely used and an examination of them assists in understanding both the current position of the UK public library service and the attitudes of the staff that work within it.

6.4 Funding and costs

In Britain we spend over £1 billion a year on the public library service, most of which comes through local authorities. Although the data for the latest year available shows a relatively small cut (see Table 6b below), this is likely to increase sharply in the next few years. A survey of library authorities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland by CILIP (2012) in November 2011 revealed that although general local authority funding will be reduced by 28% over the next four years under the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review, the cuts are 'front-loaded' and will be likely to have a deep impact on the library service. According to CILIP the median expenditure cut for local authorities between 2010-11 and 2011-12 was 7.5%, but 'some public library services are being expected to bear disproportionate levels of cuts' with a wide range, including 'twelve responding authorities... making revenue cuts of over fifteen percent' (CILIP, 2012: 7).

Table 6b: Total net expenditure on the UK public library service

Year	£000s	% annual change
2010-11	1,066,410	-2.1
2009-10	1,089,799	+0.8
2008-09	1,081,206	+2.1
2007-08	1,059,130	-0.4
2006-07	1,063,120	

Source: CIPFA, 2011c

Moore (2004: 48) notes that for most of the twentieth century, expenditure on the public library service grew in line with the economy as a whole. For five years from 1985 this growth slowed down and from 1990 spending fell in real terms to the extent that by the turn of the century expenditure was back to 1985 levels.

Like all other parts of the public services, the library service has been under pressure to generate efficiencies for some time. DCLG (2007b: 5) defines 'efficiency' as 'achieving the same outputs for less resource or additional outputs for the same resource'. It emphasises that a cost-cutting measure at the 'expense of the overall effectiveness of service delivery is not an efficiency gain' (ibid). The previous Government (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, ODPM, 2005: 8) also made a distinction between 'cashable' and non-cashable' efficiency gains. Cashable gains represent savings achieved by providing the same service (or possibly a better service) from lower inputs. This allows for re-allocating these resources elsewhere. This might be redeployed towards the introduction of new elements to the library service or it might simply be used to reduce the overall cost of the library service. By contrast, non-cashable gains 'are achieved through such means as improved quality or additional outputs for the same level of resources' (ibid). With non-cashable gains there is no reduction in the overall expenditure for the library service.

In the past, local authorities have dealt with expenditure cutbacks by attempting to maintain the broad fabric of the service through reducing the level of service. This took the form of some

library closures or more often, reductions in opening hours. Although spending on the UK public library service is over £1 billion (which is, of course, a large amount of money) it is spread across 206 library authorities in the UK and amounts to only about 1% of local authority spend. It increased in real terms during the last Labour government years, after periods during the 1979-87 Conservative governments which saw real terms cuts. Nevertheless, even before the current crisis there was disagreement about whether the budget was sufficient for the ever growing demands being placed on the service.

Moore (2004: 48) contends that even with annual increases above the rate of inflation, the library service needs and should receive further increases. Writing in 2004, he pointed out that between 1985 and 2000, GDP increased by 46 per cent (see Table 6c), and that to keep pace, public library expenditure would have needed an additional '£350 million just to put the service back on the growth path of the early 1990s' (Moore, 2004: 49).

Table 6c: Public Library Expenditure and GDP 1965–2000 (England)

Year	GDP Index (1965 = 100)	Total expenditure per 1,000 population (1965 = 100)
1965	100	100
1970	116	115
1975	141	154
1980	150	155
1985	157	161
1990	188	181
1995	199	171
2000	230	162

Source: Moore (2004: 48)

Note from Moore: The table was compiled by taking the GDP data at current prices from the National Accounts dataset. Retrieved from www.statistics.gov.uk/STATBASE. The gross figures were then converted to 2003 prices using the Retail Price Index (see, for example, www.wolfbane.com/rpi.htm) and were indexed, using 1965 as a base. For the public library expenditure a similar process was followed, using actual expenditure per 1,000 population data from Public library statistics. Source: Office for National Statistics National accounts and CIPFA Public Library Statistics.

Commentator Tim Coates (2004) takes a different position in his book, *Who's in Charge?* His view is that the library budget is sufficient: it is just misspent. He wanted to see a tripling of expenditure on books and other reading materials, a 50% increase in opening hours and a major programme of library refurbishment and redecoration. The key to a successful rejuvenation of the public library service, in his view, is an increase in book stock, a boost to opening hours and library buildings which are pleasant to visit – all of which most library supporters would agree with. But Coates claimed that these improvements could be paid for within current budgets if the funding was better spent. He says this could have been achieved with a drastic reduction in the number of staff involved in management and cataloguing and a much more efficient, streamlined acquisition programme. Some challenged his data and the fact that he concentrated on one aspect of the service (book loans) and used data from just one library service (Hampshire) to make wide-ranging recommendations. Goulding (2004: 149) remarked that

A more welcoming environment and a better selection of books would no doubt go a long way... but it is doubtful that the redistribution of resources advocated in *Who's in Charge* would be sufficient to transform public libraries.

In the past when faced with budgetary pressures, councils tended to introduce various cost cutting measures which appeared to leave the library service broadly intact – such as cutting the opening hours, changing the skills mix of staff so that more expensive qualified staff are replaced by cheaper unqualified staff; replacing books less often than in the past; acquiring paperbacks rather than hardbacks and so on. Unfortunately, many of these savings are one-offs which store up problems for the future rather than resolve them (such as replacing hardbacks with paperbacks). Others, such as cutting opening hours, serve to accelerate a general withering away of the service by making it more difficult to use and therefore contribute to a further decline in use.

Charging

The 1964 Act obliges library authorities to provide 'comprehensive and efficient' public library services. This is not defined within the Act although authorities are required to provide 'free of charge, access for people who live, work or study in their area to borrow or refer to books, printed material and pictures in line with their needs and requirements' (DCMS, 2008).

Free access to books has been a cornerstone of the public library service since its inception but has always had its critics. It reflected the tension perceived by some to exist between satisfying public demands and raising standards. In fact one of the early concerns about funding public libraries through the rates was that the middle classes would be funding working class reading of popular fiction. The strength of these feelings in some quarters is reflected in the fact that some libraries even banned fiction for a time (Muddiman, 2000: 18). A more recent variant of this was expressed by the Adam Smith Institute (1986: 32) in making the case for introducing library charges:

...there seems no good reason why the state should be expected to provide leisure and entertainment facilities of one kind free of charge to the user when it does not do so for others such as films or football.

That such views are not the preserve of eccentric right wing economic think tanks can be seen by the fact a few years ago, Yinnon Ezra, then head of leisure services at Conservative-run Hampshire County Council declared: 'We have to ask whether fiction should remain in libraries when most people buy books.' The MLA (at the time responsible for 'strategic leadership' for libraries in England) refused to disassociate itself from this statement – perhaps not surprisingly as Ezra was one of its board members (Cooke, 2007).

While charging for borrowing books has always been rejected, charging for some library services has been regarded as acceptable by many, and has become standard practice for some services such as borrowing CDs or DVDs (and before that records or tapes). And of course, fines for late return and reservation charges are also commonplace. The debate has re-emerged over the issue of whether to charge for use of the internet in libraries and whether information (and access to it) is a public good or a marketable commodity (Goulding, 2001). The Culture, Media and Sport Committee (2005a: 36) named and shamed those councils that charged for the use of the People's Network, and strongly criticised their decision:

We believe that charging for the People's Network contravenes at least the spirit of the 1964 Act which permits libraries to impose fees only "where facilities made available to any person by a library authority go beyond those ordinarily provided by the authority as part of the library service." We believe that the provision of the People's Network in all public libraries, coupled with the Government's target for universal access to the internet, suggests strongly that the service now falls within the statutory definition of a facility "ordinarily provided by the authority as part of the library service" and charges should not be imposed.

In its response, the Government (DCMS, 2005a: 13) agreed that the intention was that access to the People's Network should be free but pointed out that the original legislation had been amended and that authorities were not obliged to offer free access to the People's Network. The 1991 Library Charges (England and Wales) Regulations specified that library authorities have the power to provide facilities for the borrowing of books and other materials (e.g. video tapes, multi-media, open learning packages) by any individual, but the duty to lend free of charge extends only to written material which is readable without the use of any electronic or other apparatus (De Almeida, 1997: 146).

Nevertheless, charging for access to the internet directly challenges social inclusion and lifelong learning agendas with their proclaimed aim of breaking down the division between the information haves and have-nots. The last Government's stated disapproval of charging did not appear to have much effect because two years later the then Minister David Lammy MP admitted that DCMS were aware of 25 local authorities that charged (Hansard, 2007). It also reopened the debate on the purpose and role of libraries. Goulding (2001: 2) points out that the notion of information as a commodity is not new, but what *is* new is that 'the commodification of information has been accelerated by recent technological innovations'. She refers to the National Consumer Council's characterisation of information as a 'fourth right of citizenship' and a social good which enhances social, political and cultural life (Goulding, 2001: 1).

Usherwood et al (2005: 90) refer to the role of libraries in securing a citizen's right to know and cite the view of the New York Times (1998) that: 'One test of a democracy is whether it grants equal access to the tools that make knowledge possible' and note:

The need to ensure equity in the distribution of services is one of the factors that distinguish public sector organizations such as archives, library and museum services from those in the commercial world (Usherwood et al, 2005: 91).

Hendry (2000: 447) agrees, linking this with the role of public libraries in social inclusion. Public librarians:

should be among the custodians and propagators not of information but of the gift of reason: a gift that can turn information into knowledge, and then to understanding, reason and tolerance, and perhaps even a wee bit of wisdom; then we might achieve a just society.

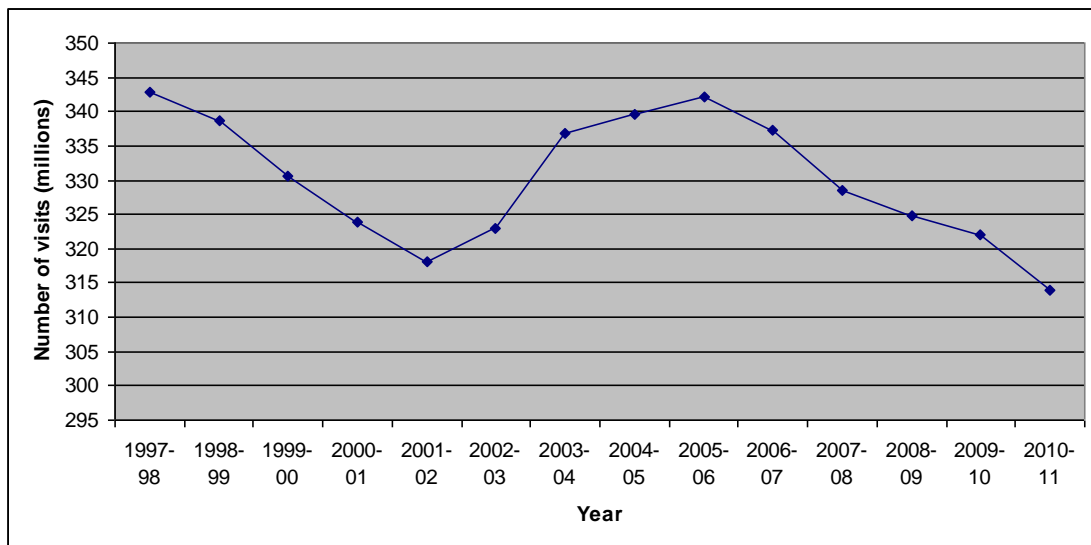
The charging issue has also returned in another guise around the idea of charges for 'premium' services, such as help with family histories. For example, UNISON activists at a library seminar I attended reported that one local library service had introduced a system of premium charges for 'Personal Knowledge Advisers'. Members of the public are offered half sessions with qualified staff at a cost of £15. Each qualified member of staff was set a personal target of generating £850 in such premium charges by the end of the first year of implementation.

6.5 Library visits and usage

For many years the number of visits to libraries has been in decline (see Figure 6a). A variety of different reasons has been put forward for the long term decline in both visits and book issues, including the following: the simple fact that stock has declined (Audit Commission, 2002b: 1; Coates, 2004: 7), the poor quality of library buildings (Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, CABE, 2003: 2; Coates, 2004: 7), library regulations such as fines and restrictions (Grindlay and Morris, 2004: 614; Audit Scotland, 2005: 4), reduced accessibility of libraries because of closures and cuts in opening hours (Coates, 2004: 1; Audit Commission, 2002b: 1; Grindlay and Morris, 2004: 627), the impact of the end of the Net Book Agreement in 1997 and consequent increase in people buying books instead of borrowing (Audit Commission, 2002b: 8) and the negative image of libraries (Brockhurst, 2005: 24) and their staff (Green, 1994:19, 21).

As Figure 6a shows, for four successive years (between 2002-03 and 2005-06), the downward trend in visits was reversed, although since then the figures show a return to sharp decline. In 2005, the Government claimed that the increased visits were the result of the impact of the introduction of internet access in all libraries through the People's Network initiative which 'has given the public library network a new lease of life' (DCMS, 2005a: 13). The impact of the recession and the cuts means that it will be very difficult to ascertain whether the increase in visits of these four years was a very specific, time-limited effect of the introduction of the People's Network.

Figure 6a: Total visits to UK public libraries 1997-98 to 2010-11



Source: Derived from CIPFA Statistics

When the visits figures are augmented by those for other measures since 2000-01 (see Table 6d), we can see a more generalised steady decline. Data for 'active borrowers' reveals a long term decline as does the data for housebound readers (with a small increase in 2004-05 and in 2007-08). Visits per 1,000 population follow the same trend as visits generally.

Table 6d: UK visits and usage

	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	%+/- 2000-01 to 2010- 11
Active borrowers ('000)	17,211	16,506	15,843	14,812	13,808	13,510	13,035	12,608	12,267	12,078	11,920	-44
Housebound Readers ('000)	127	123	115	110	113	111	106	111	103	101	99	-28
Visits to Library Premises ('000)	323,835	318,155	323,042	336,951	339,708	342,168	337,316	328,485	324,991	322,111	313,987	-3
Visits per 1,000 Population	5,420	5,411	5,454	5,656	5,675	5,683	5,568	5,387	5,295	5,213	5,043	-7
Requests for Specific Items ('000)	7,689	7,816	7,860	8,934	9,043	9,939	10,917	12,027	13,629	15,132	15,796	+105
Requests per 1,000 Population	129	133	133	150	151	165	180	197	222	245	254	+97
Enquiries ('000)	58,234	58,506	57,326	58,183	56,860	55,517	51,238	49,050	44,009	48,810	48,202	-21
Enquiries per 1,000 Population	975	995	968	977	950	922	846	804	717	790	774	-26

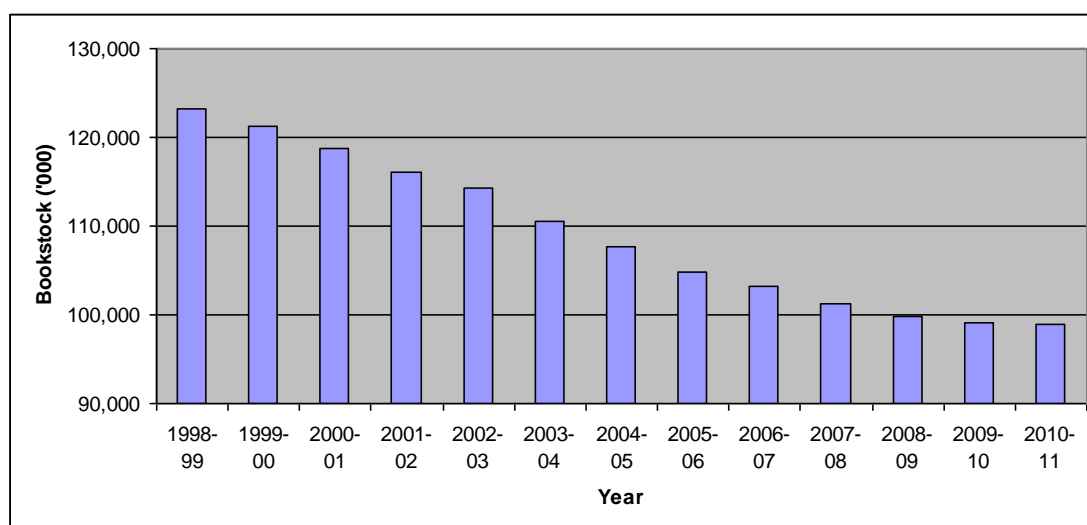
Source: Derived from CIPFA Statistics

Table 6d shows that requests for specific items and requests per 1,000 population have steadily *increased* over the same period with a substantial overall increase since 2000-01 of 105% and 97% respectively. This may also be related to bookstock decline in that borrowers may not be able to find a particular book on the shelves and so place a request to order the item, either as new or from another branch. Enquiries have been slightly more erratic although over the period show a decline both in total and per 1,000 population.

Book stocks, acquisitions and issues

Both book stocks and book issues have continued to decline and this is a long term decline, as illustrated in Figures 6b and 6d. Even during the New Labour period of broadly rising expenditure on the library service, there was an overall decline in both book stock and book issues. In New Labour's first decade there was a 16.6% decline in book stock and 34.8% drop in book issues.

Figure 6b: Total book stock 1997-98 to 2010-11



Source: Derived from CIPFA Statistics

In the last decade, all of the constituent parts of the UK have seen a decline in both total book stock and the book stock per 1,000 population (see Table 6e). In terms of current bookstock per 1,000 population, Northern Ireland comes last with Scotland having the largest number of books per 1,000 people followed by Wales then England.

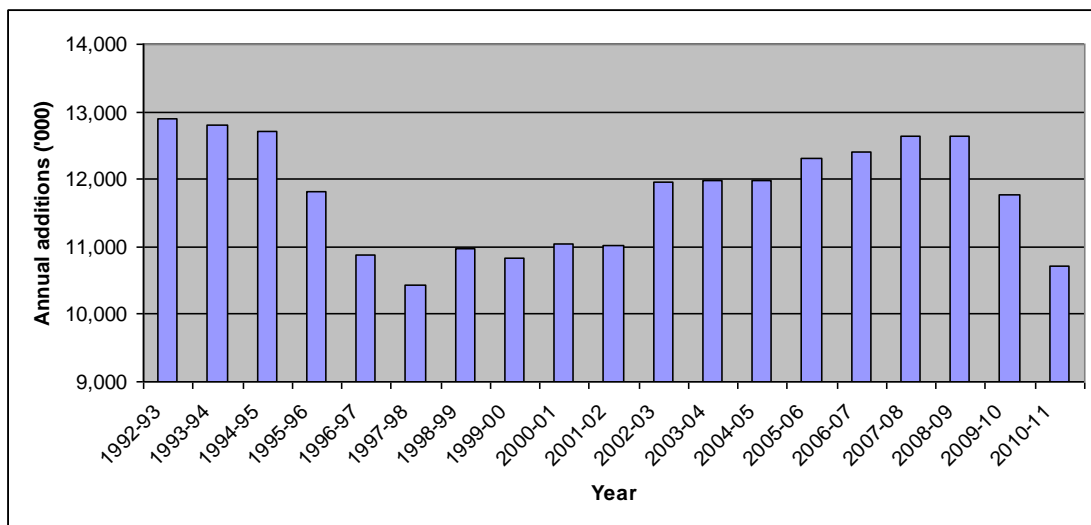
Table 6e: Total bookstock and bookstock per 1000 population (territorial units) 2000-01 to 2010-11

	2000 - 01	2005-06	2010-11
England			
Bookstock ('000)	94,372	82,391	78,383
Per 1000 population	1,888	1,634	1,501
Wales			
Bookstock ('000)	7,170	6,156	6,337
Per 1000 population	2,434	2,081	2,108
Scotland			
Bookstock ('000)	13,433	12,466	11,700
Per 1000 population	2,626	2,447	2,240
Northern Ireland			
Bookstock ('000)	3,819	3,850	2,525
Per 1000 population	2,249	2,233	1,403
UK			
Bookstock ('000)	118,794	104,863	98,945
Per 1000 population	1,988	1,742	1,589

Source: Derived from CIPFA Statistics

Acquisitions increased steadily - if unspectacularly - across the UK during the lifetime of the last Labour government (see Figure 6c) but the rate of acquisition was simply not enough to maintain, leave alone increase, the book stock (see Figure 6b and Table 6e). All of the constituent parts of the UK showed a similar trend of slight recovery but it was not enough to overturn the accumulated damage of earlier periods.

Figure 6c: Total UK public library service book acquisitions 1992-93 to 2010-11



Source: Derived from CIPFA Statistics

With a long term decline in the amount of money spent on books it is inevitable that either the size of book stock will reduce or the physical quality of the stock will deteriorate as either paperbacks replace hardbacks or stock is replenished less often. The impact of the recession from 2008-09 put the improvements into reverse and the numbers of book acquisitions have gone into steep decline (see Figure 6c).

Table 6f: Book acquisitions per 1,000 population 2005-06 to 2010-11 (by territorial unit)

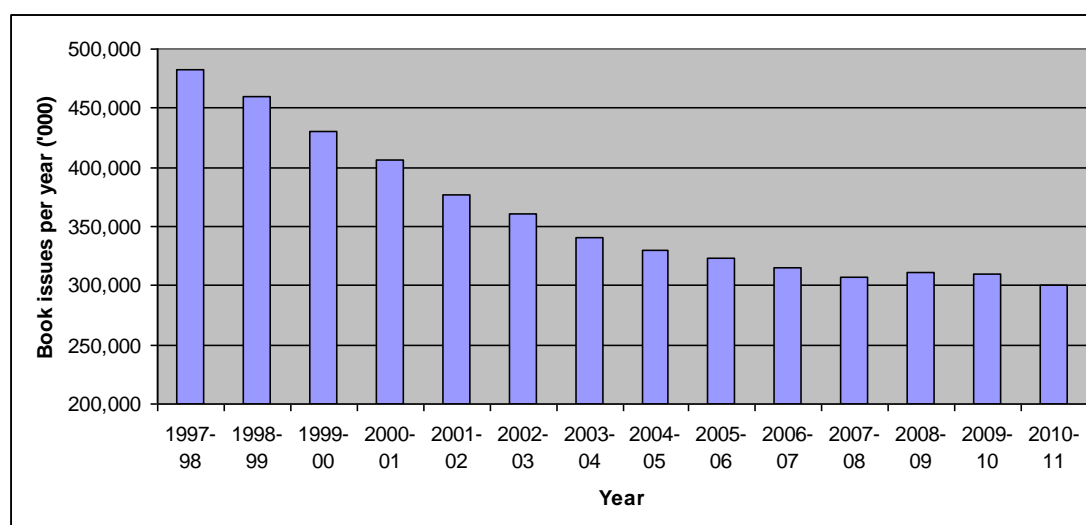
	Book acquisitions 2005-06 per 1,000 population	Book acquisitions 2010-11 per 1,000 population	% change 2005-06 to 2010-11
England	204	167	-18.1
Wales	197	200	+1.5
Scotland	233	201	-13.7
N. Ireland	141	187	+32.6
UK	204	172	-15.7

Source: Derived from CIPFA Statistics

Even though there were four years of increases in overall book acquisitions in the UK, acquisitions per 1,000 population in the UK have declined over the last six years. However, there are considerable variations between the different UK territorial units. Table 6f shows that England has fared particularly badly with a decline of 18% in book acquisitions per 1,000 population, and Scotland shows a decline of nearly 14%. Wales registered a small increase (1.5%), while Northern Ireland increased by 32% (from a very low base).

With a decline in the numbers of books held and/or a deteriorating physical stock it is not surprising that there has been a continuation in the decline in book issues. Figure 6d shows that book issues were in steady decline for virtually the entire length of Labour's period in office with an overall drop of 35%, and that the decline has continued under the Coalition.

Figure 6d: Total book issues per year 1997-98 to 2010-11



Source: Derived from CIPFA Statistics

6.6 Library facilities

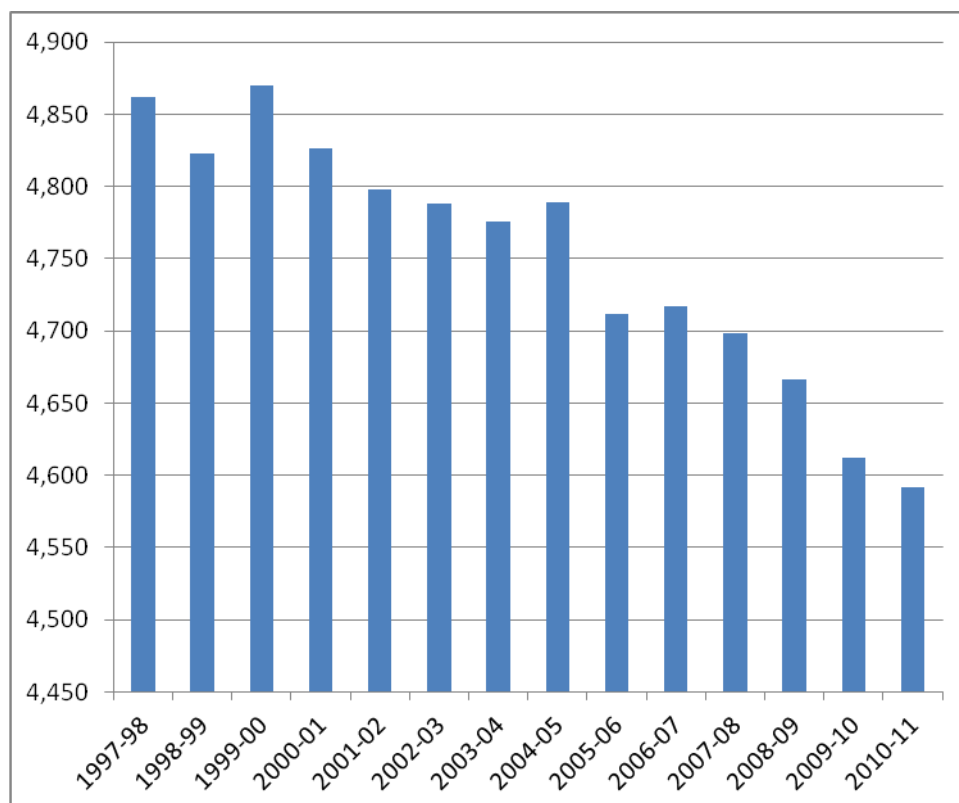
The UK has a total of 4,592 library service points (4,089 central and branch libraries and 503 mobile library units) (CIPFA, 2011c). Under New Labour and before the financial crisis, the library service was already under pressure. In 2006, it was reported (Daily Telegraph, 2006) that then Minister David Lammy wrote to all councils urging them not to close libraries as part of local government cut-backs. In response to such concerns about the future of public libraries, the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) commissioned a report from Patrick Conway, former Director of Culture and Leisure with Durham County Council. He investigated changes in ten public library authorities that had been brought to the attention of CILIP because of proposed closures, changes in service delivery and staffing structures (Conway, 2008)¹¹.

This pales into insignificance against the current and likely impact of the Coalition Government's cuts programme. Figure 6e below illustrates the very sharp decline in the number of library service points in the UK since the onset of the financial crisis, with 106 fewer libraries in 2010-11 than in 2007-08. However, the number of library closures is likely to rise steeply over the course of the next few years as the local government cuts work their way

¹¹ The authorities were Cumbria, Dorset, Dudley, Gloucestershire, Hampshire, Hillingdon, Kent, Lambeth, Medway and Northumberland. Conway (2008: 7) also noted similar concerns reported in the press about an additional group of authorities - Buckinghamshire, Conwy, Devon, Hertfordshire, Worcestershire and Waltham Forest.

through the system. As early as the end of March 2011, the respected Public Library News blog reported that 495 libraries (428 buildings and 67 mobiles) were either under threat of closure, recently closed or removed from council control (in other words handed over to ‘the community’ to be run by volunteers) (Public Libraries News, 2011).

Figure 6e: Number of UK library service points 1997-98 to 2010-11



Source: Derived from CIPFA Statistics.

NB: Library service points includes both central and branch libraries as well as mobile libraries

In a survey of library authorities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, CILIP (2012) reported that 17% of responding authorities were implementing library closures in 2011-12. In addition to that, 28% have reduced the number of mobile library vehicles. For 2011-12, just 13% of respondent authorities reported that they had transferred libraries over to ‘community management’, but CILIP point out that if this was replicated across the whole of England, Wales and Northern Ireland, it would mean ‘the loss of 90 staffed libraries just for the year 2011-12’ (CILIP, 2012: 19).

Each library in the UK – including mobiles – now serves an average of 13,266 people. For England the figure is even higher, although libraries in Scotland and Wales both have a much lower population figure for every service point. Table 6g shows that just 2.8% of UK libraries or 128 (3.1% if mobile libraries are excluded from the totals) are open for more than 60 hours a week. England (3.8%) has the highest proportion of its libraries open for these extended hours, Northern Ireland next with 3% while Scotland and Wales each only achieve 0.9% (CIPFA, 2001c).

Table 6g: Percentage of all service points open 60 hours a week or more (territorial units) 2010-11

	Number of service points open for 60 hours and over, excluding mobile libraries (average hours of opening per week)	Total Service Points (excluding mobile libraries)	% of all service points that are open for more than 60 hours (excluding mobile libraries)
England	117 (68)	3,119	3.8
Wales	3 (68)	326	0.9
Scotland	5 (64)	545	0.9
Northern Ireland	3 (63)	99	3.0
UK	128	4,089	3.1

Source: CIPFA, 2011c

Table 6h (below) shows that the collapse in the number of libraries that open for over 60 hours was catastrophic towards the end of the twentieth century. From a figure of 160 in England alone in 1975-76, this dropped to just 25 throughout the UK in 2000-01 (it fell as low as 9 in England in 1995-96) before gradually recovering to 128 in 2010-11, even though the number of library service points has declined. This is still a long way short of the mid 1970s figure, and if the austerity programme impacts in a similar way to previous cuts in expenditure, there will be a sharp drop in opening hours.

Table 6h: Opening Hours of UK library service points 1997-98 to 2010-11

Service points (excluding mobiles) open:	1997-98	2000-01	2003-04	2006-07	2010-11
More than 60 hours per week	39	25	62	110	128
30-59 hours per week	2248	2233	2386	2442	2470
10-29 hours per week	1,694	1696	1534	1424	1365
Total open more than 10 hours per week	3981	3954	3982	3976	3963

Source: Derived from CIPFA Statistics

Electronic facilities have been one of the library service's growth areas as Table 6i illustrates. Funded with £120 million from the New Opportunities Fund (and managed by the MLA) the People's Network was set up to provide ICT learning facilities in all UK libraries and to train library staff in ICT skills. In 1999 the MLA also received a donation of £2.5 million from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation for the provision of IT learning centres in public libraries. Because of the People's Network all public libraries are now able to provide internet access and online services with trained library staff available (House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2005a: 34). Table 6i shows that the number of terminals in libraries with library catalogue and internet access has actually increased since 2005-06 despite the fact that the number of libraries has declined. This has meant that the number of electronic workstations available per 10,000 population has remained constant.

Table 6i: UK library service electronic facilities 2005-06 to 2010-11

	2005-06	2010-11	% change
Total number of library service points (including mobile libraries)	4,712	4,592	-2.5
Number of terminals with library catalogue and internet access	39,855	43,465	+9.0
Number of electronic workstations available to users per 10,000 population	7	7	-
Estimated number of web visits (000s)	22,098	114,142	+416

Source: Derived from CIPFA Statistics

NB 2005-06 figure for web visits based on sample of 97 authorities.

The growth in the number of web visits to library websites has been the most spectacular. Even allowing for the fact that the 2005-06 figure is based on a sample, the increase has been remarkable and suggests that it is not only very successful but that libraries have extended the range of services available online (see Table 6i).

6.7 The library estate

Several commentators including Coates (2004: 7) and the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) (2003: 2) argue that both the rundown appearance of libraries and inconvenient location are a disincentive to the public using them. The Culture, Media and Sports Committee (2005a: 31) agreed that 'a significant barrier to library use was shabby buildings; whether inside or out' and referred to a DCMS asset survey covering a third of all local authorities which estimated the maintenance backlog to be £79.8 million. Furthermore in evidence to the Committee, the MLA reported (House of Commons Culture, Media and Sports Select Committee, 2005b: Ev 66):

A survey conducted 10 years ago identified a backlog of building repairs and refurbishments totalling £650 million in England alone. There is reason to believe this potential cost has increased substantially.

The Committee (2005a: 31) commented that this 'suggests a total significantly higher than the £240 million that can be extrapolated from the Department's figures' and that there is 'manifestly a problem'. Apart from using the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) to meet this need, the Government (DCMS, 2005a: 11) welcomed the Big Lottery Fund's community library programme, which has provided grants of between £250,000 and £2 million to 58 library authorities in England (Big Lottery Fund, 2007). Funding from these sources is a significant part of the finance used to improve the library estate. The Select Committee estimated in 2005 that

to date, well over £200 million in total has been awarded from Heritage, Community, New Opportunities and Millennium lottery funds to projects related to the buildings, redevelopment, and services of libraries of all kinds (House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2005a: 32).

Attractively designed buildings that are pleasant both to work in and to visit can enhance the position of a library in a local community. Imaginative designs in a number of recent new build libraries (e.g. Peckham, Norwich, Bournemouth, Cambridge, Cardiff) have proved very popular and have caught the public's imagination (Childs, 2006). They can also provide a boost to visitor numbers, as was seen when more than 7,000 items were issued and over 700 people became members in the first five weeks after the Arena Park Library in Coventry opened (Childs, 2006: 156).

Building libraries with the Private Finance Initiative

Over the last three decades, a standard response of all governments to the need for large scale investment in public sector infrastructure has been to utilise the Private Finance Initiative (PFI). The library service is no different in this respect, although there has been nothing like the scale of use of PFI as there has been in the NHS or the Prison Service for example. Perhaps because of this, one of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee's suggestions for resolving the problem of the funding of the library estate was for further consideration to be given to the use of PFI. The then Labour Government (DCMS, 2005a: 11) responded by pointing out that

DCMS has been pleased to allocate £90m of its Private Finance Initiative credits to date to public library projects. Additionally, DCMS has announced that £130m of PFI credits will be available for projects over the next two years and that public libraries will be one of the priorities

DCMS (2004: 12) reported to Parliament that up to 2004 it had allocated £204m in credits to cultural projects. A large number of PFI projects involving libraries have been completed since then or are under construction in 2012¹². Of course, both staff and library users welcome improvements in the library estate – especially well designed, purpose-built, modern buildings that are comfortable to work in and pleasant to visit. Several PFI-built libraries are precisely that. However, the problem does not lie with the design but with the method of financing. Supporters of PFI claim that it provides better value for money than conventional procurement, partly because it is argued that lenders' involvement contributes to on-time and on-budget delivery; the private sector brings innovative approaches; that 'private sector management skills [are] incentivised by having private finance at risk' (HM Treasury, 2003a: 28); and overall there is a better quality service.

All of these assertions have been challenged and have come under growing scrutiny as many PFI projects hit problems. Before approval is given for a PFI project it must be justified in terms of providing better value for money than conventional procurement. This is done through contrasting the projected cost of the PFI project with the Public Sector Comparator which is supposed to outline the cost of procurement under traditional methods. However, it is a controversial area. The former Auditor General for Wales (then National Audit Office deputy controller), Jeremy Colman told the *Financial Times* (Timmins, 2002) that public sector comparators suffer from 'spurious precision' and that the associated value for money exercises were

pseudo-scientific mumbo-jumbo where the financial modelling takes over from thinking... It becomes so complicated that no one, not even the experts, really understands what is going on.

He concluded by observing that

¹² These include: Borough of Telford & Wrekin: Hadley Learning & Jigsaw Project (includes a library); Bournemouth Central Library and community library; Brighton and Hove County Council (Jubilee Library Brighton and the Brighton and Hove Group Schools Project, which included a Library and Community Facilities Element); Electronic Libraries for Northern Ireland; Liverpool City Council: Central Library and Archive Redevelopment; London Borough of Croydon: Ashburton Learning Village (includes a library); London Borough of Hackney (Hackney Library and Technology Learning Centre); London Borough of Lewisham (Downham Lifestyles project – includes a library and leisure centres); Newcastle City Library and community library; Oldham Library and Lifelong Learning Centre; Metropolitan Borough of Rochdale: Joint Service Centres (includes library services); South Eastern Education and Library Board, Northern Ireland (Lisburn City Library); Wigan Council (Wigan 'Life Centre' including new central library and swimming pool); Worcestershire County Council (new joint library and history centre with University of Worcester) (Partnerships UK Projects Database, 2008; DCMS, 2005b; HM Treasury, 2011).

People have to prove value for money to get a PFI deal. But because that is wrongly seen to be demonstrated only by the public sector comparator, it becomes everything. If the answer comes out wrong you don't get your project. So the answer doesn't come out wrong very often.

Supporters of PFI have relied heavily on the notion that competition for PFI contracts drives up quality and drives down prices. The House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts (2007: 5) recently dealt this idea a savage blow. Its report on tendering and bench-marking states that:

Since 2004 the proportion of deals attracting only two bidders has more than doubled, with the risk of no competition if one bidder is weak or drops out.

Furthermore, instead of driving down prices, benchmarking and market testing of support services have, in practice, increased prices by up to 14 per cent during the contract period (House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 2007: 5). Where services have come up for renewal, the price has gone up rather than down in more than half of the cases (*ibid*).

Some PFI supporters, like ex-minister Alan Milburn (2006: 14), continue to claim that PFI leveraged in extra finances to the provision of public services and the construction of public infrastructure. He says it is a 'way that gets vital additional investment into frontline services in the shortest possible time'. This is highly misleading. PFI is a form of borrowing, not of funding. The public sector funds the full cost of the private sector providing the infrastructure and services in annual payments. It is not a magical way of accessing new forms or higher levels of funding than could be available through conventional public funding. It simply spreads the cost over a long period just like a mortgage, and just like a mortgage costs considerably more than paying for the project at the time of construction (e.g. Audit Scotland, 2002: 59). PFI has also been criticised for its high transaction costs (Ive et al., 2000; House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 2007: 5).

The evidence for better value for money is slim despite remorseless repetition (Arthur Andersen and Enterprise LSE, 2000; CBI, 2007a: 10) and although much of the case rests on risk transfer, there are serious questions about the value of the risk that is actually transferred to the private sector - sometimes passed on to a subcontractor – and refinancing (Edwards et al, 2004; Standard and Poor's, 2003; Standard and Poor's, 2004; National Audit Office, NAO, 2000; Centre for International Health Policy, 2007).

Regardless of the terms of any contract, the government remains the guarantor of last resort for essential public services. This was proven in practice with the contract problems for Royal Armouries contract (NAO, 2001b); NIRS2 (the National Insurance Recording System) (NAO, 2001c); the Channel Tunnel Rail Link PFI deal (NAO, 2001d); National Air Traffic Service (NATS); the Passport Agency and the benefit payment card. Problems caused by the contractor did not prevent the public sector having to meet additional financial liabilities. The NAO (1997: para. 3.27) noted: 'The Contributions Agency did not believe it would be possible to get Andersen Consulting to compensate them for lost savings', even though the projected savings were part of the value-for-money case supporting the PFI option in the first place. Despite the contract allowing for compensation, the then Treasury minister Dawn Primarolo conceded that the Government would not demand payment 'for fear of damaging future relationships' (cited in Edwards and Shaoul, 2003: 412).

Growing evidence suggests that the PFI 'premium' (UNISON Scotland, 2007; Edwards et al (2004: 10) is much larger than either the Government (HM Treasury, 2003a: 108; HM Treasury, 2003b) or PFI supporters (e.g. CBI, 2007b: 14) are prepared to admit. They claim that PFI projects are more likely to come in on time and on budget (Sturgess and Smith, 2006: 79). However, PFI projects have also been involved in spectacular cost over-runs (Allen, 2001: 27) And the evidence base used by the Government is unconvincing (Pollock et al, 2005: 12): two NAO reports (2003 and 2001a), an unpublished internal Treasury study and two private sector studies (Agile Construction Initiative, *Benchmarking Stage Two Study*, 1999 and Mott MacDonald, *Review of Large Public Procurement in the UK*, 2002). And as the Commons Treasury Committee remarked in 1996:

There is no a priori reason why public procurement should not run to time and cost. Indeed many of the assumed benefits of PFI would appear to be available to better-managed and controlled conventional procurement (House of Commons Treasury Committee, 1996: para. 33).

The evidence to support the claims made for the innovative character of PFI driven by competition is also rather thin (Dixon et al, 2005; 420, 422; Audit Commission, 2003: 13; Weaver, 2002). The UK Government's public building watchdog (before the Coalition withdrew its funding in 2011), the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) drew attention to the poor quality of many PFI buildings on a number of occasions (e.g. CABE, 2002).

It characterised the first round of PFI hospitals as 'urban disasters' (Public Service Review, 2002). In 2001, CBE chairman Sir Stuart Lipton said:

The word that sums up most of the early PFI hospitals is meanness - a low-cost mentality that means too many corners have been cut in too many vital areas. There has been a general under-performance in terms of functionality, build quality and aesthetics (ibid).

In recognition of some of the problems identified by CBE and others, the government sponsored a joint report from CBE and the Office of Government Commerce urging a higher priority for design (CBE/OGC, 2002). Despite the enthusiastic claims of UK ministers of improved performance under PFI, the evidence here too is less than conclusive. There have been so many problems with IT PFI projects that the Treasury (2003a: 8) was eventually obliged to announce that it 'will replace PFI in IT with a range of procurement models'. But it is not just IT projects in which there have been service failures, several 'have had to be bailed out, some have been scrapped and others have been the subject of widespread criticism' (Edwards et al, 2004: 7; Audit Commission, 2003). Anna Simons (2006: 48), Assistant Auditor General at the National Audit Office notes:

So how well is PFI delivering this operational performance and does it exceed that of conventional procurement? Well here the evidence is less clear cut.

PFI payments have first call on a public sector organisation's finances and any unforeseen increases in costs can lead to problems of affordability and financial crisis in which the only solution may be a cutback in services (see Hellowell and Pollock, 2006; Pollock, 2004). Hellowell and Pollock's study (2007) of the financial impacts of health service PFIs in England shows under-funded PFI projects leading to financial deficits and, because of government pressure to balance the books, plans for cuts to services. The resulting affordability gap means that many health bodies have to meet the costs of the PFI debt from the operating budgets at the expense of clinical budgets and patient care. This analysis has now been borne out with PFI-related debt causing major crises within many parts of the NHS in England.

The House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts (2007: 6) states categorically:

There is evidence that, faced with price increases, public authorities had to cut back on services in hospitals, including portering, to keep the contracts affordable.

The latest Commons report – from the Treasury Committee (2011) – continues the almost universally negative assessment of the value of the PFI. It noted that although Government could always borrow more cheaply than the private sector, this difference has increased significantly since the financial crisis making PFI an even more expensive option than previously, unless there are savings to be made elsewhere in the process. However,

there is no convincing evidence to suggest that PFI projects are delivered more quickly and at a lower out-turn cost than projects using conventional procurement methods (House of Commons Treasury Committee, 2011: 57)

Among other criticisms, the Committee remarked that PFI is an uncompetitive market, that risk transfer has sometimes been ‘illusory’ and that the contracts are ‘inherently inflexible’ (ibid) and concluded that

We do not believe that PFI can be relied upon to provide good value for money without substantial reform (House of Commons Treasury Committee, 2011: 58).

Before he became Chancellor at the last election, George Osborne said that ‘Labour’s PFI model is flawed and must be replaced’ (Helm and Inman, 2009), but apart from relatively minor changes, the scheme remains intact and in use by the Coalition. Any extension of the use of PFI in new build libraries is likely to exacerbate the financial pressure for local authorities.

6.8 Staffing, skills and training

Table 6j shows that in 2010-11 the UK library service employed 23,662.8 staff (full time equivalent, FTE) with 0.38 staff per 1,000 population (CIPFA, 2011c). This proportion varies across the UK with Scotland achieving a figure of 0.52 per 1,000 population and Northern Ireland just 0.36. Of the 23,662.8 employed, 4,366.2 or (18.5%) were professional¹³ posts. Again the proportion varies when comparing England and the devolved administrations. England and Scotland closely follow the UK figure, Wales has a higher proportion of professional staff (20.3) while Northern Ireland has a considerably lower proportion (10.4%).

¹³ CIPFA (2011c: 125) defines ‘professionals’ as ‘persons holding formal qualification in librarianship or information science or persons who have completed their qualifying examinations. This includes graduates and other trained specialists on the library staff.’ They also include ‘posts where it may be preferable but not essential for staff to hold the above mentioned qualifications’ (ibid).

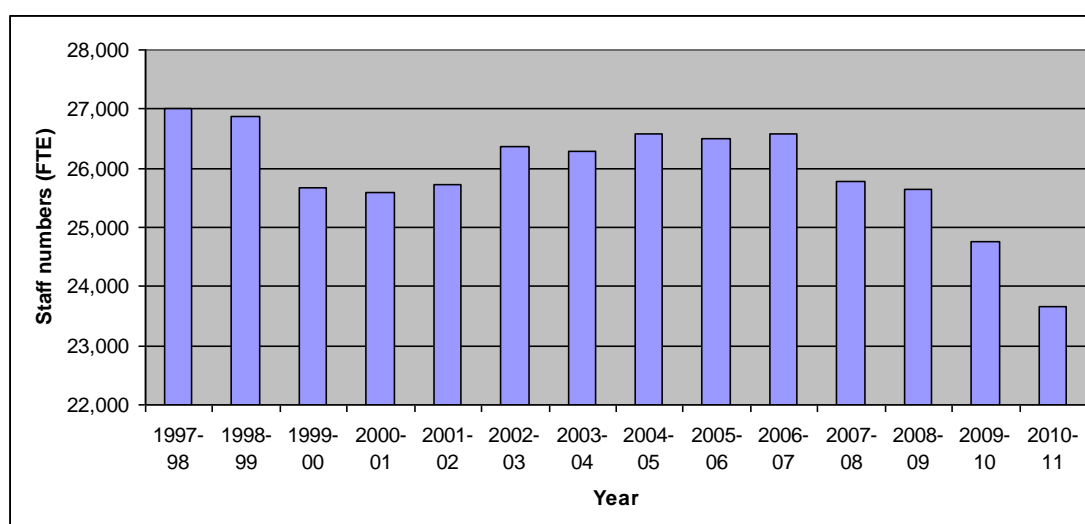
Table 6j: Staff in post (FTE) (at 31 March 2011)

	Professional posts	Professionals as % of all staff	All other posts	Total	SIP per 1,000 population
England	3,555.3	18.6	15,542	19,097.3	0.37
Wales	238.9	20.3	935.8	1,174.7	0.39
Scotland	504.0	18.4	2,234.8	2,738.8	0.52
Northern Ireland	68.0	10.4	584.0	652.0	0.36
UK	4,366.2	18.5	19,296.6	23,662.8	0.38

Source: CIPFA, 2011c

For several years during the last Labour Government, overall staffing figures showed a recovery with regular if relatively small increases (see Figure 6f below), but since 2006-07 staff in post figures have dropped sharply.

Figure 6f: Total staff in post (FTE) 1997-98 to 2010-11



Source: Derived from CIPFA Statistics

Even in the period of overall growth, the figures for professional staff showed a continued decline (see Table 6k). The skills mix of the library workforce has therefore been changing for some time as part of a programme of economies, replacing professional staff with clerical staff. The Bourdillon benchmarks of 1962 recommended that 40% of staff should be qualified. In 1980 the proportion was 33%; in 2010-11 it was just 18.5%.

There is some debate about what skills set is required for the modern library service, but it is undeniable that untrained staff are unlikely to be able to have the skills necessary for a reference and information service, a readers' advice service, a children's service or to operate extension services.

Table 6k: UK Staff in post, professionals, and ratio to population – selected years 1997-98 to 2010-11

Year	Total staff in post (FTE)	Total staff: population ratio	Professional posts (FTE)	Professional staff : population ratio	% of all staff that are professional
1997-98*	27,020.6	N/A	6,660.1	N/A	24.6
2000-01	25,593.1	1 : 2335	6,317.3	1 : 9459	24.7
2006-07	26,590.9	1 : 2278	5,679.2	1 : 10668	21.4
2010-11	23,662.8	1 : 2,631	4,366.2	1 : 14,260	18.5

Source: Derived from CIPFA Statistics and LISU (2010)

*Staff establishment. All other years are Staff in post.

Bourdillon also recommended that there should be one member of staff for every 2,500 population service. In 2010-11 the UK library service had one member of staff for every 2,631 people (see Table 6k). On a range of different measures of overall staffing and the staff skills mix, there has been a general steep decline since the last high point of 2006-07 (see Table 6k).

The Culture, Media and Sport Committee (2005a: 39) pointed out that the public library service is both trusted and popular and that a 'large contributor to the esteem in which the public holds the service is its staff'. However, it also noted that public library recruitment of graduates from

professional librarianship courses was at a low level and that such students were joining other private sector professions and information services. Perhaps this is not surprising, as while staff numbers in the library service broadly held up for several years, this was at the expense of qualified staff. The number of professional staff in the service declined by 34% between 1997-98 and 2010-11 (see Table 6k) and the proportion of all staff that are qualified has dropped from 24.6% to 18.5% (against the 1962 Bourdillon benchmark of 40%).

The difficulty in recruiting graduate librarians is a problem that will get worse as the current professional staff approach the end of their careers. In evidence to the Select Committee, Dr Bob McKee, then Chief Executive of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP), said that 'there is a greying of the profession' (House of Commons Culture Media and Sport Committee, 2005b: Ev 37). The Government accepted that a 'large proportion of library staff are due to retire shortly' (DCMS, 2005a: 14), noted the lack of skilled staff (DCLG, 2007a: 10) and referred to research from the South East Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (SEMLAC) which revealed that 40% of public library staff in the South-East will retire within the next 10 years. While recognising that the service needs to attract new people who have the necessary skills to fill this gap (ibid), there is no acknowledgment that low pay, uncertainty, the undermining of the public service ethos and staff cuts have a damaging effect on any recruitment programme.

The Government pledged to help current library staff adapt to the changing needs of the service by expanding their range of skills. It also said that the Select Committee 'is quite right to state that new recruits are needed to help change the culture of the library service to more readily meet the needs of the communities they serve' (DCMS, 2005a: 14). This creates an image of an old-fashioned service that neither reflects the needs of its local community nor serves them well. In fact the Select Committee did not actually say this. When the Committee referred to 'culture' it was urging a massive expansion of the number of libraries that open outside normal office hours. Opening hours have been in decline for some time, but solely as a result of cost cutting. The 'culture' of the library service has traditionally been to open outside office hours and on weekends, but this collapsed as a result of Conservative funding cuts and, having made some modest improvements in recent years, is now under threat again in the current financial squeeze. In terms of the demography of the workforce, it is important for the library service to reflect the population that it serves so that all sections of society feel at ease within libraries, hence it is a welcome move to identify and begin to address barriers to black

and minority ethnic entrants to the service (DCMS, 2005a: 15). But this too should be kept in perspective. CILIP's McKee said that while professional librarians do not reflect the wider population, this is not the case among library assistants, where 'there is a real range both in age and in cultural ethnic diversity, disability, and so on' (House of Commons Culture Media and Sport Committee, 2005b: Ev 37).

While some criticise the library service for its lack of management skills, there are others who argue that 'managerialism' is 'a largely ideological driven philosophy' that conflicts with the role of a profession (McMenemy, 2007b: 446). McMenemy argues that New Public Management is the modern public sector incarnation of 'managerialism' and he refers to Adcroft and Willis's (2005: 387) description of how these ideas

include more emphasis on "professional" management, the introduction of explicit measures of performance, a focus on outputs and results and an ever greater role played by "private sector styles" of management practice.

There are undoubtedly new skills required under the impact of rapid change. The Audit Commission identified a lack of leadership and advocacy skills at senior management levels in the library service (House of Commons Culture Media and Sport Committee, 2005b: Ev 48).

The Committee itself listed:

...knowledge management; IT; leadership; public relations and customer service expertise; managers; business-minded people; those qualified in marketing and finance; web management...

New accreditation routes to enable staff to gain qualifications through on-the-job training as well as the traditional library schools route are welcome (DCMS, 2005a: 15). This is doubly so given the likely future recruitment problems as an ageing professional workforce retires. However, there is an implication in some of the Government's comments that professional librarianship qualifications are unnecessary in a modern library service. At a UNISON library branches seminar I attended in October 2007, several branch reps reported that cost-cutting at that time was already dictating a decline in the numbers of qualified librarians employed in the service. Posts were being reclassified, professional librarians not replaced or replaced by generalist managers rather than qualified staff and key vacancies left unfilled.

Participants at the UNISON seminar were asked to complete a short questionnaire, which revealed a range of similar experiences. For example, in one authority, branch librarian posts were downgraded and redesignated branch manager posts not requiring librarianship qualifications. In another, restructuring led to qualified librarians' posts being replaced by 'Service Development Officers' who did not need to have a library qualification. This authority also has various library service managerial posts which do not require the holder to have a librarianship qualification. Restructuring proposals in one authority looked for qualifications in business or arts administration rather than librarianship. There is no requirement for librarianship qualifications for any library service posts in some authorities today¹⁴. One rep commented that:

up until a few years ago being a qualified or chartered librarian was an essential requirement for librarians and more senior posts. Now it only seems to be a preferred requirement.

This downgrading of professional skills is a short-sighted decision by councils, but if there are elements of the current skills mix that the Government feels need to change then the union argues that there should be an open consultation and negotiation with the staff's union representatives and involving the library schools.

6.9 Discussion

This chapter considered governance within the public library service and discussed the changing face of the service in terms of the metrics used to measure its health. The public library service is a service provided at municipal level¹⁵. In England, it is governed by Act of Parliament, overseen by one Secretary of State (in DCMS), and funded primarily from the departmental revenue stream of another Secretary of State (in DCLG). It is also expected to work closely with other departments (notably DfE) and non-departmental public bodies like ACE. A similar (although slightly less) complicated arrangement exists in the devolved administrations. This fragmentation of responsibility is relevant to the discussion of value and quality because the library service has a statutory obligation to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' service and in England it falls to the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport to

¹⁴ Such moves were reported by UNISON reps as having taken place or being planned in many local authorities, including: Calderdale, Camden, Derbyshire, Essex, Hammersmith, Hampshire, Haringey, Kent, Kingston, Newport, Northamptonshire, North East Lincolnshire, Portsmouth, Somerset, and Swindon.

¹⁵ Except in Northern Ireland where a regional body provides library services.

ensure that local authorities do not breach that legal obligation. Campaign groups have bitterly complained about the inaction of successive Secretaries of State as local authorities have implemented cuts in the library service.

The measure of value and quality has been largely around numerical inputs and outputs. This has concerned many academics and campaigners who argue that this fails to capture the 'real' value of a local public library and that to do this requires a more qualitative approach. The difference that the presence of a branch library makes to the social coherence of a local neighbourhood, or to an individual's wellbeing or outlook cannot be gleaned from a spreadsheet of book issues or library visits. Nevertheless, the focus has been on a library's more measurable activities.

This has usually come down to: funding and costs; library visits and usage; library facilities; the library estate; and staffing skills and training. On almost all of these measures, the picture is one of decline. After a period of increased expenditure under the last government, the picture is now one of severe cuts and closures. Some libraries may be closed completely, others may be handed over to the local community. The decline in total bookstocks, bookstocks per 1000 population, total acquisitions and acquisitions per 1000 population are all certain to decline further, as are the number of library service points with extended opening hours. In fact it is likely that there will be a general cut in opening hours as local authorities look for economies. With important exceptions, the library estate remains badly in need of new investment for renovation but there is little chance of this in an atmosphere of general cutbacks. Those services that have used PFI to build new libraries may find additional difficulties (as in the NHS) with unavoidable commitments to PFI payments cutting deeper into a diminished budget.

Staffing levels will continue to fall and the skills mix in libraries continue to be diluted as local authorities employ fewer professionally qualified librarians and have fewer professionals per 1000 population. This inevitably has a further impact on the quality of service available to the public.

In these circumstances, it is almost inconceivable that the long term decline in book issues will be reversed. Similarly, it is hard to envisage a permanent turnaround in the decline in library visits, despite what appears to have been the temporary positive impact on library visits of the

introduction of free internet access under Labour. This is the backdrop to the discussion in the next chapter of whether the PSE has survived among library staff and, if so, on what basis.

PART THREE: THE WORKERS' EXPERIENCE

Chapter Seven: The public service ethos - a terminal case or alive and well?

7.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the data in relation to attitudes to public service among library staff. It primarily draws on the survey of UNISON members in the library service. It first sets out some of the basic data in order to illustrate the defining features of the library service workforce. It next looks at respondents' views as to whether a public service ethos (PSE) exists within the library service. The chapter then reviews some of the factors that might cut across the survival of a PSE, before a discussion of the implications of the data.

7.2 The sample: basic data from the survey

This first section provides some basic data about the respondents in the library workforce survey, of which there were 2,668 valid responses. It examines respondent age (with a caveat about response rate for this variable) and compares the age profile of this workforce with that in other sections of the economy; reviews the spread of responses across all library authority employers and places that within the territorial units of the UK; looks at the type of workplace and the numbers of employees in the respondent's workplace; provides data on hours of work and the presence of full time and part time workers in the workplace; and looks at length of service – both in the respondent's current post and their time in the library service in total.

Age

Just under half of the respondents provided details of their age (48.1%). The response rate for this question was lower than for almost every other question in the survey, so the results should be viewed with caution as we have no way of knowing whether the non-respondents were randomly distributed among the age groups or not. Nevertheless, of those who responded, over half (54.9%) were aged over 50 (see Table 7a). Over 80% were aged over 40. Just 7.1% were under 30 years of age.

Table 7a: Age of respondents

	Number of respondents	%	Valid %
20 and under	4	0.1	0.3
21-30	87	3.3	6.8
31-40	153	5.7	11.9
41-50	335	12.6	26.1
51-60	606	22.7	47.2
61-65	92	3.5	7.2
66 and over	6	0.2	0.5
Total valid	1283	48.1	100
Missing	1385	51.9	
Total	2668	100	

This is an older working population than in the economy generally, the private sector, the public sector as a whole or even local government as a whole. Comparing the library workforce data with a set of figures compiled by the employers' organisation, the Local Government Group (2011), the differences are stark (Table 7b). Whereas 89% of the library workforce is aged over 35, in local government generally the figure is 73%, as it is in the public sector as a whole, while in the private sector it is 58%. There has been a recognition for some time that 'there is a greying of the profession' as the then CILIP chief executive put it (House of Commons Culture Media and Sport Committee, 2005b: Ev 37) so these figures are perhaps not surprising.

Table 7b: Cross sectoral comparison of employees' age profile

	24 and under	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65 and over
Whole Economy Employees	14%	23%	24%	23%	13%	2%
Private Sector Employees	17%	24%	23%	21%	12%	2%
Public Sector Employees	6%	21%	26%	29%	16%	2%
Local Government Employees	6%	20%	26%	29%	16%	2%
Public Library Service Employees	1.4%	9.6%	14.4%	38.4%	35.2%	1.0%

Source: Local Government Group (2011) and author's survey.

Sex

Of the 2,668 valid responses to the online survey, 2,232 (83.7%) were female and 436 (16.3%) male. There are no independent demographic data on the public library workforce but we know that women form a majority of the public sector workforce as a whole. In 2009, 66% of all UK public sector workers were women (Matthews, 2010) and the proportion of women working in the public sector as a proportion of all women workers steadily increased in the previous decade – up to 33% in 2009 from 29% in 1999 (ibid).

According to an analysis by the GMB union of ONS data, in the first quarter of 2012, 76% of local government staff (including teachers and teaching staff) in England and Wales are women

(GMB, 2012). So the survey of UNISON library staff reveals a higher proportion of women than either the public sector as a whole or local government in particular. However, as Cubitt (2006: 584) notes

...librarianship has been a strongly feminized profession since the later 19th century on both sides of the Atlantic.

Employer

Responses were received from UNISON members working in almost every library authority in the UK. Of the 206 that exist, responses were provided from 202. UNISON members in just two authorities in England and two in Scotland failed to provide responses (Table 7c).

Table 7c: Geographical breakdown of survey responses

Geographical unit	Number of library authorities	Number of library authorities in sample	Number of responses
England	151	149	2172
Scotland	32	30	285
Wales	22	22	148
Northern Ireland	1	1	6
Total number of library authorities	206	202	
Missing responses			57
Total responses			2668

The workplace

Almost half of all respondents worked in a branch library and nearly 30% in a central library (see Table 7d below). Branch libraries tend to have relatively small numbers of workers within them. Of those that chose the 'Other' category, many of them were staff that did not spend all of their time in one or other particular workplace. They often alternated between branch and central libraries or spent some time working on a mobile library and some in a branch or central library.

Table 7d: Type of workplace

Workplace	Number of respondents	%
Branch library	1273	47.7
Central library	758	28.4
Mobile library	53	2.0
Large reference library	43	1.6
Central support for library service	281	10.5
Other	260	9.7
Total	2668	100

Not surprisingly perhaps, given the proportion that worked in a branch library, 40% worked in a workplace with fewer than 10 employees, while almost three quarters (73%) were in workplaces with 25 employees or fewer (see Table 7e).

Table 7e: Number of employees in workplace

Number of employees in workplace	Number of respondents	%
Fewer than 10 employees	1070	40.1
10-25 employees	877	32.9
26-50 employees	460	17.2
51-100 employees	170	6.4
101-200 employees	54	2.0
201-500 employees	20	0.7
More than 500 employees	17	0.6
Total	2668	100

Working time

There is a high degree of part time working in the library service, as shown by the fact that 29.3% of respondents worked 20 hours or less (see Table 7f) although not as high as in local government as a whole, with 54.6% working under 21 hours a week (GMB, 2012). Just over 55% of the sample worked thirty hours a week or more, and 42.6% worked 36 or more hours a week.

Table 7f: Number of hours worked (excluding overtime)

Number of hours worked	Number of respondents	%
0-10 hours	81	3.0
11-20 hours	703	26.3
21-30 hours	411	15.4
31-35 hours	337	12.6
36 or more hours	1136	42.6
Total	2668	100

38.8% of women work 36 hours or more a week compared with 61.9% of men. Extending the comparison to those working over 30 hours shows that just half of women (50.4%) work those hours compared with 80% of men (see Table 7g).

Table 7g: Hours worked by sex of respondent

			Number of hours worked per week (excluding any overtime)					Total
			0-10 hours	11-20 hours	21-30 hours	31-35 hours	36 or more hours	
Sex	Female	Count	70	658	380	258	866	2232
		% within Sex	3.1%	29.5%	17.0%	11.6%	38.8%	100.0%
	Male	Count	11	45	31	79	270	436
		% within Sex	2.5%	10.3%	7.1%	18.1%	61.9%	100.0%
Total		Count	81	703	411	337	1136	2668
		% within Sex	3.0%	26.3%	15.4%	12.6%	42.6%	100.0%

Further evidence of the importance of part time work in the library service comes from the data shown in Tables 7h and 7i. A slightly higher proportion of respondents reported part time workers in their workplace compared to full time workers – 98.4% to 90.7%.

Table 7h: Presence of part time workers in library

	Number of respondents	%
Respondents reporting part time workers in their library	2626	98.4
Respondents reporting no part time workers in their library	39	1.5
Respondents who did not know	3	0.1
Total	2668	100

But there were significantly more workplaces without any full time workers than workplaces without any part time workers. 243 respondents reported workplaces (9.1%) with no full time employees compared with just 39 (1.5%) reporting no part time workers present.

Table 7i: Presence of full-time workers in library

	Number of respondents	%
Respondents reporting full time workers in their library	2420	90.7
Respondents reporting no full time workers in their library	243	9.1
Respondents who did not know	5	0.2
Total	2668	100

Length of service

Like much of local government, the library service has traditionally had a fairly stable workforce, with employees remaining with the service over many years. 87% of respondents had worked for the library service for more than 5 years (see Table 7j). Just 3% had been in the library service for less than 2 years.

Table 7j: Years employed in the library service

Years employed in library service	Number of respondents	%
Less than 6 months	9	0.3
Between 6 months and a year	15	0.6
Between 1 and 2 years	65	2.4
Between 2 and 3 years	82	3.1
Between 3 and 4 years	80	3.0
Between 4 and 5 years	101	3.8
More than 5 years	2316	86.8
Total	2668	100

Not only had almost 90% of respondents been in the library service for more than 5 years, but almost two thirds (63%) had been in their current post for more than 5 years (see Table 7k). It would have been interesting to examine length of service in more detail but this information was not collected and illustrates one of the disadvantages in working with a partner – in this case, UNISON – with different objectives in data gathering and the necessary compromises that are made.

Table 7k: years employed in current post

Years employed in current post	Number of respondents	%
Less than 6 months	95	3.6
Between 6 months and a year	123	4.6
Between 1 and 2 years	202	7.6
Between 2 and 3 years	240	9.0
Between 3 and 4 years	142	5.3
Between 4 and 5 years	185	6.9
More than 5 years	1681	63.0
Total	2668	100

Summary of library workforce profile

The library workforce is predominantly female (84%) but it is not young. Over 80% are over 40, more than half over 50 and just 7% under 30. It is a long-serving workforce (63% have been in their current job for more than 5 years and 87% in the library service for more than 5 years).. Just under half work in a branch library and 40% work in a workplace with fewer than 10 employees, while almost three quarters (73%) in workplaces with 25 employees or fewer. There is a high level of part time working with 29% working 20 or fewer hours a week. 43% worked 36 hours or more a week, although only 39% of women worked these hours compared with 62% of men.

7.3 The public service ethos

Respondents were asked whether they felt that there was such a thing as a public service ethos (PSE) among library staff (Table 7l). Just under 60% agreed that there was, 12% disagreed but almost 30% did not know.

Table 7l: Existence of a public service ethos among library staff

	Number of respondents	%
Yes	1551	58.1
No	320	12.0
Don't know	797	29.9
Total	2668	100

Broken down by sex, the results were markedly different. Almost three quarters of men (74.1%) agreed that there was a PSE compared with 55% of women (see Table 7m). Those registering disagreement produced similar proportions – 10.6% for men and 12.3% for women – but women were twice as likely as men to register 'Don't Know' (32.7% compared with 15.4%). It should be noted that there are five times more women than men in the survey.

Table 7m: Sex and the PSE

	Male		Female	
	Number	%	Number	%
Yes there is a PSE in the library service	323	74.0	1228	55.0
No there is not a PSE in the library service	46	10.6	274	12.3
Don't know	67	15.4	730	32.7

Chi-square = 60.420; *df* = 2; *p* < .05

Of those who provided details about age, older staff were more likely to agree that a PSE exists among library workers than was the case for their younger colleagues (Table 7n and Figure 7a).

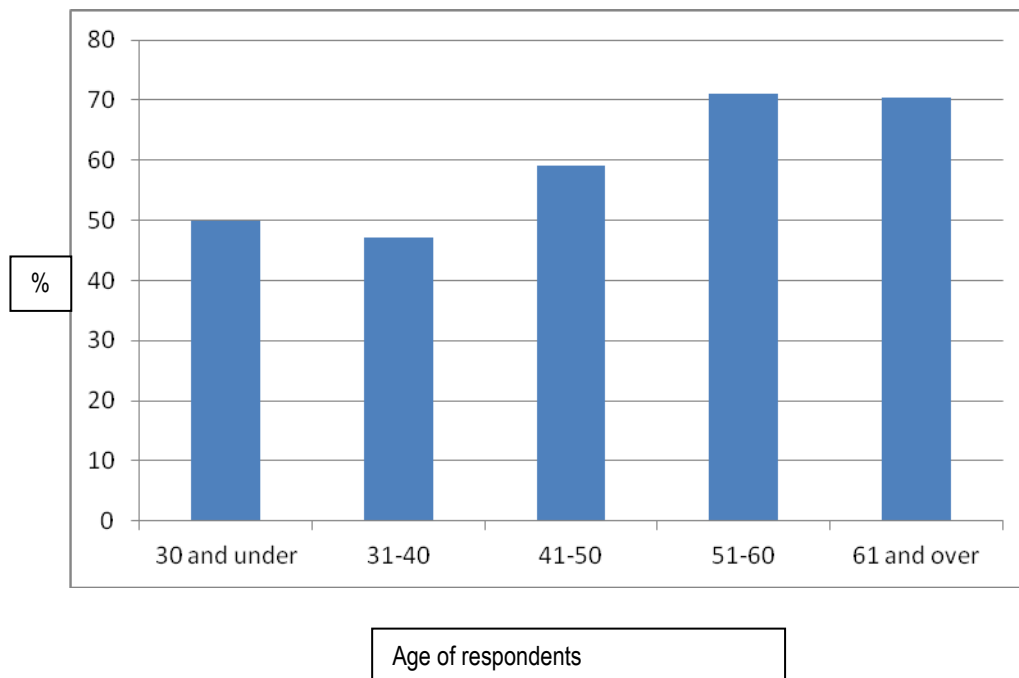
The largest age group (51-60) recorded over 70% in agreement as did the over 60 group. By contrast, in the under 30 age group only 50% agreed.

Table 7n: Age and the PSE

	20 and under	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-65	>65
	Number (%)	Number (%)	Number (%)	Number (%)	Number (%)	Number (%)	Number (%)
Yes there is a PSE in the library service	2 (66.7)	43 (49.4)	72 (47.1)	198 (59.1)	430 (71)	65 (70.7)	4 (66.7)
No there is not a PSE in the library service	1 (33.3)	9 (10.3)	21 (13.7)	50 (14.9)	46 (7.6)	8 (8.7)	1 (16.7)
Don't know	0 (0)	35 (40.2)	60 (39.2)	87 (26)	130 (21.5)	19 (20.7)	1 (16.7)

Chi-square = 54.746; *df* = 12; *p* < .05

Figure 7a: Age and the % of respondents agreeing that PSE exists



As was explained in Chapter 2, the concept of the PSE is complex and subject to differing interpretations. Clearly, this complicates any effort to gain an understanding of its meaning for public service workers. In order to attempt to get at what workers themselves understand by the term, those respondents that agreed a PSE existed among library staff were asked what words they associated with the PSE. 1524 of the 1551 respondents (98.3%) provided information in open ended responses. The intention was to allow respondents the chance to show what they understood by the PSE in their own words – without constricting them or obliging them to choose from a menu of fixed categories or statements. Some of them simply listed the words that they associated with the PSE. Others took the opportunity to craft fairly lengthy, often very thoughtful, statements outlining their views on the PSE and the library service. This illustrated the advantages of the open ended question format. There was a consistency to the responses revealing a clear understanding of the PSE and its place within the library service. The word cloud in Figure 7b provides a representation of the key words identified by respondents.

Figure 7b: Word cloud from words respondents associated with the PSE



Note: created using WordItOut at www.worditout.com

The responses match the understanding of the PSE outlined in the literature. For example, Pratchett and Wingfield's (1996: 641-642) five features of a generic public service ethos (accountability, bureaucratic behaviour, public interest, motivation, loyalty) are clearly reflected in the responses as is the emphasis from Horton (2006), Pollit (2003) and others on equity, integrity, impartiality, commitment to public service and accountability.

The following respondent responses to this open ended survey question are fairly typical:

Access to services for all; Public good; Public realm; Not for profit Accountability;
Commitment Value for money; Loyalty

Or

Free. Open to all. Universal. Public space. Universities for the poor. Public right. Cradle to the grave. Civil liberties. Gift to the people.

And

Statutory requirement underpinning just how vital and important it is; altruistic; caring; responsive; relevant; useful; professional; non-biased; comprehensive; inclusive; valued; non-profit making; enhancing society; how good it is reflects and is representative of how well a country is doing for its citizens.

Or

Accessible and available to the whole community. Led by customer needs not politics. Emphasis on service to the public not the Council's agenda. Public good before profit.

This latter response not only emphasises the 'public good' element of the service but also overtly draws a distinction between serving the public and serving the political will of the council. Some of the responses that go beyond the listing of associated key words provide further eloquently written insights into attitudes towards the PSE. For example, one survey respondent both hinted at the resentment of the marketisation and public service cuts and expanded on what the PSE represents, as:

a commitment to actually providing a service to the public (as opposed to talking about it and setting specious targets); treating customers as individual human beings; going out of the way to keep service points running despite lack of bodies or lack of direction; unpaid overtime, sometimes required of staff because too many corners have been cut to let people be in two places at once.

This response, and the many like it, provides a link between the notion of a public good and standards of public sector employment and the retention of a commitment to the PSE *despite* the negative experiences of staff. Many of the respondents emphasised those elements of the job that are difficult to quantify and involved personal contacts with service users (often combining professional knowledge and 'soft' skills) and were therefore time consuming and labour intensive. In the minds of library staff, the quality of service they could provide was clearly linked to staffing levels and good conditions which, in turn, connected to the public service ethos. These comments reflect a viewpoint that sees counter-posing of 'services or jobs' or 'services or conditions' as a false dichotomy. Their understanding of the nature of the job means that they feel that quality of service and staffing levels and good conditions are

inextricably linked. In fact they feel that the former *depends* on the latter. This has potential for the union in its campaigning against cuts and closure alongside the demands for good conditions and wages.

Another survey respondent emphasised the library as a public space and more explicitly distinguished the library service from marketised services:

The ethos stems from the idea that libraries are a national institution and are owned by the general public, free (mostly) at the point of delivery. They are safe, neutral, spaces where staff are (or were) respected and where information and advice could be trusted. The ethos includes a commitment to great customer service but also acknowledges that customers may visit a library for no other reason than to make social contact. As such, libraries are different to retail e.g. a customer can visit a library and stay all day without being challenged or made to feel a nuisance.

And another survey respondent said

I believe that free access to information and communication are a basic human right - the world is changing around us and in too many cases people are being expected to pay for information and access to new forms of reading. Our Public Library Service has always had the interests of every member of our community at heart and this is even more important in today's world.

Some respondents warned of the impact of changes on the PSE, one arguing that:

Management are attempting to replace the public service ethos with corporate loyalty and other ideas from private industry. Public service means a free service available and welcoming to all.

Similarly, another respondent spoke of the lack of commitment to the PSE among management and the direction being taken by the library service:

Public service, as a term, says it all. The wish to serve the public - or customers as we now call them - with the free service of making books etc available to them, always. ...I'm not sure that library service management still believes in this. We have long been moving towards the treatment of public libraries as if they are corporate businesses and many recent policies are moving us closer to this.

And again, a survey respondent put it even more forcefully:

Regardless of the constant attacks on the library service by elected councillors and library management (efficiency savings, budget cuts, recruitment freezes and general dumbing down of stock etc) the library staff still manage to put the public first before their own particular feelings and situations.

The insights of these respondents provided through responses to the open ended question were used as the basis for a deeper discussion in the interviews with the union reps and paid officials which are referred to later.

The type of workplace was not significant in terms of attitudes to the existence of a PSE. Three quarters of the sample worked in either a branch library or a central library with 54% of those working in a branch library and 56.7% of those in a central library agreeing that a PSE exists.

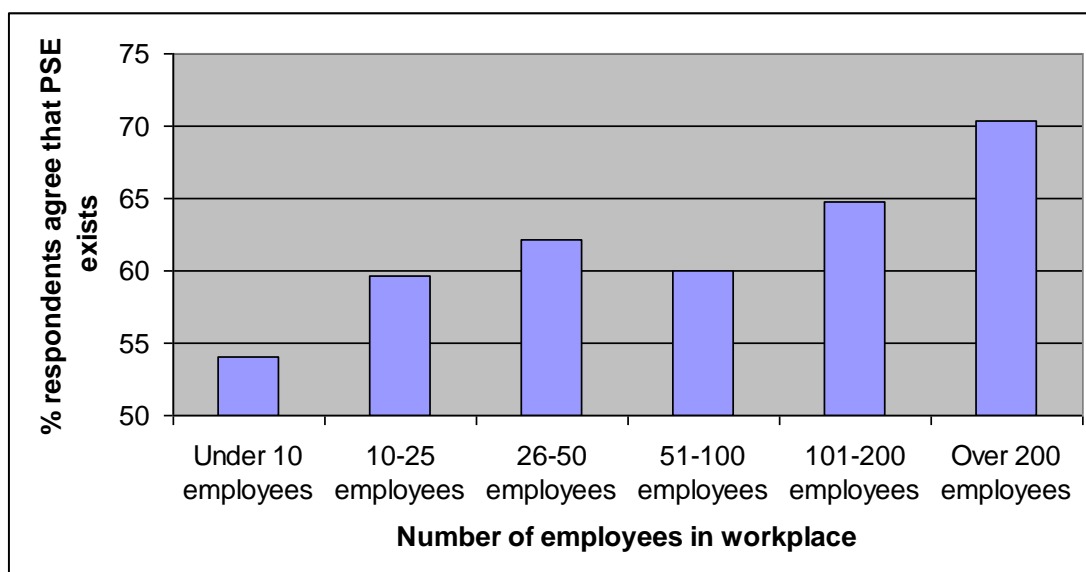
Almost three quarters of the sample work in workplaces with either fewer than 10 employees or between 10 and 25 employees. Responses to the PSE question showed that 54% of those in workplaces with less than 10 employees agreed that there was a PSE, compared with 59.7% in the 10-25 employees category, 62.2% in the 26-50 category and 60% in the 51-100 category (the categories for the larger workplaces – more than 100 employees - have small numbers of respondents and have been ignored). So there is a slight increase in support for the existence of a PSE in workplaces with more employees (see Table 7o and Figure 7c).

Table 7o: Number of employees in workplace and the PSE

	Under 10	10-25	26-50	51-100	101-200	201-500	Over 500
	Number (%)	Number (%)	Number (%)	Number (%)	Number (%)	Number (%)	Number (%)
Yes there is a PSE in the library service	578 (54)	524 (59.7)	286 (62.2)	102 (60)	35 (64.8)	14 (70)	12 (70.6)
No there is not a PSE in the library service	134 (12.5)	98 (11.2)	53 (11.5)	27 (15.9)	4 (7.4)	3 (15)	1 (5.9)
Don't know	358 (33.5)	255 (29.1)	121 (26.3)	41 (24.1)	15 (27.9)	3 (15)	4 (23.5)

Chi-square = 21.279; df = 12; p < .05

Figure 7c: Number of employees in workplace and respondents agreeing existence of PSE



If we exclude the small number of respondents (just 81 in total) working only 10 or fewer hours a week, there is a correlation between increased support for the existence of a PSE and the number of hours worked a week (see Figure 7d and Table 7p below).

Figure 7d: Working hours and respondents agreeing existence of PSE

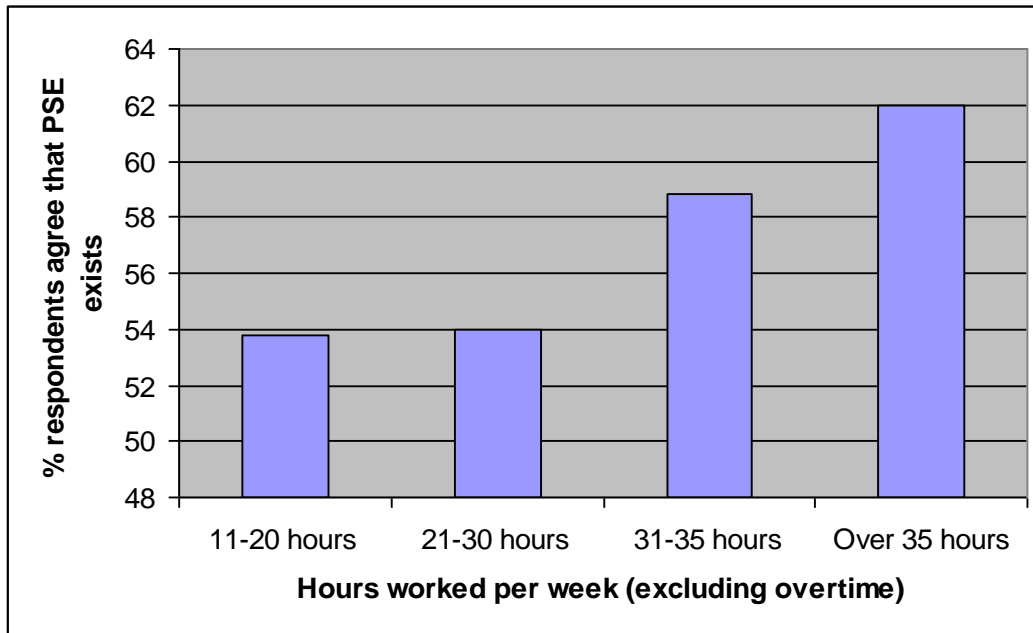


Table 7p: Working hours and respondents agreeing existence of PSE

	0-10 hours	11-20 hours	21-30 hours	31-35 hours	36 or more hours
	Number (%)	Number (%)	Number (%)	Number (%)	Number (%)
Yes there is a PSE in the library service	49 (60.5)	378 (53.8)	222 (54)	198 (58.8)	704 (62)
No there is not a PSE in the library service	8 (7.4)	79 (11.2)	57 (13.9)	51 (15.1)	127 (11.2)
Don't know	26 (32.1)	246 (35)	132 (32.1)	88 (26.1)	305 (26.8)

Chi-square = 24.909; *df* = 9; *p* < .05

Data on the length of time in current post and the length of time spent working in the library service as a whole did not provide much of an insight into attitudes towards the existence of a PSE. 51.7% of those who had worked in the library service for 5 years or less and 59.1% of those who worked there for more than 5 years agreed that there is a PSE among library staff. However, 62.3% of those in their current post for 5 years or less and 55.7% of those in post for more than 5 years agreed that there is a PSE.

Summary

Most respondents (58% of the sample) believe that there is a public service ethos among library staff. Only 12% felt that there was not, while a substantial minority (30%) did not know. It would have been useful to have been able to get beneath this latter response a little as it is not

entirely clear what this means. It could mean that 30% of the sample do not know whether there is a public service ethos among library staff. It is also possible that some of these simply did not know what is meant by a PSE. In retrospect, it would have been interesting to specifically ask - both this group and those that did not agree – what they thought was meant by the PSE. As such it might have strengthened the study if the questionnaire had allowed for a more detailed exploration of the precise meanings attached to this term by *all* respondents – whether they agreed that a PSE existed or not. This might have been possible through a series of questions using a Likert scale. Also the word cloud option could have been extended to those who responded with a 'No' or 'Don't know' reply. While all respondents had the opportunity to add any additional comments at the end of the questionnaire but a more focussed questioning of these groups might have yielded useful data.

Men were more likely than women to agree that a PSE exists among library staff (74% to 55%). There is also a clear relationship between age and the perception that there is a PSE in the library service. This view is held by around 70% of respondents in the age categories 60+ and 51-60. This drops to 59% for those aged 41-50 and falls further for younger respondents. Taking the largest group of staff, 67% of the over 40 age group accept the idea of a PSE in the library service (just 48% of those under 40 do so). The 'Don't Know' response has an inverse relationship with age: the younger the respondent, the more likely they are to register a 'Don't Know' response.

Respondents who had a positive attitude to a PSE had a clear conception of what it means, emphasising the notion of the 'public good', accountability, and community. The type of workplace (branch library, central library, mobile etc) did not appear to be significant, although there is a correlation between the number of employees in a respondent's workplace and the attitude to the PSE, as there is with the number of hours worked.

7.4 Changes in the public service employment bargain - a threat to the ethos?

Several commentators have argued that the values and behaviour associated with the public service ethos are the result of, or are at least sustained by, the workplace bargain that developed in the public sector – relative job security, a career structure, training, a better pension than is usually the case in the private sector, and a commitment to fairness at work

(the 'good employer') with 'progressive' employment policies (e.g. Winchester, 1983: 176). Hood and Lodge (2006: 6) define a public service bargain as 'explicit or implicit agreements between public servants – the civil or uniformed services of the state - and those they serve.' The way that the notion of the public service employment bargain is deployed in this thesis is narrower than the usage of Hood and Lodge (which encompasses the division of labour between elected politician and official over the creation, development and execution of policy as well as much else. In this chapter I use the notion of a bargain to illustrate the expectations of treatment of the public library workforce, how these have been changed and how that has an impact on the public service ethos.

The marketisation associated with the public sector reforms of the last 30 years is therefore seen as a threat both to the public service employment bargain *and* to the public service ethos (Hebson et al, 2003; Heery, 2000). In the next section, the findings of the survey data are used to examine this issue, in terms of respondents' views of the existence of a public service ethos among library staff and the impact upon that of perceptions of job security, career opportunities, changes in the library service, investment and cuts, availability of training, staffing levels, the staff's understanding of how they are valued, stress and morale.

Job security

Respondents were asked whether they felt secure in their post (Table 7q). It is revealing that only 38% did so with almost two thirds (62%) declaring that they did not feel secure. This is an astonishing level of insecurity and a clear indicator of the degree to which the public service employment bargain has been weakened.

Table 7q: Staff perceptions of security in their post

	Number of respondents	%
Yes	1014	38.0
No	1654	62.0
Total	2668	100

However, there was little difference between those that did feel secure in their jobs and those that did not in terms of whether they agreed that there was a public service ethos among library staff (see Table 7r) with 57.7% compared to 58.4%. Among those that did not agree that there was a PSE, the figure was higher for those who felt insecure in their post.

Table 7r: Job security and the public service ethos

	Feel secure in post	Do not feel secure in post
	Number (%)	Number (%)
Agree that there is a public service ethos	585 (57.7)	966 (58.4)
Do not agree that there is a public service ethos	83 (8.2)	237 (14.3)
Don't know	346 (34.1)	451 (27.3)

Chi-square = 29.725; df = 2; p < .05

The library service as a career

Respondents were asked whether there were career opportunities within the library service in their local authority (Table 7s). Just over a third (34.5%) thought that there were career opportunities but over half (51%) did not, with 14.4% undecided.

Table 7s: Career opportunities within the library service in the local authority

	Number of respondents	%
Yes, there are career opportunities	921	34.5
No, there are not career opportunities	1362	51.0
Don't know	385	14.4
Total	2668	100

Within any local authority, the library service forms a small part of the workforce so there are inevitably some limitations on opportunities for advancement within the service. The position is exacerbated in a service like libraries in which staff are long serving. This is particularly true within smaller local authorities. Nevertheless, there are a number of factors that have combined to make the position even more difficult in terms of careers within the library service. These have affected both the professionally qualified librarians and library staff that do not possess a librarianship qualification.

Unsurprisingly, the degree of impact is uneven across the different authorities, mediated by a range of issues. One thing that appears to be common to all is the financial squeeze felt by local authorities. This predates the Coalition government's austerity programme (although this almost certainly deepened the crisis of funding), and has frequently resulted in general funding cuts, reductions in posts and recruitment freezes, leaving vacancies unfilled.

In some cases, respondents highlighted the impact on professionals and in others on staff without librarianship qualifications (no doubt speaking from personal experience in each case).

However, while the results for both might be the same – reduced opportunities for promotion – the reasons behind it are different.

The decline in the number of professional staff and proportion of total staff that are professional librarians is a long term one, documented by CIPFA (2011c). This decline continues and obviously has an impact on prospects for those professionals remaining. Respondents complained of a devaluing of the role of professional librarians, with cuts in the numbers of posts for which a librarianship qualification was deemed essential and the search instead for library managers with ‘retail experience.’ Where recruitment has taken place, some respondents noted that it is often external recruitment for ‘team managers’, who are not expected or required to have either a professional librarianship qualification or any experience in libraries. This *deprofessionalisation* of the service (and associated devaluing) is an important feature of change and contributes to the unhappiness of professionally qualified librarians as promotion opportunities become fewer and fewer. One respondent said:

The professional librarians have become a minority under threat of redundancy from our Head of Service. At times we actually feel despised. To quote "degrees mean nothing nowadays, there is a queue of people happy to come and do your jobs so get on with it." Hardly words to make us feel valued and committed to our jobs!

Non-professional staff also complained of fewer opportunities but this seemed to be the result of a combination of cuts (in posts and training opportunities) and the widespread introduction of much flatter structures within the library service. Consequently, many complained that the move to the grade above was a much bigger step than it had been under the old structure and candidates were expected to be better qualified. However, it seems that many authorities have cut back on the support for training or self study that would assist in applying for promotion (see section on training below). This creation of a gap as a result of ‘delaying’ is not confined to the library service. Grimshaw et al (2002) conducted a study of four service organisations that had a similar experience to that reported by library staff. They saw this as undermining ‘the linkage between training and career advancement’ (Grimshaw et al, 2002: 92) and as demotivating staff and contributing to lower job satisfaction, higher staff turnover, lower morale and absenteeism. External recruitment was also an issue for the non-professional library staff, although here the complaint was about the hiring of agency staff, rather than filling vacancies with substantive appointments.

One respondent bemoaned the deskilling of library work, saying:

Where I work the public are getting the same service as they would get asking for advice at a supermarket checkout as I am surrounded by agency staff and people who have been drafted in from other council departments, with no library knowledge. Anyone can stamp a book out and put them back on the shelves, but libraries should be so much more than this.

Among those who believed that there were career opportunities within their authority's library service, there was a correspondingly positive view of the existence of a public service ethos (see Table 7t), and a much smaller proportion that rejected the idea of a PSE than the overall sample.

Table 7t: Careers opportunities and the public service ethos

	There are career opportunities in the local authority's library service	There are not career opportunities in the local authority's library service	Don't know
	Number (%)	Number (%)	Number (%)
Agree that there is a public service ethos	608 (66.0)	767 (56.3)	176 (45.7)
Do not agree that there is a public service ethos	74 (8.0)	216 (15.9)	30 (7.8)
Don't know	239 (26.0)	379 (27.8)	179 (46.5)

Chi-square = 97.756; *df* = 4; *p* < .05

Respondents were also asked a more general question about careers in the library service, specifically whether they would recommend the library service as a career. This reinforced the earlier findings with only a third (34.5%) feeling that they would recommend the service as a

career with more (43%) being clear that on the basis of their experience they would not recommend it (Table 7u).

Table 7u: Recommending the library service as a career

	Number of respondents	%
Yes, would recommend the library service as a career	920	34.5
No, would not recommend the library service as a career	1148	43.0
Don't know	600	22.5
Total	2668	100

Although only a third of respondents would recommend the library service as a career, those that would not do so were not markedly hostile to the notion that there is a PSE. In fact they were in line with the sample as a whole. This suggests that the hold of the PSE on the attitudes of library workers is strong enough to withstand some very negative experiences of working within the service. There was a correlation between those who would recommend the library service as a career and those that agreed there is a PSE.

Table 7v: Recommending the library service as a career and the public service ethos

	Would recommend library service as a career	Would not recommend library service as a career	Don't know
	Number (%)	Number (%)	Number (%)
Agree that there is a public service ethos	616 (67.0)	664 (57.8)	271 (45.2)
Do not agree that there is a public service ethos	60 (6.5)	194 (16.9)	66 (11.0)
Don't know	244 (26.5)	290 (25.3)	263 (43.8)

Chi-square = 126.958; *df* = 4; *p* < .05

Training provision

Training is seen as an important part of the culture of the public sector and as Farnham (1999: 120) notes, the 'public services have always trained their staff, although their traditions have varied across the services'. One of the traditional attractions to work in the public sector is that there is continuing training for employees. Respondents were asked whether they felt that they are given adequate training, as required and whether there had been any cuts in the training budget in the previous two years. These two questions are of particular interest given that many respondents reported the flattening and 'delaying' of library service structures – a process which ordinarily is accompanied by a sharper emphasis on qualifications.

Table 7w: Adequate training, as required

	Number of respondents	%
Yes	1632	61.2
No	1036	38.8
Total	2668	100

Training and career development would be particularly beneficial to library assistants, to help them to meet the demands of the service and to follow a coherent career path. Qualified librarians also need to be able to update their skills and knowledge. UNISON (2010b) told the DCMS library review that many library courses offer a largely irrelevant curriculum, with most new applicants needing complete training on the job. In the survey of library service members, 61.2% of respondents felt training was adequate, while 38.8% disagreed (Table 7w).

Table 7x: Adequate training and the PSE

	Agree that there is adequate training	Do not agree that there is adequate training
	Number (%)	Number (%)
Agree that there is a public service ethos	978 (59.9)	573 (55.3)
Do not agree that there is a public service ethos	161 (9.9)	159 (15.3)
Don't know	493 (30.2)	304 (29.3)

Chi-square = 18.363; *df* = 2; *p* < .05

Of those who thought their training adequate 59.9% agreed that a PSE exists among library staff while among those who felt training was not adequate this fell slightly to 55.3% (Table 7x).

Table 7y: Cuts in the training budget in previous two years

	Number of respondents	%
Yes	950	35.6
No	199	7.5
Don't know	1519	56.9
Total	2668	100

35.6% of respondents reported cuts in the training budget over the previous two years (Table 7y). Just 7.5% reported no cuts. However, 56.9% did not know whether there had been cuts or not.

Table 7z: cuts in the training budget and the PSE

	There have been cuts in training budget over previous 2 years	There have not been cuts in training budget over previous 2 years	Don't know
	Number (%)	Number (%)	Number (%)
Agree that there is a public service ethos	580 (61.1)	143 (71.9)	828 (54.5)
Do not agree that there is a public service ethos	130 (13.7)	19 (9.5)	171 (11.3)
Don't know	240 (25.3)	37 (18.6)	520 (34.2)

Chi-square = 40.117; *df* = 4; *p* < .05

Among those who reported a cut in training budgets, 61.1% agreed that a PSE exists among library staff (Table 7z). For those who reported no budget cut the figure was 71.9%. The largest group, however, was those that did not know whether there had been a cut or not, and 54.5% of these agreed that a PSE exists. Again this data suggests that while negative workplace experiences can have an impact on the belief in the PSE to a certain degree, overall it remains relatively robust.

Change and instability: Investment and cuts

Over the last three decades, the public sector has seen virtually constant change under the pressure of wave after wave of public sector 'reform'. During the New Labour period there was some additional investment in the public sector but there were also further inroads made towards marketisation and the adoption of private sector management methods. The cumulative effect of that might be perceived to have damaged staff commitment to the PSE. This next section examines some of the changes in the library service and attitudes towards the PSE.

When respondents to the survey were asked whether they had seen changes to their library service over the previous two years (the survey took place in January 2010). 93.7% reported that they had seen changes with only 6.3% reporting no changes. Respondents were asked whether staff are normally consulted -- either directly or through the union - before changes are made to the library service (see Table 7aa). Just under half (49.3%) said that they were, but almost as many said that they were not. Interestingly, this question registered only a small proportion of 'Don't Knows' suggesting that this was an issue which animated staff and on which they had clear opinions.

Table 7aa: Consultation with staff before changes are made

	Number of respondents	%
Yes, staff are consulted before change	1314	49.3
No, staff are not consulted before change	1161	43.5
Don't know	193	7.2
Total	2668	100

There needs to be a caveat to this data however. Although almost half of respondents reported they were consulted before change, several explained that while this was formally the case, 'it seems that decisions are already made' and

...it's my experience that management just go through the motions in 'consulting' with staff and/or the public and they don't really want anyone to change the plans they've already devised.

Another respondent complained that

it is always stressed that staff are consulted about changes we feel that we are rarely listened to and that plans have already been decided

Such an approach encourages a view among some library staff that consultation was largely meaningless, as another respondent reported that although:

the forms of consultation are being observed, no-one really believes that any of it actually affects the changes taking place

And

we often are consulted but I feel our opinions are often ignored and management go ahead with their plans anyway

Or

consultation doesn't necessarily mean we are listened to and our concerns addressed.

Table 7bb: Consultation and the PSE

	Staff are consulted before change	Staff are not consulted before change	Don't know
	Number %	Number %	Number %
Agree that there is a public service ethos	855 (65.1)	588 (50.6)	108 (56.0)
Do not agree that there is a public service ethos	109 (8.3)	204 (17.6)	7 (3.6)
Don't know	350 (26.6)	369 (31.8)	78 (40.4)

Chi-square = 91.790; *df* = 4; *p* < .05

65.1% of those who were consulted over change agreed that there is a PSE among library staff. This contrasts with just 50.6% of those who are not consulted over change. Although there was a great deal of weary cynicism about the reality of consultation, there is a correlation between a lack of consultation and a lower degree of workers' belief in the existence of a PSE.

Given the ubiquity of change, it is interesting to examine what kind of change has been experienced in the library service, and it is clear that the majority of changes relate to the employment bargain and the organisation of work within the library.

Table 7cc: Selected changes in previous two years

	Number of respondents N = 2500	%
Reduced staffing levels	2077	83.1
Use of Volunteers	881	35.2
Reduced hours	609	24.4
Increased hours	506	20.2

83.1% of those that reported change in their library service also reported staff reductions. 35.2% reported the use of volunteers as a change over the previous two years (this is examined in more detail in the next chapter). 24.4% reported reduced hours of work and 20.2% reported increased hours of work. This apparent contradiction masks the differing responses of local authorities to financial pressure. Some have cut back on the hours available for staff to work (often reducing the hours of part time workers), while others have combined staff cuts with an increase in the hours of work in order to cover for the reduced staffing level. High among the other changes reported by respondents were library closures and reorganisation or restructuring of the library service, often to integrate it with other services.

Respondents were also specifically asked whether: their library service had cut any services or delayed the introduction of planned new services; there had been any positive developments; or there had been any investment (see Tables 7dd, 7ff and 7hh). Under half of all respondents (42.7%) reported cuts or delays to planned improvements in the previous two years (see Table 7dd). Just 18.8% reported no cuts or delays, while well over a third (38.5%) did not know.

Table 7dd: Cuts in services or delays in planned new services over previous two years

	Number of respondents	%
Yes	1140	42.7
No	501	18.8
Don't know	1027	38.5
Total	2668	100

There was not much difference between those that had experienced cuts and those that had not in terms of whether or not they agreed that library staff held to a PSE (see Table 7ee). 63% of those who had experienced cuts, and 67.9% of those that had not, agreed that there is a PSE among library staff.

Table 7ee: Cuts in services and the PSE

	There have been cuts in services in the previous two years	There have not been cuts in services in the previous two years	Don't know
	Number %	Number %	Number %
Agree that there is a public service ethos	718 (63.0)	340 (67.9)	493 (48.0)
Do not agree that there is a public service ethos	160 (14.0)	55 (11.0)	105 (10.2)
Don't know	262 (23.0)	106 (21.2)	429 (41.8)

Chi-square = 117.508; *df* = 4; *p* < .05

Respondents were also asked whether there had been any positive developments in their library over the previous two years (Table 7ff). Almost half (47.9%) responded affirmatively while 37% reported no positive developments and 15.1% did not know.

Table 7ff: Positive developments in the library service over the previous two years

	Number of respondents	%
Yes	1279	47.9
No	986	37.0
Don't know	403	15.1
Total	2668	100

Respondents were asked to provide examples of what they considered to be positive developments. Figure 7e below represents the responses in a word cloud format to give an indication of the sort of positive developments experienced by respondents.

Figure 7e: Word cloud based on positive developments in the library service over previous two years identified by respondents



Note: created using WordItOut at www.worditout.com

It should be borne in mind that the two year period covered is 2008-09, during which time some previously planned expansion occurred, despite the onset of the financial crisis. The positive developments noted by respondents included the building of new libraries; refurbishment of existing libraries; the successful introduction of new services; in some cases a new (better) approach to service provision brought in by new leadership; increased use of technology, e.g. self service facility; access to lottery grant funding; improved stock in some instances; better IT provision; some extension of opening hours; greater efforts to reach new potential service users; increased online services; more consultation with users on running of the library; and more staff involvement.

Those who had experienced positive developments in their local library service were much more likely to agree that library staff had a PSE than those who had not experienced positive developments (70.2% compared with 48.4% - see Table 7gg). This reinforced the view of the symbiotic relationship between the employment contract (conditions of work, degree of professionalisation etc) and belief in the existence of a PSE.

Table 7gg: Positive developments in local library service and the PSE

	Positive developments in the local library service over the last two years		
	Yes	No	Don't know
	Number %	Number %	Number %
Agree that there is a public service ethos	898 (70.2)	477 (48.4)	176 (43.7)
Do not agree that there is a public service ethos	92 (7.2)	195 (19.8)	33 (8.2)
Don't know	289 (22.6)	314 (31.8)	194 (48.1)

Chi-square = 210.943; *df* = 4; *p* < .05

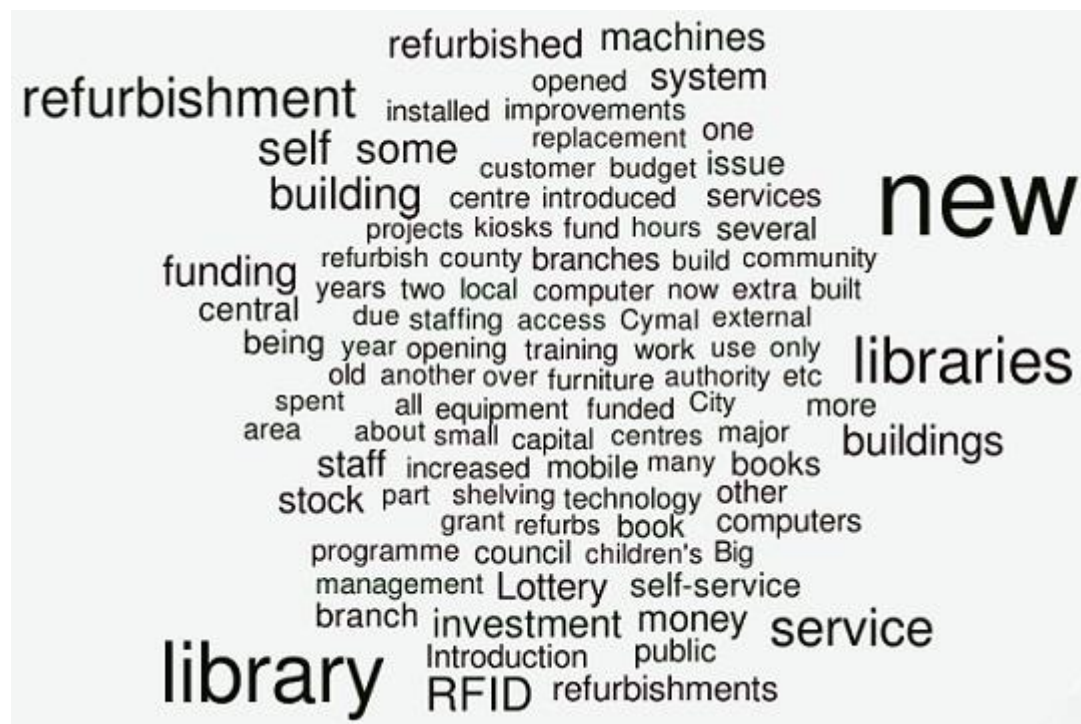
Respondents were also asked whether or not there had been any investment in their library in the previous two years (Table 7hh).

Table 7hh: Library investment in previous two years

	Number of respondents	%
Yes	1379	51.7
No	691	25.9
Don't know	598	22.4
Total	2668	100

Over half (51.7%) replied that there had been investment with just over a quarter (25.9%) reporting no investment and 22.4% reporting that they did not know. There is obviously some cross over with responses to the earlier question about positive developments within the service (many of them having been related to investment). Figure 7f below gives an indication, through a word cloud presentation, of the sort of investment that was reported by respondents.

Figure 7f: Word cloud based on examples of investment over previous two years identified by respondents



Note: created using WordItOut at www.worditout.com

Table 7ii: Library investment and the PSE

	Library investment in previous 2 years		
	Yes	No	Don't know
	Number %	Number %	Number %
Agree that there is a public service ethos	941 (68.2)	350 (50.7)	260 (43.5)
Do not agree that there is a public service ethos	122 (8.8)	140 (20.3)	58 (9.7)
Don't know	316 (22.9)	201 (29.1)	280 (46.8)

Chi-square = 186.351; *df* = 4; *p* < .05

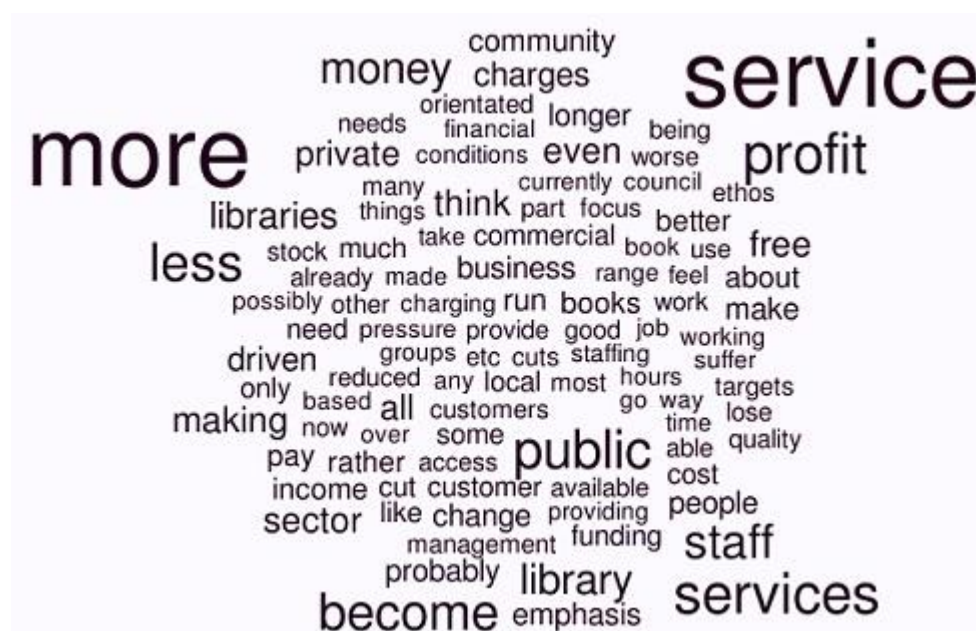
Again, and in line with the previous discussion, it was clear that those working in libraries that had received investment over the previous two years were more likely to support the view that there was a PSE among library staff (see Table 7ii). 68.2% of those who reported investment agreed that a PSE existed, compared to 50.7% of those working in libraries without investment. It seems clear therefore that a strong link has developed between the conditions of employment of staff in the public sector and a belief in the existence of a public service ethos. This has considerable relevance for the ongoing discussions of public sector 'reform'. In recent years, both Labour and Conservative governments have considered whether private or third sector providers could or should replace public sector provision in the delivery of public services. Ministers (and their shadows) from all the major parties have argued that such a change should be welcomed as a means of improving the quality of public services. As such, the views of these respondents will be of interest. In the survey they were asked if they thought that the library service would change if it was no longer part of the public sector (Table 7jj). This question produced one of the most decisive responses in the survey - 77.9% agreed that it would change, just 2.8% disagreed and 19.2% did not know.

Table 7jj: Change in the library service if no longer part of the public sector

	Number of respondents	%
Yes, the library service will change if it is no longer part of the public sector	2079	77.9
No, the library service will not change if it is no longer part of the public sector	76	2.8
Don't know	513	19.2
Total	2668	100

Those that expected it to change were asked what changes they would expect. With 2,067 of the 2,079 who expected it to change providing comments – some of them quite detailed - Figure 7g below provides a word cloud based on their responses, almost all of them negative.

Figure 7g: Word cloud based on likely changes in library service if outside the public sector, identified by respondents



Note: created using WordItOut at www.worditout.com

The vast majority of respondents (89.9% of those that expressed a view) believed that if the library service moved out of the public sector there would be negative consequences of one form or another. The most common expectations were to do with the replacement of a community focus with a focus on profits; the loss of the public service ethos and its replacement with a commercial ethos; an end to democratic accountability; the loss of public trust, support and a sense of public ownership; the danger of bias and discrimination in service provision; service and staff cuts; deprofessionalisation; library closures; a narrower range of bookstock, concentrating on best sellers; worse conditions for staff; higher and more extensive charges for most services; a narrower range of service provision, eliminating expensive services like visits to the housebound; and the loss of independence in stock selection. Read another way, these responses speak to a powerful commitment to public ownership, and one that focuses on the quality of service rather than simply the deterioration in working conditions.

63 respondents (3.1%) who expressed a view were ambivalent about a move out of the public sector, identifying both potential positive and negative impacts. Just 145 respondents (7%) suggested that a move out of the public sector would be positive. The most commonly expressed view here was that a move outside the public sector would provide greater funding (including additional funding for better stock, buildings and pay for staff), improved

management and less bureaucracy. The record of thirty years of privatisation does not offer much hope for these staff and neither does the more recent experiences of the (so far) few cases of privatisation in the public library service (Public Libraries News, 2012). One respondent explained from bitter experience:

I am one of many professional librarians who have felt obliged to leave Hounslow Libraries since the service was contracted out to John Laing Integrated Services. The Library service has all but been destroyed and I do not believe Hounslow Council is fulfilling its legal obligation to provide a public library service.

Among those that expected the library service to change if it moved out of the public sector, two thirds (65.7%) also agreed that there exists a PSE among library staff (see Table 7kk). This drops to just 27.6% among those who do not believe that the library service would change outside the public sector.

Table 7kk: Change if libraries no longer part of public sector and the PSE

	Library Service would change if no longer part of public sector		
	Yes	No	Don't know
	Number %	Number %	Number %
Agree that there is a public service ethos	1366 (65.7)	21 (27.6)	164 (32.0)
Do not agree that there is a public service ethos	233 (11.2)	26 (34.2)	61 (11.9)
Don't know	480 (23.1)	29 (38.2)	288 (56.1)

Chi-square = 277.702; *df* = 4; *p* < .05

Staffing levels

Respondents were asked whether they thought that staffing levels were adequate in their library. Just over a third (36.1%) agreed that they were but almost two thirds disagreed (62.1%) (see Table 7II). This was also a question in which there were very few 'Don't Knows' – only 1.8% of respondents - suggesting that this is an area of importance for library staff.

Table 7II: Adequate staffing levels

	Number of respondents	%
Yes	964	36.1
No	1656	62.1
Don't know	48	1.8
Total	2668	100

Although 62% of respondents regard staffing levels as inadequate, in terms of whether they agreed there was a PSE among library staff, there was not much difference between these respondents and those that were satisfied with staffing levels (see Table 7mm). 59.5% of those who thought staffing levels adequate and 57.4% of those that disagreed, believe that there is a PSE among library staff.

Table 7mm: Perception of adequacy of staffing levels and PSE

	Staffing levels are adequate		
	Yes	No	Don't know
	Number %	Number %	Number %
Agree that there is a public service ethos	574 (59.5)	951 (57.4)	26 (54.2)
Do not agree that there is a public service ethos	100 (10.4)	217 (13.1)	3 (6.3)
Don't know	290 (30.1)	488 (29.5)	19 (39.6)

Chi-square = 7.353; df = 4; p > .05

Over half of all respondents (54.2%) did not think that adequate arrangements are made to cover sickness and holiday absences, although 41.7% did (see Table 7nn).

Table 7nn: Adequate arrangements made to cover sickness/holidays

	Number of respondents	%
Yes	1112	41.7
No	1446	54.2
Don't know	110	4.1
Total	2668	100

Again, in terms of the PSE, there was not a great deal of difference between those who thought that sickness/holiday cover was adequate and those that did not (Table 7oo). 59.6% of those

satisfied with sickness/holiday cover and 57.2% of those that were not agreed that there existed a PSE among library staff.

Table 700: Sickness/holiday cover and the PSE

	Adequate arrangements for sickness/holiday cover		
	Yes	No	Don't know
	Number %	Number %	Number %
Agree that there is a public service ethos	663 (59.6)	827 (57.2)	61 (55.5)
Do not agree that there is a public service ethos	9.8 109	204 (14.1)	7 (6.4)
Don't know	340 (30.6)	415 (28.7)	42 (38.2)

Chi-square = 16.921; df = 4; p < .05

Workforce perception of how they are valued

In their study of the reciprocal exchange made between public sector worker and employer, Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler (2003) found that sharing common values meant that workers were prepared to tolerate some breaches of the workplace bargain, if the organisation remained supportive, so:

Acknowledgement of the employees' worth by the employing organisation is likely to be viewed as particularly important to public servants. (Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler, 2003: 223)

Such an overt demonstration of support was seen as a statement of the value of the workforce and its work to the employer. Respondents were asked whether they felt valued by their management; whether they felt that their authority valued the library service and also whether

they felt valued by the general public – the ‘customer’ in this case. Their feelings about their management were largely negative ones.

Table 7pp: Valued by management

	Number of respondents	%
Yes	1005	37.7
No	1663	62.3
Total	2668	100

As we see in Table 7pp, almost two thirds (62.3%) of respondents did not feel valued by their management, while 37.7% did feel valued by their management. This is quite a dramatic finding when we consider that the majority of the sample registered commitment to the public service and had negative expectations of privatisation.

Table 7qq: Valued by management and the PSE

	Valued by management	
	Yes	No
	Number %	Number %
Agree that there is a public service ethos	664 (66.1)	887 (53.3)
Do not agree that there is a public service ethos	55 (5.5)	265 (15.9)
Don't know	286 (28.5)	511 (30.7)

Chi-square = 75.720; df = 2; p < .05

Those that felt valued by management were more likely (66.1%) to agree that there was a PSE among library staff than those that did not feel valued (53.3%) (Table 7qq). They were also much less likely to reject the existence of a PSE (5.5% against 15.9%) although both groups produced a similar proportion of Don't Know responses (28.5% and 30.7%).

Respondents were asked whether they thought that their local authority valued the library service (Table 7rr) and here again negative feelings predominate with 60% feeling that their authority did not value the library service.

Table 7rr: Library service valued by local authority

	Number of respondents	%
Yes	1053	39.5
No	1615	60.5
Total	2668	100

Those that felt the local authority valued the library service were more likely than those that did not to agree that there is a PSE among library staff (63.4% compared to 54.7%) (Table 7ss). As with responses to the question on being valued by management, the proportions of Don't Know responses were similar, with a much smaller proportion rejecting the PSE among those that felt the library service was valued by the authority.

Table 7ss: Library service valued by local authority and PSE

	Library service valued by local authority	
	Yes	No
	Number %	Number %
Agree that there is a public service ethos	668 (63.4)	883 (54.7)
Do not agree that there is a public service ethos	58 (5.5)	262 (16.2)
Don't know	327 (31.1)	470 (29.1)

Chi-square = 70.245; *df* = 2; *p* < .05

The responses to the two questions about being valued by management and the local authority stand in distinction to the responses to a question which asked respondents whether they felt valued by the general public (Table 7tt). This produced the most decisive response in the entire survey, as 88.4% reported that they felt valued as against just 11.6% who did not feel valued by the general public.

Table 7tt: Valued by the general public

	Number	%
Yes	2359	88.4
No	309	11.6
Total	2668	100

One respondent wrote that:

We may face library closures, reduced hours and redundancies over the next few years. Majority of staff feel overworked and unappreciated by our bosses. Thank goodness the public still appreciate everything we do for them - they are the only reason many of us continue in our jobs.

Another long-serving library worker wrote:

I have worked in public libraries for over 30 years and although I still enjoy my job I am now looking forward to my retirement. We now have very few professional librarians and lower paid staff are expected to do their duties. I also feel that the media give a very unfair picture of local government conditions such as pensions and pay scales. I have seen my lump sum halved in the last couple of years and I feel betrayed that whilst I was paying my contributions my employer decided not to pay theirs. The thing which makes my job worthwhile is the goodwill of the public.

This quote encapsulates several points of relevance: about the deprofessionalisation of the service, the attacks on workers' conditions and the sense of unfairness, but this individual retains a sense of commitment to the public as the basis of the job.

There was a significant difference in views about the existence of a PSE between those that felt valued by the general public and those that did not (Table 7uu). Of the latter only 38.8% felt that there was a PSE among library staff, whereas among those that felt valued by the public, 60.7% agreed that a PSE existed.

Table 7uu: Valued by the general public and the PSE

	Valued by general public	
	Yes	No
	Number (%)	Number (%)
Agree that there is a public service ethos	1431 (60.7)	120 (38.8)
Do not agree that there is a public service ethos	240 (10.2)	80 (25.9)
Don't know	688 (29.2)	109 (35.3)

Chi-square = 82.068; *df* = 2; *p* < .05

Stress and staff morale

Respondents were asked whether they felt stressed at work. (92.1% of the sample responded). Of these, 65.6% reported that they did feel stressed at work while 34.4% did not (Table 7vv).

Table 7vv: Stress at work

	Number of responses	%	Valid %
Yes	1613	60.5	65.6
No	844	31.6	34.4
Valid responses	2457	92.1	100
Missing	211	7.9	
Total	2668	100	

Whether or not a respondent reported feeling stressed at work did not make much difference to their view of whether or not a PSE existed among library staff (Table 7ww). 57.7% of those feeling stressed and 59% of those that did not feel stressed agreed that there was a PSE among library staff.

Table 7ww: Stress at work and the PSE

	Stressed at work	
	Yes	No
	Number (%)	Number (%)
Agree that there is a public service ethos	931 (57.7)	498 (59.0)
Do not agree that there is a public service ethos	225 (13.9)	77 (9.1)
Don't know	457 (28.3)	269 (31.9)

Chi-square = 13.006; *df* = 2; *p* < .05

When asked about morale at their workplace (Table 7xx), two thirds of respondents (65.8%) reported that it was low or very low. Just 6.2% described morale as high or very high and 28% said that it was neither high nor low.

Table 7xx: Workforce Morale

	Number of responses	%
Very low	627	23.5
Low	1128	42.3
Neither low nor high	747	28.0
High	155	5.8
Very high	11	0.4
Total	2668	100

When examined in terms of their views about the existence of a PSE among library staff, the data provided some interesting results (Table 7yy). Of those who reported very low morale, 51.4% agreed with the existence of a PSE among library staff. Among those reporting low morale, this rose to 59.4%, very similar to the 58.8% for those reporting that morale was neither low nor high (this figure is slightly higher than the figure for the sample as a whole). Of those reporting high morale, 72.9% agreed that there was a PSE among library staff. The figures for those reporting very high morale were very small (11 in total), but if combined with the results for those reporting high morale (still relatively small totals), we find 72.3% of them agreeing that there is a PSE.

Table 7yy: Morale and the PSE

	Morale				
	Very low	Low	Neither low nor high	High	Very high
	Number (%)	Number (%)	Number (%)	Number (%)	Number (%)
Agree that there is a public service ethos	322 (51.4)	670 (59.4)	439 (58.8)	113 (72.9)	7 (63.6)
Do not agree that there is a public service ethos	125 (19.9)	138 (12.2)	52 (7.0)	5 (3.2)	0 (0)
Don't know	180 (28.7)	320 (28.4)	256 (34.3)	37 (23.9)	4 (36.4)

Chi-square = 79.249; *df* = 8; *p* < .05

Summary

The library workforce is heavily committed to the service but feel that the employer does not share this commitment. The workforce has also been negatively affected in several areas of their working lives, areas that have previously been seen as part of the public service employment bargain between employee and employer. Even before the 2010 election and the announcement of the Coalition's austerity programme – leave alone the impact actually felt – there were considerable problems.

62% felt insecure in their post and only 35% would now recommend the library service as a career, with just over half (51%) stating that there were no career opportunities within the service in their local authority. 39% felt that there was not enough training and 36% also reported cuts in the staff training budget.

93% reported having experienced changes in their library service over the previous two years but only 49% of respondents worked in libraries where staff were consulted over change before it happened (and many added that they felt this was often formalistic and largely meaningless).

Although 48% reported some positive developments in the previous two years and 52% recorded some investment over that period, large numbers (43%) worked in areas where library services had been cut or new services postponed in the previous two years. 83% of those reporting changes in their library service over the previous two years, reported reduced staffing levels. Perhaps not surprisingly, 62% felt that staffing levels in their library were insufficient, and 54% believed that cover for sickness and holiday absence was inadequate.

78% thought that the library service would change outside the public sector (90% of those who expressed a view suggested negative consequences). Two thirds (66%) described morale as low or very low and two thirds 66% described feeling stressed at work. Finally, 62% of respondents did not feel valued by management; and a similar proportion (61%) did not feel their local authority valued the library service.

Despite this, there remains a large majority who feel valued by the general public (88%) and this clearly has a big impact on their working life and their perception of themselves and the service.

Examining the relationship between the various indicators and respondents' views about whether a PSE exists in the library service produced some interesting results. First, several of the indicators appeared to have little or no impact on whether or not respondents agreed with the existence of a PSE. These included whether they felt secure in their jobs; had experienced cuts in services in their library; the adequacy of staffing levels – both in general and in response to sickness and holiday absence; and whether they felt stressed at work.

On the other hand there were a much larger series of indicators where there was a clear relationship with the attitudes towards the PSE. Those who believed that there were career opportunities within their authority's library service had a more positive view of the existence of a public service ethos than those who did not (66% to 56%). A similar picture emerged among those who would recommend libraries as a career choice, compared to those that would not (67% to 58%).

60% of those who felt that training was adequate accepted the existence of a PSE, while this fell to 55% among those who felt training provision to be inadequate. 72% of those who had not experienced any cuts in the training budget accepted the existence of the PSE against 61% of those who had experienced training cuts.

Again, among those who reported that they were consulted by the employer before change, there was a higher proportion of those who accepted the existence of a PSE than among those who said that they were not consulted before change (65% compared with 51%).

On the other hand those who reported positive developments over the previous two years in their local library service were much more likely to register agreement that a PSE existed than those who reported no positive developments (70% to 48%). Similarly 68% of those who reported investment in their library in the previous two year agreed with the existence of a PSE against 51% who reported no investment.

Among those who expressed the view (almost wholly negative) that the library service would change if removed from the public sector, 66% agreed with the existence of a PSE. Among those who thought that the library service would not change outside the public sector, the figure was just 28%.

Of those who reported very low morale, 51% agreed with the existence of a PSE among library staff. Among those reporting low morale, this rose to 59%, the same as the 59% for those reporting that morale was neither low nor high (this figure is slightly higher than the figure for the sample as a whole). Of those reporting high morale, 73% agreed that there was a PSE among library staff. Those reporting very high morale were very small numbers (11 in total), but together with the figures for those reporting high morale (still relatively small totals), 71% of them agree that there is a PSE.

The perception of how staff feel that they, and the service within which they work, are valued produced some interesting data. Staff who felt valued by management were more likely (66.1%) to agree that there was a PSE among library staff than those that did not feel valued (53.3%). They were also much less likely to reject the existence of a PSE (5.5% against 15.8%).

Again, those that felt the local authority valued the library service were more likely than those that did not to agree that there is a PSE (63.4% compared to 54.7%). The proportions of Don't Know responses for both groups were similar, but with a much smaller proportion rejecting the PSE among those that felt the library service was valued by the authority.

Another significant difference can be seen in views about the existence of a PSE between those that felt valued by the general public and those that did not. Of the latter only 39% felt that there was a PSE among library staff, whereas among those that felt valued by the public, 61% agreed that a PSE existed.

7.5 Discussion

Several key points emerge from the data relating to members' views of the PSE. These can be summarised as:

- the attacks on the public service employment bargain have had some impact on attitudes
- despite this, the public service ethos has survived and remains relatively strong

If the PSE rests on common values held by both the staff and the employer (Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler, 2003) and the sense of security and relatively favourable conditions at work (Winchester, 1983; Heery, 2000), then we might expect that any attack on these common values or moves away from the traditional employment practices and job security would have an impact on the staff belief in the existence of a PSE. A whole series of variables are examined in order to look at whether movement away from the 'good employer' model – the public service employment bargain - and a shared vision of the public service with the employer, has any impact on staff perception of the existence of a PSE.

Library staff drew a clear connection between the quality of service that they could provide to the public, the standard of employment conditions and the commitment of the employer to the public service. Many expressed anger and disappointment at what they saw as the deskilling or deprofessionalisation of the service as part of a cost cutting regime which simultaneously damaged the service and the quality of the work experience. The 'professional' issues facing library staff cannot be separated from the 'union' issues. In the library service (and many other parts of the public sector as well) this is not a new development, due to the nature of the work. As Michener (1976: 175) wrote in reference to American library workers:

...professional issues often outweigh, or at least balance, the economic ones as causes for library unionisation. In Detroit, by contrast, auto workers demand only higher wages and better working conditions; they do not seek influence over the styling and design of next year's models. But it is, of course, over matters of 'styling and design' that librarians most demand control, and it is these professional issues that have sparked some of the bitterest conflicts in library unionisation.

Union emphasis on the public service ethos can play a part in constructing a professional identity which is compatible with members' union identity and mutually reinforcing. Attachment to the public service ethos validates the members' view that libraries are a 'public good'.

There was a relationship between agreement of the existence of a PSE and responses in relation to career opportunities; whether respondents would recommend the library as a career; consultation before change; positive developments; investment; possibility of change outside the public sector; training provision; morale; whether staff were valued by management; whether the library service was valued by the local authority; and whether staff were valued by the general public. On the other hand, job security, Staffing levels and cover for absence, and stress did not appear to have a significant impact.

The data reveal a widespread 'public service orientation' - in contrast to the instrumentalist orientation identified in the *Affluent Worker* studies (Goldthorpe et al, 1968: 79). This public service orientation may be what brings them to the job in the first place, it carries with it certain wants, attitudes, expectations and behaviour, and is associated with intrinsic rather than extrinsic economic rewards.

Looked at another way, a belief in the idea of a PSE appears to mitigate some of the negative aspects of working within the library service and to be associated with a slightly more positive view of the service. So among those who agreed that there is a PSE, compared to those that did not, a smaller proportion had low or very low morale (64% compared with 82%) and felt stressed at work (65% against 75%); a higher proportion believed their local authority valued the library service (43% compared with 18%) and a higher proportion felt valued by management (43% against 17%).

The data shows that there is some impact on the staff perception of the existence of a PSE. Deterioration in conditions, cuts to the service and attacks on esteem have a damaging effect on the staff view of the PSE. On the other hand, what is perhaps much more interesting is the degree of robustness of the PSE, its survival and vitality, despite the experience of staff over a long period, stretching now over three decades.

There is a correlation between staff age and agreement that a PSE exists and this matches the results of earlier research (Pratchett and Wingfield, 1996). This is particularly interesting given

the age profile of the library service workforce. Of those respondents who supplied age data, over 80% of them are aged 40 or above. Given this probable bias in the sample toward older library staff it seems likely that the overall positive assessment of the PSE exaggerates the view of the library staff as a whole.

However this link between age and the PSE may also be an impact of the pro-market policies of the last thirty years. Many of the older staff will have begun their careers when the PSE was still seen as an essential part of the make-up of the public sector workforce and marketisation was either in its early stages or had not even begun. This 'vintage effect' would reflect the views of public service that existed when these staff were recruited thirty years ago.

An alternative explanation relates to the fact that library staff in the sample tend to be long serving. It is possible that over time, inculcation into the PSE takes place and that (like trade unionism perhaps) it can be seen as an 'experience good' something that becomes valued the more that it is experienced. In this case, length of service rather than age would be the more important variable and high rates of turnover would be very disruptive to the perpetuation of a strong PSE. Unfortunately as noted earlier, the data lacks the detailed breakdown of years in service that would have made a more detailed interrogation possible¹⁶. Nevertheless it remains a positive response and the link between age and the PSE is an interesting one.

The values of the majority of employees appear to be out of kilter with those of the employers. Abandonment of the PSE by the employers is seen as a betrayal, a violation of previously accepted norms, a rejection of the widely held views and values of staff, of what they see as common sense and good practice producing high quality service.

On a range of measures there is a statistically significant correlation between an acceptance of the idea of a PSE and a more positive view of the library service, whether that be in terms of morale, stress, the sense of whether the council values the service, or whether staff are valued by management and the general public. The only variable that did not produce a statistically significant relationship with the PSE was members' opinion about the adequacy of staffing levels, and here the explanation is likely to be because the view was so widespread. Overall,

¹⁶ This illustrates one of the disadvantages of close research collaboration with a partner. The union was particularly interested in the gathering of one set of data relating to length of service but not to the degree of detail that would have been more useful to this study.

there is a clear view that library staff feel under threat, although hugely valued by the general public.

The data captures a significant division within the workforce. Those who believe that a PSE exists among the library workforce see the world differently. It is a variable that categorises their approach to work, the public service and the union. A majority of members not only expressed a strong belief in the existence of a PSE but also felt anxious that many of the elements they associated with high quality service and the public service employment bargain have been damaged.

As Kelly (1998: 52) notes:

Since the workers' 'willingness to act' is one of the key power resources for unions, then the ways in which employees think about workplace and employment issues is a vital component of the mobilisation process.

The importance to the union is that there are clear links between membership adherence to the PSE and their values and identity - how they perceive of themselves, their work and the union. It is a powerful explanator that the union needs to be aware of and of which it should take account. It could be that members' commitment to the PSE assists the union in generating an alternative vision, one that provides a 'mobilising rhetoric' (Hyman, 2001: 173), around which to organise for collective action against an identified injustice.

It is also likely to have a self-reinforcing element, as a union that reflects members' views is likely to gain from a deeper sense of commitment to the union (Levesque et al, 2005). This is because, not surprisingly, there is a connection between commitment to the union and participation and activism (Bamberger et al, 1999; Fullagar et al., 2004).

Workers join unions for many different reasons but most explanations fall into two broad categories – instrumental and normative. In other words, they join for rewards, in the form of pay and benefits, or because of belief. No doubt in reality, motivations are mixed but there is research that shows that some workers primarily join for ideological reasons (e.g. Heshizer and Lund, 1997; Sverke and Kuruvilla, 1995). However, when scholars write about beliefs or ideology as a motivation to join the union, they usually focus on a member or prospective member's belief in trade unionism itself. Another approach is possible, involving the values and norms that the union champions and which -

being shared by the prospective member – are a motivation to join. Sinclair and Tetrick (1995: 681) take this further with a social exchange model of union commitment, in which they argue that:

union commitment may be a function of not only the member's perception of the union's ability to address member's economic needs (e.g. pay, benefits), but also the members' perception of the union's commitment to the member evidenced by its concern for members' non-economic needs.

Bamberger et al (1999: 306) develop this perspective 'on the promotion of a union as an occupational community and source of support and the development of pronion norms and values'. A focus on the PSE could offer a focus for exactly an approach that allows the union to take up issues of importance to members without neglecting, but going beyond, pay and conditions. This has the potential to become a virtuous circle: the union reflects the priorities of members, there is an increase in membership commitment to the union, and the union increases the power resources available to it. As Heshizer and Lund (1997: 67) argue, in such a case 'members are bound to the union by shared beliefs and values; not through the receipt of rewards'. This may be especially important to the union at a time when it is difficult to make gains in pay and conditions.

In some respects it is like a new form of the idea of dual commitment (or dual allegiance or dual loyalty) – a debate that began in the 1950s when unions were strong and growing and re-emerged in the 1980s (Angle and Perry, 1986). This was a discussion about whether union members had a dual commitment to their union and their employer. What I am referring to with the PSE is a dual commitment of members to their union and to *the service* they provide – not the employer. This has some resemblance to the sort of commitment that skilled workers had to their craft and their union in the heyday of engineering, but it is closely tied to the idea of the provision of a service seen as a public good. The next chapter will look at how these issues are interpreted by the front line activists, the reps.

PART 4: THE UNION RESPONSE

Chapter Eight: Union reps and the PSE

8.1 Introduction

In 1968, research commissioned by the Donovan Commission famously described shop stewards as more of a 'lubricant' than an 'irritant' (McCarthy and Parker, 1968: 5). This view changed dramatically in the 1970s - at least among employers and government - as workplace conflict intensified and shop steward structures spread throughout the economy. In the words of Charlwood and Forth (2008: 2): 'shop stewards emerged as the non-commissioned officers of a militant and angry trade union movement, on the front-line of industrial conflict.' After three decades in which the unions have been on the defensive, the picture is different again. Since 1980, the proportion of workplaces organised with shop stewards present has declined in every sector and there are generally fewer shop stewards to members. Those that take on the steward's role often have to carry out their duties with less facility time and at a time when there is increased pressure on workers, many stewards make up the shortfall from their own time (TUC, 2012).

Yet they retain a critical role in industrial relations and within the trade union movement. The reps are a significant leadership group within any union, playing a 'pivotal role' in membership socialization (Fullagar et al, 1994: 530). As Terry (1983: 72) pointed out, stewards are 'closely identified with the work group they represented', they share their working environment and are subject to close and continuous membership control. None of this was unproblematic either in the past or now, but their organic link with the membership means that they are an 'essential component of member-led democracy: leadership which connected with; built on and developed the logic of members' own interests' (Cohen, 2006). They do not simply reflect the issues and concerns of members but are also able to shape attitudes and views, thereby highlighting *particular* issues and concerns. It is this capacity that is of interest in terms of their influence around the PSE.

In UNISON they are the key actors in both workplace organising and wider campaigning (UNISON, 2010b). Referring to the success or failure of the library campaign at a local level, one UNISON officer said in interview:

I think a lot of it is the stewards. I don't think the branch secretary is the kingpin there. I think it's having a really good library steward...

The online survey cleared showed the extent of the attack on the conditions of workers within the library service and the widespread unhappiness about the current state of the service. But it also illustrated the continuing belief in the existence of a PSE among much of the membership.

This chapter will examine how the PSE is interpreted by the most active layers of the union – the reps. Their views are not only important because of their influence at the workplace and their leadership role but also because we can use the reps' willingness to take a representative role in the union as a steward (or other form of rep) as an indicator of commitment to the union. Gordon et al's (1980) influential work argued that union commitment consists of four dimensions: union loyalty, responsibility to the union, willingness to work for the union, and belief in unionism. Obviously all these are present within the rep and therefore examining the attitudes of the reps towards the PSE may provide useful information about union commitment and the PSE.

UNISON's library reps

Of the 2,668 respondents in the online survey, 180 (6.7% of the sample) were union reps of various kinds – 126 women (70%) and 54 men (30%). 12 respondents described themselves solely in terms of the position they occupied on the branch committee (president, chair, vice chair, secretary, assistant secretary, treasurer, and officers with responsibility for education, equalities, the newsletter and welfare). A further 15 described themselves as holding either more than one branch position (e.g. vice chair and welfare officer) or as holding a branch position in addition to another position (e.g. assistant branch secretary and library convenor). 9 respondents were convenors, deputy convenors or assistant convenors, although some also held other posts such as health and safety rep. One respondent said they were a senior steward. 39 respondents were health and safety reps (25 of whom did not carry out any other role). 88 respondents identified themselves as reps or stewards (these terms are used

interchangeably in UNISON) without any other role. 22 described themselves as reps or stewards but also carried out other roles of various kinds (health and safety reps, equality reps etc). Four people identified themselves as Union Learning Reps (ULRs) with no other role. UNISON has a union post that calls for a lower level of activity than the standard rep/steward. These are called workplace contacts and they act as distributors for union literature and carry out other tasks in supporting and assisting the steward. There were nine of these among the sample (for the purposes of this thesis, they are regarded as reps). Finally, there were a number of miscellaneous positions listed such as Secretary of the Disabled Staff Group, Departmental Chair for Cultural and Community Services and Staff Joint secretary.

The age distribution of the reps was very similar to the non-reps but there were proportionately more men among the reps than among the sample as a whole and conversely a lower proportion of women. Just 16% of the overall sample was men, whereas 30% of the reps were men. On the other hand, 84% of the sample was women but 70% of the reps. There was little difference between reps and non-reps in the proportions in types of workplace, number of workers in their workplace, length of service, and their views on library careers. However, reps were more likely than non-reps to work more than 36 hours a week. This may be a consequence of the proportion of men among the reps or due to the well documented difficulties that part time workers face in finding the time for union representational roles (ACAS, 2008: 7).

8.2 Reps and the PSE

The union reps were far more likely to agree that a PSE exists than the non-reps (see Table 8a). As a distinct group, the union reps' greater degree of belief in the existence of a PSE than the non-reps is shown by the fact that 74% of reps compared with 57% of non reps agreed that there is a PSE. A far smaller proportion of reps were undecided than was the case among non-reps (just 11% compared with 31%). Both female and male reps recorded a positive response to the PSE question – 70% of the women agreed that a PSE existed and 83% of the men. Of the reps that agreed there is a PSE, 70% are women (which exactly matches the proportion of women among the reps) and 33% are men (the men comprise 30% of the reps as a whole). More female reps than male reps were likely to record negative or 'Don't know' responses (18% to 7% and 12% to 9% respectively).

In addition, if we compare female reps to the female sample as a whole and then male reps to the male sample as a whole, we can see that in both cases the reps are much more likely to agree that there is a PSE. Among the women, 70% of the reps and 55% of the women in the sample agreed. While among the men, 83% of the reps agreed compared with 74% of all the men in the sample. This suggests that the key variable is whether or not they are a rep rather than whether they are male or female.

Table 8a: Union reps, non-reps and the PSE

	Reps	Non-reps
	Number (%)	Number (%)
Agree that there is a public service ethos	133 (73.9)	1418 (57.0)
Do not agree that there is a public service ethos	27 (15.0)	293 (11.8)
Don't know	20 (11.1)	777 (31.2)

Chi-square = 32.440; *df* = 2; *p* < .05

Reps' understanding of the PSE

The continued survival of a belief in a public service ethos among most members - and certainly most reps - first needs to be explained and, secondly, examined from a union perspective. Many of the issues raised in the online survey responses (particularly to the open ended questions) were followed up in the interviews with the reps. In the interviews it was possible to probe the reps on the meaning and practical impact of the PSE. The interviews revealed a profound commitment to the public service and, in most cases, an acknowledgement of the importance of the PSE. In an interview, one UNISON rep (R3) summed it up very clearly:

I think most people who work for public libraries, they're doing it for the social good. They feel that what they're doing, they're making a difference in their communities and that it's a really worthwhile thing to do.

One UNISON steward (R6) referred to:

...changes from above that have been wasteful and nonsensical and people have stuck to their 'I do my job well' public service ethos as a defence, a sort of mental defence against this barrage of what they see as lunacy happening all around us... It's like something to hold onto, something to maintain your pride in...

There was a feeling that whatever else was going on in the service, the commitment to the service and the service users was buoyed up by the fact that the workers know that they are supported by the users. Another UNISON steward (R7) interviewed, explained the attitude of her members:

Their loyalties are definitely to the public and to their fellow colleagues in the library service. And we've always been quite passionate about delivering our service to the public. If we're asked something, we are the type to go out and do it. It is a caring service.

This conviction that they were highly valued by the public was widespread among library staff (88% of the sample) and even slightly higher among the reps (89%).

One rep (R3) interviewed, put it:

...That's what makes people enjoy their work because they feel the people that use the service appreciate them, so even if they feel underappreciated by their managers, that's what makes it worthwhile – the fact that they feel the users appreciate them.

In interview, a rep (R6) explained how the PSE influenced the way that people worked within the library and that staff:

...want to have face to face contact with the public and find out, it's a skill to get what somebody wants sometimes and what somebody's actually coming into the library for. There's a skill in asking the right questions. It's not necessary. Some people just come in and they accept what the question is and don't go further. But I think that those people who are good, try to actually ascertain from whoever's in front of them what's the best way for them because they might not always be articulate enough or understand the system enough to actually express themselves. So I think that's a way the public service ethos comes over...

Similarly, in an interview a rep (R10) explained: ‘...pretty much everybody thinks there’s something more to the job than just doing it and packing up at 5 o’clock in the evening’, while one rep (R20) interviewed, talked about the motivation:

The pay’s quite low so almost everyone who works here is doing it because they feel that libraries are something that should be there and that’s what gets us through the day really.

Another (R1) put it that he wasn’t in it just ‘for the bread and rations’ because ‘you want to do the best thing for the public and the county council bureaucracy should take second place’. Still another (R12) emphasised the point:

...there is a belief in the ‘good’ of the service. Good with a capital G, that it is a good thing and that everybody should have it available, for the whole population because it is a good thing and on the whole does a lot of good and therefore I think people do have a confidence that it is a valuable service for the whole community. And actually to be honest, we do get that as feedback from a fair number of people.

They also see themselves as being very firmly rooted in the local community (partly a function of the network of branches around the country). For example, one rep (R7) in trying to explain the place of the local library in the heart of the neighbourhood, said:

We’ve had people coming in here since I first joined as a school leaver. They become friends as well as people just using the service and I think they value us. Sometimes, especially if it’s a little old lady or someone, you’re the only person they see all day, and especially, in the smaller branch libraries, even more importantly. When I worked down a little village library a few years ago, we had one lady who used to come in a certain day of the week all the time. She didn’t turn up, couldn’t get her on the phone, we couldn’t rise her. We sent an ambulance and she was really ill. Sometimes it’s a lifeline for those people in little places like that.

One rep (R9) interviewed, placed this in historical context:

If you go back through our history I think we had benefactors like Carnegie building our buildings, and that sort of thing and I think it goes right back to people wanting to improve themselves with the Mechanics’ Institutes and things like that. I think we were there right from the beginning before the Education Act actually, because the Public Library Act was 1850 whereas the first Education Act was 1870, something like that. So I think we are identified in the public’s mind, or we have been in the past, as very much there for the benefit of the community and actually help them to improve themselves and it still goes on now with the number of students who come in. It’s not going away.

So the reps have a very clear idea that in defending libraries they are defending something larger than just jobs and conditions – a public good. Of course what constitutes a public good is highly contested but the activists use this to frame their views of what is taking place in libraries. It becomes a ‘cultural resource’ to employ in justifying their case – both internally and externally (Williams, 1995).

Socialised or self selected?

There has been a long-running discussion within the literature about whether workers with a predisposition towards a PSE self-select to work in the public sector or whether they are socialised into the PSE once they begin work (e.g. John and Johnson, 2008). Gregg et al (2008: 24) found some evidence that ‘individuals differentially select’ into the public sector ‘on the basis of their propensity to donate labour.’ Houston (2006: 69) concurred with this, arguing that ‘by virtue of their missions public organizations are more likely to provide individuals with an opportunity to engage in public service.’ From the interviews with the reps, it appears to be a mixture of both. One rep (R20) said that when she started work at the library, she ‘came to it with that idea’, while another interviewee (R5) spoke of the PSE as ‘instilled in everybody’ in the library service.

Some spoke of a conscious choice, as in the case of this rep (R3):

I think I’ve always had it. When I was doing my postgraduate course in librarianship, it was public libraries that I wanted to work in. I was attracted to that because of the fact that public libraries were reaching out to everybody and it wasn’t like the private sector, it wasn’t working for a company. It was doing something for the benefit of the community and that really attracted me so it was a deliberate choice that I wanted to work in public libraries.

Another rep (R6) interviewed made a similar point:

I’d say I was a person who chose to work in an area that I wanted to help the community... to be of use rather than to be in a job that was to do with, a commercial job, a job that was generating money...

And again (R24):

I would say that it's probably something that's always been there and therefore I moved into a profession where, sort of attracted to that way of thinking... talking about public service ethos...

One rep (R10) who was a professionally qualified librarian reflected on whether being a professional made any difference to the commitment to the PSE:

Some of it is associated with professional status because of the sort of things you learn when you qualify, stuff around anti-censorship and the importance of information. But I guess that those things that you learn formally are also the sort of things that people can pick up on informally just by using their commonsense. I do see a lot of my colleagues who are library assistants who do seem to have that same ethos: somebody needs information and they're going to go as far as they possibly can to find it for them.

In another interview, a rep (R12) described the commitment to the PSE as

wider than professional status. I am, but there are very few of us. The vast majority of the service are unqualified. When I say unqualified – they're not qualified as librarians...

Linking public service clearly with democratic values, the same rep (R12) suggested that

the sorts of people who go into librarianship tend to be people who want to serve the public in one way or another... librarians on the whole do tend to be quite egalitarian.

One rep (R1) explained that a predisposition towards the PSE is strengthened or deepened on working within libraries:

I think in theory I had it but I didn't really know what it meant. You might think this is what I'm doing it for, but 'til you've actually done it for a while, then you don't know quite what it is you're trying to do. You can't put flesh on the bones I suppose.

In another case, a rep (R19) similarly spoke of how a commitment to public service became deepened through work within the library service:

...one of my motivations was to work somewhere where it was more about helping people and providing a service that people needed, a broad service so I guess I started with an attitude that I was in it for that and that's developed as I've progressed to a more deep level so I look at it on a higher, almost strategic level now. So I think, well

what are we doing about the bigger issues, rather than just thinking, 'I've got an old lady her book', I'm thinking how are we helping whole sectors of the community.

Another rep (R6) speculated that this might be because of the nature of a long serving workforce keeping the idea alive and passing it on to a new generation of library service workers. This suggests the transmission from one generation of workers to another of particular workplace, professional or occupational cultural values around the notion of the PSE:

I think there must be something historical that I'm not aware of properly. I think lots of people here have probably worked in libraries all their lives... so they've inculcated the ethos that was going on from what you might call an old fashioned thing. So that carries over.

Views on the public service employment bargain

Given the strength of the reps' views about the PSE, it was of interest to interrogate the data in terms of experiences both towards what could be seen as part of the public service employment bargain and attitudes about the public library service more generally. The reps felt more insecure in their post than non-reps: less inclined than non-reps to see staffing levels, staffing cover for sickness and holidays or training provision as adequate; they were much more likely to report cuts in the training budget in their workplace (52% compared with 32%); a little more likely to be stressed at work; and more likely to believe that morale was low or very low in their workplace.

On the other hand, the reps were more likely than non-reps to report positive developments and investment in the previous two years, although they were also more likely to report cuts in services or delays in the introduction of planned new services. They were much more likely than non-reps to believe that the library service would change if it was no longer in the public sector (91% to 77%). They were more likely to believe that they were not valued by management and slightly more likely to believe that their local authority did not value the library service.

In an interview, one rep (R19) linked this devaluation of the service with deprofessionalisation and a weakening of the PSE:

There's a cultural shift I suppose – not wanting to talk too much in management terms – but there's a transition from professionals to managers. And a professional, by dint of their training and experience, is more likely to approach things from a neutral status and have more of an overview, whereas a manager is more concerned with numbers and figures, in my opinion. And that change means that you're prepared to make compromises as a manager that you won't necessarily as a professional, so it weakens that ethos a bit to have that shift.

Finally the reps were marginally more likely than non-reps (89% to 88%) to feel valued by the general public. Given the data in the earlier section, it is notable that the reps scored higher than the non-reps in virtually all of the variables associated with a more positive attitude towards the PSE.

8.3 The PSE and the union

Introduction

Most of the reps saw no contradiction between their role representing members' interests and a role for the union in defending the library service, reflected in their commitment to the PSE.

One UNISON steward (R3) in interview expressed it as follows:

...providing a good library service and being a trade union member, there's no real conflict there. Although being a trade union member's also about looking after the particular interests of your members – their terms and conditions, things like that – I think the union also has a role in promoting public services and a better society, so the two kind of go together.

Another UNISON steward (R6) interviewee noted:

They [union membership and the PSE] seem to me to be, in some sense that I haven't really thought through, connected and part of the same sort of thing. The PSE is a team working thing and unions, when they function well, function in the same way. People feel they're reliant on each other and are working together.

In interview, a UNISON steward (R11) argued that the relationship between a commitment to the PSE and union membership was

...quite complementary really because UNISON's there to protect public services as well as the staff. They are known as the public service union and they don't want to

see cuts in services and I don't. It means staff jobs going which they would obviously try to protect but it's not just the jobs, it's the actual services too...

Another steward (R16) spoke of the connection between the PSE and union membership:

... I think there is a connection just because union membership is about collectivity and that sort of ethic feeds into the public service ethic in the sense that it's inclusive, that it's providing a service, so I think there is a connection.

One UNISON rep (R17) saw the PSE and union membership as sharing certain characteristics:

There are certainly common ideals to both, the idea of the collective. The library is something that is based on co-operation and sharing and making it accessible to everybody. This idea of collectivity is common to trade unionism as well.

In interviews with the reps, most of them indicated that they saw the PSE as potentially an important tool that the union could and should use more effectively. On the other hand some, at least, drew a line between the work of the union (around jobs, pay and conditions) and issues relating to the service itself such as the PSE. Given that, in general, the reps had a more positive view towards the PSE than the non-reps, it may be that this attitude is more prevalent among the non-reps.

The PSE as a mobilising rhetoric

The PSE provides library staff with a clear framework with which to view their working lives and around which they can create an identity of interest. The PSE as a frame for thinking about workplace issues and laying the basis for a collective definition of interests is an important step towards mobilisation (Kelly, 1998). But it is insufficient in itself. It needs to be linked to and combined with a belief that their objectives can be achieved by collective action and an organisational form through which to mobilise. The union could be the focus for this and as Hyman (2007: 205) argues, 'trade union strategic capacity can be, and needs to be, enhanced through internal dialogue, discussion and debate' – in this case around the PSE.

Over a quarter of survey respondents (26.1%) nominated the union as the prime defender and best representative of the PSE. However, almost a third (31.8%) said library service management, while 23% separately identified the staff themselves. The relatively high

proportion of respondents nominating library service management suggests that many staff do not hold library line managers responsible for the policies of the council (that they obviously are obliged to implement), unlike their attitude to senior management.

However, a comparison of the responses of reps and non-reps in the survey is instructive here (Table 8b). Reps were much less likely than non-reps to see library service management as the best defenders of the PSE (15% compared to 33%). And although few of the non-reps saw senior management as committed to the PSE (just 2.5%) the reps were even less convinced (0.8%). Non-reps were more likely to see the staff themselves as the main defence of the PSE (24% to 13%), while the reps, perhaps unsurprisingly, were much more likely to identify the union as the key defender of the PSE (53% to 24%).

Table 8b: Non-reps and Reps' views of who best represents and defends the PSE

Of those that agree PSE exists, which of the following best represents and defends it	Non-reps		Reps	
	Number of respondents	%	Number of respondents	%
Elected councillors	29	2.0	3	2.3
Library service management	473	33.4	20	15.0
Library staff trade unions, like UNISON	334	23.6	71	53.4
Professional associations, like CILIP	133	9.4	12	9.0
Senior local authority management	35	2.5	1	0.8
Staff themselves	334	23.6	17	12.8
Mix of different groups	26	1.8	7	5.3
Other specific group	19	1.3	1	0.8
None	24	1.7	1	0.8
Don't know	11	0.8	0	0
Total valid responses	1418	100	133	100
Missing	1070		47	
Total	2488	100	180	100

The perception of who best represents and defends the PSE shows a clear view that something that is valued by most members has effectively been abandoned or rejected by both senior management and local politicians. This polarisation is even more starkly illustrated in

terms of the reps. These issues were explored further in the series of interviews with reps. One UNISON steward (R3) said in the interview:

I think managers pay lip service to it [the PSE]... When they make decisions to impose cuts, I think they miss a lot of the impact those cuts will have. I think they tend to focus on tangible performance indicators, they're under pressure to produce to show that this service is successful – things like book issues.

Another rep (R7) contrasted the commitment of staff with the attitude of the employer and said:

They don't value their staff like they used to. Staff tend to go above and aboard for the public but it's more for their colleagues, it's not for their employers. They're working for their colleagues, putting everything else in to help everyone else out, to make their job easier. But their loyalties are not with government anymore, their employers anymore at all... Their loyalties are definitely to the public and to their fellow colleagues in the library service. And we've always been quite passionate about delivering our service to the public...

In the words of one steward (R24) in interview:

... people used to be proud to work for the authority and have a commitment to the authority as well as to the public and I think now the commitment is to the public and not to the authority.

In another interview, a steward (R6) explained the continued commitment to the PSE in terms of a staff reaction to attempts to deskill and casualise the job:

...maybe they hang on to an alternative ethos, what you might call the public service ethos, as a way of countering that devaluation and lack of job satisfaction.

This sense of betrayal goes deep but, as in this case (R24), the anger is not directed at the public but at the employer:

I think it's because of the authority's attitude, the way that staff are tret has deteriorated over the years. At one time you would think that the authority cared about its staff and now quite frankly it's patently obvious it doesn't.... People are demoralised and therefore your commitment to the people who employ you goes down but the staff in libraries definitely and the staff across the authority are still very much committed to the public and providing a good service.

While it is not clear what respondents exactly mean by 'library service management', it would appear, from the responses to open ended questions and interviews with reps that, local line managers are distinguished from the senior managers engaged in policy development and implementation. As one steward (R6) put it:

The managers aren't necessarily authority figures... So that tends to build up a team working together ethos that maybe helps generate a public service ethos.

In any event, given that many of the library service line managers will themselves be UNISON members, that a majority of the staff are UNISON members, and that 26.1% of respondents felt that the union is the best defender of the PSE, there may be considerable potential for the union to take a more outspoken position on the issue of the PSE in its organisational and campaigning work. However the fact that the union scored highly but not as high as library service management is a clear indication that the union is not automatically seen as the prime defender or representative of the PSE among the majority of members. On the other hand to emphasise the point, there is clearly potential here for the union to take the initiative.

As voluntary organisations, members' 'willingness to act' is a key power resource for unions and Kuruvilla and Fiorito (1994) argue that a key part of increasing members' attitudinal commitment to the union, and therefore their willingness to actively participate, is strengthening the positive image of the union – both internally and externally. Local leaders can assist in this by articulating and reinforcing membership commitment to the PSE. In a situation in which the unions have experienced both a loss of legitimacy and of workplace power, a focus on the PSE offers public sector unions an opportunity to re-imagine an alternative form of legitimacy as Hyman (1999) put it, or as a 'mobilising rhetoric' (Hyman, 2001: 173).

This presents an opportunity for the union as the representative body for the workforce in three senses. First, it can legitimately make a vocal defence of the PSE as part of its task in representing its membership. Secondly, by doing so and reflecting the union's recognition of the importance of the PSE to members, it should strengthen the bond between the union and the membership. And thirdly, it offers the union a means with which to forge alliances between the workers (who provide the service) and service user groups in defence of public services. The objective of building alliances with service users will be more likely to succeed if there is a

perception that, while the union is obviously concerned with members' jobs, pay and conditions, it is not *just* concerned with these issues.

Reps as alliance builders

This is where the heightened commitment of the reps to the PSE becomes of importance, as it is at a local level, where the reps operate, rather than at national level where the paid officers operate, that campaigns and alliances are really built and sustained. Emphasising members' commitment to the PSE and focusing on the quality of service, they could act as the 'bridge-builders' with service user groups that 'translate common interests and experience-based relationships into sustained coalitions' (Turner, 2006: 86).

In an interview, one rep (R1) explained:

If there are threats, then you can go to people and say 'yes, we're interested in protecting your jobs, pay and rations and all that kind of thing, but also we do care about the public library service in this instance and we think it's important that they don't close half the libraries in the borough or whatever it happens to be, because how is Mrs Smith going to get from home to the nearest remaining library when it's two bus journeys and she's got two kids in a pram?' And that might appeal to union members in terms of getting organised as well as to the public.

Another rep (R3) saw it in terms of fighting back against stereotypes:

...in the media there's a lot of negative publicity about public sector workers, with your gold-plated pensions for example and somehow they don't work as, they're not as efficient as, people in the private sector. But I think the union could use that [the PSE] a lot more just to get across to people that people aren't in it for the money. They're in it because they want to help people

Linking people's perceptions with building support was seen by one rep interviewee (R19) as critical:

One of the things you find is if you are lobbying or leafleting, stuff like that – which we have done because of a restructure we had – it's very important. A lot of people will get you straight away and say 'that's not very good' but it's getting it across to people that you are motivated by that ethos and not by self-preservation that becomes quite important. If you can emphasise the fact that a lot of people are doing a lot of really good work for not as much money as they would get in the private sector, it changes that dynamic of what people think, hopefully so I think it is quite important.

This presupposes a highlighting of service quality (with jobs, pay and conditions within that context), rather than a narrower focus on members' pay and conditions. However, it is just this that Terry (2000b) argues that public service union stewards are ill-equipped to do. He argues that the stewards' strengths can become a weakness when the need is for long term thinking and a wide angle lens. He claims that closeness to the members, results in stewards being obliged to prioritise immediate concerns about pay and conditions to the exclusion of strategic questions about the quality agenda. Not only do they lack the space for long term planning, but they also lack the expertise and are working in an environment with very few legal rights – all of which encourages a defensive, reactive, risk-averse form of unionism.

There is clearly much in what Terry argues, but the situation today – a dozen years and a financial collapse after these arguments were written – is such that in order to meet the immediate concerns of members, it is necessary to highlight the quality agenda and develop alliances that reach beyond the workplace. Therefore the 'choice' between meeting immediate demands and a strategic approach to quality is a false dichotomy. In the public library service at least, UNISON members *do* have the expertise necessary for strategic thinking and, in order to succeed in coalitions there will be a need to think through imaginatively what quality of service means and what sort of service provision should exist.

8.4 Discussion

The data reveal that there is a deep commitment to public service and the public service ethos among the reps, a more enhanced commitment than exists among ordinary members. This more positive response to the idea of a PSE than the sample as a whole might be expected to be the case for two reasons. It may be that people predisposed to that view will put themselves forward for a union rep role and/or it may be the case that once elected as a rep they become socialised into the prevailing viewpoint of the reps within the library service and the union's overall view of public services.

Whatever the reason, the potential impact of the reps on the attitudes of members in the workplace is profound if, as Kelly (1998: 44) remarks, the creation of a collective social identity at the workplace 'is heavily dependent on the actions of small numbers of leaders or activists.' Following Kelly, Cregan et al (2009) describe the process as involving the union reps

encouraging members to strongly identify with the collective values and mission of the union, thereby building loyalty; and providing meaning to individual member's efforts, relating them to the wider social objectives of the union and placing them within a historical context, thereby increasing commitment to the union. 'Transformational' local leaders (Cregan et al: 2009: 705) can help to deepen the collective social identity of the members. Among library service members, UNISON is already seen as a much better defender and representative of the PSE than CILIP, the professional body for librarians. This shows the potential for the union to incorporate a professional identity within members' union identity. But the union, through the reps, can also emphasise the commitment to the PSE across the library service workforce – professionally qualified or not.

The enhanced public service orientation found among the reps is a characteristic which has been largely passed over by both scholars and practitioners in relation to union activism in the public services, but it is potentially of great importance for both understanding trade unionism in the library service (and possibly more widely in the public services) and for the union in terms of membership mobilisation and alliance building beyond the workplace. The next chapter examines the experience of library campaign groups in their interaction with UNISON and the views of UNISON reps and paid officers on such alliances.

Chapter Nine: UNISON's library campaign

9.1 Introduction

An emphasis on the PSE is also an emphasis on the quality of service provision. It highlights the 'sword of justice' role of unions. A strategic turn with this at the forefront would include recognition that the best way to safeguard jobs, pay and conditions is to focus on the quality of service provision. This would require the union to be able to recognise and negotiate the inevitable tensions that would be created in the course of such an approach – both internally and with external partners.

This chapter discusses whether the basis for such an approach exists in terms of the relationship (or potential relationship) between the union and the PSE, examines UNISON's library campaign and the experience of library campaign groups in this context and finally reviews whether there are more generalisable lessons beyond the public library service. It draws extensively on: a survey of library campaign groups, particularly in response to open ended questions; a series of interviews with UNISON paid officers and with UNISON reps; and it refers back to the membership survey of UNISON members in the library service.

9.2 Who defends the public service ethos?

Having made a decision to pursue a policy of engaging in alliances with service user groups (partly in recognition of the difficulties faced by UNISON at the workplace), the union needs to show to potential partners that it has a wider agenda about high quality public services. The first step along that route is to convince the broader union membership that this is the case. As McAdam et al (1996: 6) point out, there is a need for 'conscious strategic efforts by groups of people to fashion shared understandings of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action'. This involves a delicate balance between the pay and conditions issues and the wider service questions: one element cannot be sacrificed for the other, they need to run in tandem and there will be tensions from time to time. To succeed in this, the union must be seen as the best representative and defender of the PSE.

Those survey respondents that agreed that a PSE exists among library staff were asked to choose from a range of options as to who best represents and defends the PSE. They were also able to add alternative choices not provided (Table 9a). This was an attempt to gauge members' views in relation to the PSE and several of the key actors in the public library service. The last chapter drew attention to the differential response of non-reps and reps to the question of who best defends and represents the PSE. The reps' responses were highly significant, showing a more polarised attitude to management than the members as a whole. This is as expected given their role. However the overall views on who best represents the PSE offers few comforts for senior management or elected politicians (see Table 9a).

Table 9a: Best representative and defender of the PSE

	Number of respondents	% of those that agree PSE exists
Elected councillors	32	2.1
Library service management	493	31.8
Library staff trade unions, like UNISON	405	26.1
Professional associations, like CILIP	145	9.3
Senior local authority management	36	2.3
Staff themselves	351	22.6

The most striking aspect of these responses is the small numbers that chose elected councillors or senior local authority management as the defenders of the PSE – just 2.1% and 2.3% respectively. This sense of both the political and managerial leadership of councils having abandoned any commitment to the PSE as part of the acceptance of marketisation was reflected in some of the comments made by respondents to the survey that 'senior managers have no idea' and

It's the front line staff who have this ethos and demonstrate it daily, regardless of the increasing pressure to perform to rote and to 'tick boxes' at the insistence of senior management and above. We appreciate they also have pressure brought to bear on

them from cabinet and government, but the 'public service ethos' sometimes gets a little lost on the way.

and

...most frontline staff represent and defend this ethos but I'm not sure that it is represented or defended by those 'above'.

or

...Not management, they too often dissolve under outside pressure from councillors and the like.

Behind these, often angry, comments lie two different conceptions of the role of the public library. One, increasingly influential among all political parties and senior council management, sees public services like the library service through the prism of NPM, emphasising the importance of market mechanisms and competition. The other view, which remains strongly held by many workers within the library service, is based on the traditional view of the library as a public good. It is a view that they have internalised and which has become their 'common sense'. It is a citizen view rather than a consumer view.

9.3 UNISON's library campaign

Community unionism

The notion of social movement unionism (of which 'community unionism' is a variant) grew from two sources. The first is the form of trade unionism that arose under authoritarian regimes in the global South and was associated with both a workplace focus but also with wider issues relating to democratisation (e.g. Von Holdt, 2002). The second is a radical form of trade unionism that has received most attention in the USA and represents a rejection of business unionism in favour of campaigning using repertoires of practice that are more commonly found among social movements. It also broadens both the focus of the union beyond the workplace and is often aimed at previously ignored groups of workers – a strategy of 'field enlargement' (Wever, 1998). It is the second form of social movement unionism that interests us here.

In some respects, this is not a new idea at all, although it is often portrayed as such. At the First International, Marx (1866) criticised the unions for their narrow focus on the workplace:

Too exclusively bent upon the local and immediate struggles with capital... They therefore kept too much aloof from general social and political movements... Apart from their original purposes, they must now learn to act deliberately as organising centres of the working class in the broad interest of its *complete emancipation*. They must aid every social and political movement tending in that direction.

Heery and Adler note that 'new organising' in the USA and UK is associated with 'a broadening of union purpose' (2003: 61) that includes workplace issues but also recognises the need to go beyond the workplace and to act for a broader constituency (working people more generally) than just the membership in order to achieve success on the workplace issues. They argue that the emphasis 'in the most developed cases has embraced community coalitions' (Heery and Adler, 2003: 62), and 'community unionism' as a form of social movement unionism has become an area of specific scholarly research (e.g. Wills, 2001; Wills and Simms, 2004; Tattersall, 2006, 2008; McBride and Greenwood, 2009).

Voss and Sherman (2000: 309) explain the adoption of a social movement unionism approach by unions in part as a response to 'negative environmental shifts'. For British unions, the last three decades have seen a long series of negative environmental shifts – notwithstanding the period of the New Labour government. Other issues Voss and Sherman identified as important in explaining the emergence of US social movement unionism included the introduction of new leadership that brought with it experience of other social movements; and a commitment to change along these lines from the very top of the organisation.

Community unionism is a form of social movement unionism that is particularly associated with the building of community-union coalitions. Tattersall (2008) argues that it is not possible to understand community unionism unless the different meanings attached to 'community' are disentangled. She sees three complementary aspects of community: community organisation; common interest identity; and local neighbourhood or place. She then defines community unionism 'as the set of strategies that consists of union collaboration with these elements of community' (Tattersall, 2008: 417). One such strategy is that of coalition unionism. It is clear to see that a UNISON branch's engagement in a campaign to save a local library service could draw on all three aspects of community as defined by Tattersall (2008), collaborating with a

library campaign group, the creation of a common interest identity around the library in a local neighbourhood.

UNISON has been influenced by some of the innovations and ideas of the American trade unions. It is involved in a joint project (the Three Companies Project) with the SEIU, the US union most strongly associated with these approaches (UNISON, 2009). Reflecting this focus, UNISON has also been involved in the European Social Forum process, engaging with a range of different civil society actors and organisations as part of a wider social movement. In the UK it has worked with London Citizens on the Living Wage campaign. UNISON's own campaigns also now routinely carry a commitment to an outward-looking approach, to the need to build alliances with service users and local communities, and this is noticeably the case with the library campaign.

UNISON beyond the workplace

In reviewing union efforts to combat contracting out in local government in the early 1990s, Colling (1995: 143) noted:

The capacity, or even inclination, to forge alliances with other interested bodies, such as residents or community groups, was absent and appeared unlikely to develop in the prevailing climate.

That is not a charge that could be pinned on UNISON today. There is, at the very least, a formal commitment at national policy level to engage, and build alliances with, service users and other community groups around the issue of defending high quality services and a recognition of the relevance of this approach even, perhaps particularly, during a time of austerity. There are obviously some differences between today's campaigns in response to the government's austerity programme and those of the late 1970s onwards against cuts (Fryer, 1979; Hall, 1983) and contracting out (Baekkeskov, 2011), although the current cuts often also involve contracting out. Nevertheless, the attitude of the unions – in this case UNISON - is significantly different.

There is an acknowledgment that if trade unionists 'just try to defend jobs, pay and pensions, the public may see us as just looking out for our own interests' (UNISON, 2011c: 30). By contrast, engaging with community groups allows the union to focus on the benefit derived by

the wider community from public services and correspondingly means that the union has to find common ground and adapt, probably augmenting more traditional union modes of activity with new tactics. UNISON talks of reaching out 'beyond our traditional allies to other organisations who share our issues and concerns' (ibid) in a bid to build what Levesque and Murray (2002: 46) describe as 'external solidarity'. Such an approach also fits with the union's view of the need to involve service users and local communities in public service governance and design (UNISON, 2008).

The union is under no illusion about the potential difficulties in such a relationship-building exercise, with possible conflicts over control of the agenda and the need to convince prospective partners that the union is both serious about collaboration and in it for the long term (UNISON, 2011c). In addition, as Tattersall (2008: 421) notes, there is a tension within

coalitions involving unions, because accountability for unions is complicated by the cross-purposed need to defer to both internal union decision-making structures as well as joint coalition structures.

Although the union is committed to alliance building at a general level, it is particularly pertinent for its members within the public library service – something that it recognises itself, urging members in libraries under threat to 'identify all the groups who regularly use or rely on the library's resources or your members' expertise, e.g. local parents' groups, schools, Age UK etc' (UNISON, 2011c: 30). Part of the reason for the need for good will and flexibility in any such coalition is the danger of conflicts of interest arising between the partners. Service users may be unhappy with a strike which (temporarily) deprives them of access to the library they are campaigning to keep, while library staff may be opposed to the use of volunteers in the library if these are perceived as a threat to the jobs of employees.

UNISON is clearly convinced of the gains to be made by working with other groups, despite the curtailment of a certain amount of independence. It notes that the work with alliances has been a 'feature of the campaign, at national and local level' which 'has enabled the union to demonstrate far wider public support for public services than would have been the case if we had campaigned alone' (UNISON, 2012a: 24).

This strategic turn 'to establish coalitions and campaigns against the cuts and reforms' (UNISON, 2011d: 4) is now seen as a key part of the organising approach of the union as well.

The union’s awareness that this engagement can take a number of different forms is reflected in the matrix below in Table 9b, that may involve the creation of new vehicles for the campaign or using already established organisations. So, for example, UNISON is involved with the local campaign in Doncaster to keep libraries open and within council control. This campaign was set up in 2010 but was not established by UNISON and the union does not control it. By contrast, UNISON was instrumental in the establishment of *Speak Up for Libraries*, which is a national co-ordinating body and for which UNISON provides funding. Both of these focus specifically on libraries in contrast to two other coalitions with which UNISON is involved – the Northern Public Services Alliance, which UNISON was closely involved with from the start and London Citizens which UNISON has worked with on various campaigns.

Table 9b: Building coalitions of interest – a matrix

Type of coalition	Examples of:	
	Single-issue campaign	Multi-dimensional
Use or revitalisation of structures and partnerships that already exist	Save Doncaster Libraries	London Citizens
Establishment of new structures or partnerships	Speak up for Libraries	Northern Public Services Alliance

Building a campaign to defend public libraries

Even during the period of the last Labour government, there was a view among UNISON’s library activists that, welcome though new library investment was, it needed to be on a far greater scale to undo the ‘malign neglect’ of nearly two decades of Conservative cutbacks. By the time of the 2008 financial crash, the cuts agenda had been revived and library closures were beginning to occur again in different parts of the country. As they did so, local campaigns appeared in response.

A series of high profile campaigns to keep threatened libraries open – particularly in the Wirral and Northumberland – took place. The Wirral was unusual in that after a vociferous public campaign (in which UNISON was involved) and reported concerns of the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA), the Secretary of State initiated a local inquiry under section 10(1) of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964. This was the first time since the passage of the Act that these powers had been used and the Inquiry (led by Sue Charteris) ‘found the Council to be in breach of its statutory duties under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, because it failed to make an assessment of local needs in respect of its Library Services’ (DCMS, 2009: 7). As a result, the council stepped back from its closure programme. In Northumberland, UNISON was involved in the campaign to stop the closure of 12 small libraries in a largely rural authority. Public support for the campaign showed the important place that libraries have in local areas and again, the council stepped back – partly because of the campaign, partly in response to the conclusions of the Wirral Inquiry.

Alongside the growing incidence of cuts and threatened closures, other pressures grew. At the *Love Your Libraries* conference, UNISON activists reported the increasing commercialisation of the service in some parts of the country. One gave the example that librarians were given income targets and threatened that if they failed to meet the target they will be deemed to be ‘non-performing’ in their appraisal. In this case, the impact was that all sources of income – e.g. from family history or IT courses, sales of ex-library stock – had to be calculated and returned each month. Some librarians were also under increasing pressure to do ‘one-to-one’ training with library ‘customers’ in areas like computer literacy or online shopping, with a £15.00 charge for these sessions. Although many libraries have previously charged for some services such as business research, this new development is a much more systematic commercialisation of the service. A particular concern was that, at a time of economic recession, people were being charged for things like helping them to write a CV. One activist at the conference described this as ‘picking on the people who are most in need of help’.

With pressures on many fronts, the union has agreed conference policy on alliances with service users in its library campaign and reiterated the position at its 2011 Local Government delegate conference that it should continue to campaign to defend and improve the library service and specifically:

Work with and continue to build alliances across the library network, including with the Campaign for the Book, Voices for the Library and other groups, particularly women's and parenting campaign groups opposing the cuts, those involving service users and the local community more generally (UNISON Local Government, 2011b: 13).

The union has put this into practice in a number of different ways at different levels. The nature and the level of this partly reflect the opportunity structures within which the union operates and also the internal structure of the union itself. The fundamental unit of the organisation is the branch. Within local government, these branches usually map on to local councils. Library staff form a relatively small part of any council workforce and any local government UNISON branch. There is no separate structure for UNISON members who are library staff, although like all local government members, they elect their own stewards in their workplaces. At a national level, within the Local Government Service Group, there is a paid officer with responsibility for the public library service and this is replicated at regional level in every part of the UK. At local level, the stewards operate through the branch in terms of campaigns but several of the livelier branches are actively involved with library user groups, of which there are now many around the country (for a selection, see Annex 5).

UNISON was conscious that in order to defend public library services and the jobs and conditions of its members, it was necessary to wage a 'hearts and minds campaign' that reached out beyond the workplace, while remaining attentive to the specific employment relations, jobs and conditions issues. At its 2007 annual conference, UNISON launched a campaign on the library service (UNISON, 2007). Its aim was:

to defend the achievements of 150 years of the free public library service, to celebrate its successes and to call for its continuation as a key public service in the 21st century (Davies, 2010b: 3).

A part of that involved attempting to shape the public debate on libraries. To that end, the union commissioned me to research and write a report on the state of the public library service and the challenges it faces. UNISON also organised a library members' seminar in October 2007 at which I spoke and which drew together experiences of library staff across the country.

This report (Davies, 2008b) was published at *The Libraries Big Conversation* in the House of Commons in December 2008 with a panel consisting of myself, Ed Balls, then Secretary of State for Children and Schools and UNISON General Secretary, Dave Prentis. Despite warm

words from Balls (and other Labour ministers) the problems within the library service around funding remained. In the aftermath of the financial crash and change of government, the situation became a great deal worse but before 2010 UNISON was dealing with a relatively friendly government – or at least one that was prepared to meet union officials and listen to union concerns (not surprisingly in UNISON’s case as it is both affiliated to the Labour party and a substantial contributor to party funds). However, as Bach (2002: 326-327) pointed out, this was not a straightforward relationship and there were local complications – which is the level at which the public library service is directly controlled:

The closer relationship between trade unions and the government, at least in comparison to their exclusion during the Conservative period in office, has created dilemmas for public-sector trade unions, not least tactical decisions about whether it is advantageous to criticize the government in public. Although productive relationships often exist between unions, employers and government at national level, there is rarely the same degree of trust at local level, or the opportunity to develop it.

The potential for problems at local level was illustrated very starkly by the attempt by Wirral Council to close 11 libraries in 2008-09. In response to this, the union engaged with local campaigners to challenge the council’s decision and, as pointed out earlier, in a rare ministerial intervention, the then Secretary of State agreed to hold a formal public inquiry to examine whether the council was in breach of its statutory duty to provide ‘a comprehensive and efficient service’. UNISON, together with local campaigners, submitted evidence to the Inquiry. The Inquiry found the council to be ‘in breach of its statutory duties’ (DCMS, 2009: 57). The planned closures were halted and although the then Conservative Shadow Minister, Ed Vaizey MP had spoken against the cuts, on his accession to office he has consistently avoided using these powers available to him to order similar inquiries.

In this period, UNISON also submitted evidence to the All Party Parliamentary Group inquiry into governance and leadership in the public library service and to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) consultation on its modernisation review. As increasing numbers of libraries came under threat UNISON found itself involved in a series of campaigns at local level to defend jobs and services including in Calderdale, Camden, Edinburgh, Hampshire, Northumberland, Southampton and Swindon. Out of these grew some lasting relationships with local campaign groups and prominent local campaigners.

In February 2011, UNISON branches around the country took part in a national day of action in support of libraries (UNISON, 2011e). A variety of events were held highlighting the contribution of public libraries to local communities. It received sympathetic and widespread coverage in the media and attracted support from high-profile literary figures. Following this success, Alan Gibbons of the Campaign for the Book called for the first Saturday in February to become an annual National Libraries Day, and requested support from individuals and organisations. UNISON agreed to support this and become involved in the organisation of the National Libraries Day (2012), along with a range of other organisations.

UNISON has encouraged local branches to engage in similar collaborations at a local level. Women's Institute groups in Surrey and Hackney have been involved with UNISON in campaigns to keep libraries open and to avoid cuts (UNISON, 2011f). As part of this approach, the union produced a *Libraries Campaign Pack* (UNISON, 2011g) offering advice to branches on campaigning in the community. As the intensity of the campaign has increased, UNISON has moved to regular weekly email bulletins to its library activists (UNISON, 2011e).

UNISON continues with traditional tactics such as lobbying politicians at a UK and devolved administration level, both separately and in collaboration with other stakeholders – submitting evidence to the parliamentary Inquiry into library closures (House of Commons Culture, Media and Sports Committee, 2012) and meeting with Huw Lewis, the Welsh Minister responsible for libraries, in May 2012 (UNISON, 2012b). As well as these continuing activities the union has experimented with different approaches, e.g. organising a public inquiry into the library service and joining with other interested parties to create a new national coalition in defence of libraries.

Love your Libraries: The People's Inquiry

The union decided to boost its campaigning work on libraries by branding it under the *Love Your Libraries* banner. It was seen as a discrete area of activity but one which was linked in to the union's wider pro-public services *Million Voices* campaign. In November 2009, UNISON announced that it would hold a *People's Inquiry into the UK Public Library Service*, at the British Library on 11 February 2010. Library staff UNISON members and library users were invited to give evidence before an 'expert panel' on issues affecting the future of the service, particularly the potential threats to the service and the main issues affecting staff.

As part of the preparation for the conference, UNISON commissioned me to design and conduct an online survey of UNISON members working in the library service. The content of the survey was very wide-ranging, reflecting the campaigning interests of the union but also areas of research interest to me – specifically on attitudes to the public service ethos. The survey was carried out in January 2010 (fuller details are provided in Chapter Four of this thesis). UNISON also asked branches and other stakeholders to submit written evidence to the Inquiry and to send representatives prepared to speak to the evidence. Contributors were asked to address the following questions in particular:

- What are the key services that your library/libraries in your authority should provide?
- Has your library/local libraries been closed or suffered reduced hours? Why?
- How important do you think library services are to the community?
- In a period of public service cuts, how can we help libraries survive?
- What do you value about your local library?
- What part does your local library play in your life?
- How would you like to be involved in developing/making changes to your library?
- What changes should be made? (UNISON, 2010a)

As part of the day's events, UNISON commissioned a series of short films - interviews with library staff and users - which ran throughout the conference breaks¹⁷. The union also published a range of publicity material: posters, flyers, stickers, recruitment leaflets and bookmarks.

From the start, UNISON intended the conference to face outwards. Although one of the objectives was to bring together activists from public libraries all over the UK, it was not just aimed at UNISON members but also library campaigners¹⁸, Friends of Libraries Groups, charities, professional bodies, local authorities, community groups, authors and writers and other stakeholders. For the conference UNISON highlighted the five themes of the campaign, which I had developed in discussion with activists and officers (Davies, 2008b: 44-45):

¹⁷ See <http://www.unison.org.uk/video/video.asp?did=11007>

¹⁸ Among the campaign and user groups represented at the conference were: Save Swindon Old Town Library; St James St Library Campaign, Walthamstow; Manor House Library Campaign, Lee, London; Libraries for Life for Londoners; Friends of Richmond Libraries; Hereford Library Users Group; Blackheath Village Library Users Group; Friends of the Heath Library; Friends of Lambeth Libraries; Friends of Islington Libraries; Friends of Rotherham Central Library; Friends of Reading and Education – London Stakeholders; The Library Campaign.

- adequate resources and funding for library services, staff and premises
- empowerment of staff and communities to shape services together
- partnership working between libraries and councils across the UK to share information and good practice
- responsiveness to library users from all backgrounds
- provision of staff training and professional development.

The 'expert panel' assembled for the conference, consisted of biographer and children's author Ann Thwaite; former Children's Laureate, Michael Rosen; children's writer Joe Craig; Adrian Mole author Sue Townsend; and Observer journalist Rachel Cooke. The keynote speakers were the then Minister for Culture, Margaret Hodge, UNISON General Secretary, Dave Prentis and myself, presenting the results of the survey of library staff, and of which there was a summary analysis (Davies, 2010d). The event was chaired by Radio 4's Sue MacGregor. The *Love Your Libraries* campaign was formally launched at the conference.

Many writers – such as Jacqueline Wilson, Alan Gibbons, and poet Roger McGough - who were unable to attend the conference sent good wishes and pledges of support. Some of these, like Alan Gibbons are very actively involved in library campaigns. Members of Parliament in support of the campaign tabled an Early Day Motion for the week of the conference and this attracted the signatures of 64 MPs (House of Commons, 2010).

Speak Up for Libraries

In 2012, UNISON took the logical next step in its campaigning involvement with other groups by formally joining in the creation of a national coalition called *Speak Up for Libraries*¹⁹. This is a national co-ordinating body that does not itself campaign at local level but pulls together organisations that *are* involved in local campaigns, and lobbies and organises national events. Because of its pole position as the union for library staff, UNISON members are often active in other library-related organisations and campaigns, so there are UNISON members in leading positions within the Library Campaign and Voices for the Library for example, as well as the

¹⁹ This brings together: the Campaign for the Book (run by author Alan Gibbons); CILIP (the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals); the Library Campaign; the National Federation of Women's Institutes (which decided to campaign on this issue at its AGM, highlighting UNISON's campaign and adopting the same slogan, 'Love Your Libraries'); Voices for the Library and UNISON.

very highly regarded Public Libraries News Blog²⁰. This obviously provides very useful cross-fertilisation and potential for network strengthening. To a certain extent, it has assisted in policy development with UNISON being able to tap into different streams of expertise and contacts through these members. However, in my opinion, it is an under-utilised resource.

UNISON has contributed funding for *Speak Up for Libraries* from its General Political Fund. The coalition organised a rally and lobby of Parliament in March 2012 which was timed to coincide with the appearance of Ed Vaizey, the Minister for culture, communications and creative industries, at the House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee hearings into public library closures (*Speak Up for Libraries*, 2012a) – itself largely a response to the campaigns taking place all around the country.

Speak Up for Libraries (2012b) called on MPs to ask the Government to:

- Enforce the law that says local authorities must provide a “comprehensive and efficient” library service.
- Acknowledge that libraries are important to people – especially during a recession.
- Give libraries a long term future, with a vision for their development and clear standards of service.
- Ensure councils have enough money to provide quality services that are well-planned and sufficiently staffed.

UNISON has embraced a policy of alliance building with service user groups and has attempted to put this into practice. It has deployed time, effort and financial resources at a headquarters level, engaged in coalition-building nationally and encouraged local branches to build these links in their communities. The next section looks in detail at the experience of a selection of library campaign groups in their relationship with UNISON.

²⁰ <http://www.publiclibrariesnews.com/>

9.4 The experience of library campaign groups

Introduction

As discussed earlier, at a national level UNISON recognises the necessity of working with campaign groups or user groups in general and with library groups in particular. In an interview, one officer (O1) described it as

absolutely crucial. It's always been the holy grail of all our public service campaigning but saying it and doing it are something else...

Asked whether this was more important now than in the past, another officer (O3) interviewed, replied that it was always important, but had not been recognised as such at the time. It was important now

...because unions are marginalised I think. We haven't got the density we had and therefore we have to build those alliances with policy makers and other groups in order to get our voice heard...

This comment fits in with Hyman's observation (2001: 62) that:

...in the main, only when unions have been forced to come to terms with the decline in their autonomous influence have they contemplated broader alliances...

In any event, a UNISON officer (O1) interviewed, argued that 'on your own, just the employees, is not a big enough unit to defend public services' and

on your own you don't stand a chance. So we're not going to stem the tide at the moment, and probably never would, without greater awareness of what's going on.

Another explanation offered by a UNISON officer (O2) is that engagement with user groups counters the charge that UNISON is

just out for our members' interests and just concerned with preserving our members' jobs and terms and conditions... and a huge part of our focus now is on service quality and the service user experience, trying to get local authorities to incorporate service users much more in the way they design and improve services so in that sense in terms of UNISON's work that's really important...

The goodwill that exists from service users towards library staff as well as the library service as such is seen as offering possibilities for the union. One UNISON rep (R8) interviewed, related how:

...we've got people already saying to some of the staff, if you need us to come out and demonstrate against cuts, let us know, so there is that consciousness, is definitely there among those that are aware of the political situation.

Working in alliance with service user groups is not an easy option for an organisation like UNISON. As one officer (O3) said: 'It's tricky, I think, and it challenges our usual ways of working which isn't a bad thing, but it's sometimes out of your comfort zone.' In some respects, working with national co-ordinating bodies or large national civil society organisations is easier than working with local groups of campaigners. At a national level it is a way for UNISON to become part of a wider policy debate about particular issues and to raise awareness of workplace-related issues as well as the quality of service issues. As one UNISON officer (O3) explained:

...there's a huge benefit in working at a strategic level with the policy makers of community groups...

The scale of the threat to public services is cited by officers as making alliances essential and, as this officer (O2) explained, it is at the local level that the alliances have to be built in practice, where

...teaming up with users and community campaigners, although it can seem like extra work, can actually help in easing some of the burden on branches because sharing some of those responsibilities on campaigning activity can be undertaken by other people with the branch in support. I think it is more vital now to do that than ever before.

The rapid growth of library campaigns all over the country formed part of the reasoning behind the launch of UNISON's own campaign on libraries (O1):

because there were huge, huge campaigns going on around the country in response to all the pressures on libraries and so, it seemed a good thing, although we've only got a small membership in libraries... but because of all this goodwill and there were these spontaneous campaigns, it seemed sensible to... go for libraries.

This officer (O1) saw the library service as a good service on which to focus a campaign because

it's a really representative public service so it's got all the issues in it, it's a popular service, everybody knows about it even if you've never used the library in your life you know about the library service. There's a lot of people with a vested interest in it from schools to individuals and so campaigning on the libraries can be a proxy for campaigning on a lot of other public services...

It was also seen as being a favourable environment in which to build alliances with user groups

where there's such goodwill to tap into. And it's such a visible service and it's a lot easier to get public support for libraries than it is for refuse collection or environmental health.

At a paid officer level within UNISON, it is clear that the benefits of alliance working are largely accepted. That is not to say that these alliances are seen as being problem-free, but they are seen as essential in services like the library service.

UNISON involvement in the library campaigns

In the survey of library campaign groups, all 33 respondents provided information on UNISON's involvement in their campaign. In 23 cases (70%), UNISON members and the local UNISON branch were involved while in 10 cases (33%) there was no UNISON involvement.

UNISON's involvement took a number of forms and varied in its depth of engagement. 17 respondents provided details on this, as set out below in Table 9c.

Table 9c: Forms of UNISON involvement

Answer	Response (n = 17)	%
UNISON members help in the running of the campaign	4	24%
UNISON has provided some funding for the campaign	5	29%
UNISON has provided other non-financial support (e.g. meeting facilities etc)	6	35%
UNISON members have taken part in activities organised by the campaign	10	59%
UNISON has invited the campaign to speak to a meeting(s) of UNISON library staff	4	24%

The most common form of engagement was that of UNISON members taking part in activities organised by the campaign (10 cases). This covered a wide range of different actions – demonstrations, marches and so on.

Five campaigns received some form of funding or financial contribution from UNISON and in six cases UNISON provided some type of non-financial support. Examples offered by respondents included the printing of leaflets, provision of placards and a banner, and providing meeting rooms.

Four campaigns had UNISON members actively involved in the running of the campaign. One respondent (C19) reported:

One member joined our committee, though others were initially wary. Staff were in a difficult position, having to follow a policy they did not agree with, and could not be seen to be aligning themselves with a group actively opposing the policy.

In four cases, UNISON invited the campaign to speak to a meeting of UNISON members in the public library service.

One area of co-operation that was clearly valued by campaigners was UNISON members' knowledge and access to information. A 'general exchange of information' (C33) occurred in some campaigns with UNISON members able to provide 'information about council policies and actions' (C16) and some campaigns routinely copying UNISON officers into their report circulation.

Table 9d below divides into two groups the campaigns that provided details of their engagement with UNISON. Those that recorded three or more of the five categories in Table 9c (above) have been categorised as illustrating a deep engagement by UNISON with the campaign. Those with less than three can be described as having a shallow engagement.

Table 9d: Level of UNISON engagement with campaigns

Level of UNISON engagement	Number of campaigns (n=17)
Deep	4
Shallow	13

This is obviously a small sample and a fairly crude measure of the depth of engagement but it does suggest that, while UNISON often engages in library campaigns in the local community, only a minority of cases provided evidence of substantial UNISON involvement in them. The sheer scale of the cutbacks in local government may explain some of this. After all, as several officers mentioned, branches vary enormously in their effectiveness and levels of general activity – to the extent that sometimes they do not even really participate in UNISON's own campaigns, never mind build alliances with external partners. For example, as one officer (O4) in an interview explained:

where you've got massive branches who, sadly, over the last two or three years or more have been losing members hand over fist in all the areas of local government. And when we would ring about libraries, to them it seemed like the last, the straw that broke the camel's back. It was always 'haven't I got enough to do?'

Another officer (O2) said:

we encourage branches to work with user groups and the community but whether it always happens is another matter. I think there's probably more that we could do to encourage that.

This was reflected in the comments of one UNISON steward interviewee (R3) who saw very clear gains for the union:

I think the union could be doing more to link in with community and campaign groups. There have been groups when there've been library closures, there have been campaign groups set up but I don't think UNISON's really been all that involved and supporting them and I think that might be changing. They're talking more and more with what's happening just now in linking up community campaigns but I think a lot of the time we've not really been out there actively supporting these campaigns and I think we should be doing more of that. I think if the union, as well as focussing on the interests of the members, they also really focussed on the benefits of public services to society, then it would help to generate more support for public sector workers and the union.

As part of that shift in orientation, UNISON's library campaign pack (UNISON, 2011g) has a section on community campaigning and the union runs training courses for activists on this, having worked closely with Citizens UK.

Campaigners' assessment of UNISON involvement

Those campaigns that recorded UNISON involvement were asked to assess this through a Likert scale (Table 9e, below). This was completed by 18 of the 23 respondents that reported UNISON involvement.

Table 9e: Campaigners' assessment of UNISON involvement

	very positive	positive	Neither positive nor negative	negative	very negative
UNISON involvement in the campaign has been (n = 18)	6 (33%)	8 (44%)	4 (22%)	0	0

There were no cases in which the campaign group reported a negative or very negative response to UNISON's involvement. Four reported that it was neither negative nor positive but 14 of the 18 (78%) considered UNISON to have had a positive or very positive impact. The data shows that there is some engagement by UNISON at a local level with user groups and that this is regarded in a positive light. This is with a fairly low level of engagement. It may be that this means that there are greater opportunities for UNISON to play a more important role in working with the user groups and that this would be welcomed. On the other hand it is possible that the relatively shallow engagement shown in the data is valued but a more active participation might be considered too intrusive. An examination of the data in more depth, particularly in terms of what the campaigners felt to be the advantages and disadvantages of UNISON involvement may help to answer this question.

Advantages of working together

A UNISON rep (R16) interviewed, argued that there was no choice other than for the union and user groups to work together, whatever the difficulties:

...the only way probably to make any difference is for those who get the services and for those who work in them to work together. But how we're going to fully achieve that, I'm not, I think it's a work in progress.

One campaigner (C33) summed up the relationship with UNISON making 'obvious sense to form common cause with staff'. When asked to expand on the advantages for the campaign of UNISON involvement, the 16 respondents highlighted a range of different contributions, but chief among them was the knowledge, ideas, access to information, expert advice and guidance that UNISON and its lay members were able to provide the campaigns (mentioned by 8 of the 16 respondents). In addition the resources and infrastructure of the union – its ability to communicate beyond the locality – were valued by the campaigners.

Some of these views were recognised by UNISON officers, one of whom (O2) suggested in an interview that

I think often, service user groups and campaigners very much value the input made by paid, trained, professional staff into those services and they don't want to lose the staff from those services, so I think that's often the motivation to get them working with the union in the first place.

One campaigner (C21) described UNISON's involvement as

consistent support and encouragement without seeking to dictate how we should act.

A UNISON officer (O3) interviewed, noted that working in alliances has meant that

we've also learned more about biting our tongue and not trying to be the dominant person but letting some of the other groups be a lead on different aspects but being clear about what our objectives are from a union perspective.

UNISON officers recognise that this sort of approach represents a culture change for the union.

This officer elaborated:

...you have to behave differently... you have to let go... in order to be able to work collaboratively – a very difficult path to tread and I don't think you can make rules about it. You have to just look at the circumstances and who are involved...

Another campaigner (C12) noted that

UNISON staff have been very supportive throughout.

These comments by both the UNISON respondents and the campaigners reveal a fairly sophisticated understanding of the need for mutual support and compromise in order to sustain an alliance between very different social actors. It requires a determination to see the alliance partner's point of view and to understand both the limits and the range of what they can do. The participants need to be able to critically reflect on their own practice as well and how that relates to that of the partner and of the shared goals that they have identified. None of this is particularly easy, for either the formal sort of organisation that is a union branch or the much less structured form of the campaign group.

Nevertheless the data provide examples of successful collaborations. The value of UNISON involvement was summed up by another campaigner (C19) as:

It shows solidarity of feeling and response to threats, even if from different perspectives.

A UNISON officer (O1) interviewee described the dynamics of relationships within coalitions as follows:

...if you're going to get a strong group of campaigners, then you've all got to minimise your differences and find common ground to work together and so, for them they get the strength of working in a larger organisation but then they lose some of the control, which is the same for everybody.

From UNISON's point of view, there are a number of different objectives beyond the immediate one of saving this or that library. An objective mentioned by several of the officers in interviews was to raise the profile and understanding of the role of the library workforce which 'constantly gets overlooked and actually is a key source of improving delivery and service' (O3). Another (O1) said the goal is to gather 'broad public support for the general principle of the public service'.

In interview, an officer (O2) said that it's also to raise UNISON's profile, both as the representative of dedicated public servants but also of

broadening the appeal of UNISON and showing that actually involving the trade union is not solely concerned with members, and I think often there is a perception that a trade union just wants to keep the status quo... it's often about changing people's perception and the image of UNISON... about UNISON being concerned about issues beyond the workforce, very much concerned with the quality of the service the community's getting.

One steward (R6) interviewed, spoke about a previous threat of library closures in their local authority:

...we've had periods of occupation to keep libraries open so there was a connection there with unions not just selfishly serving its members but actually protecting the interests of the public as well.

By engaging in alliances, one officer (O3) interviewed felt that UNISON is 'in a better position to get people to understand our ethos and culture'. Another officer (O4) said in interview that by working in a coalition of groups, UNISON could 'work with all these groups together otherwise they'd all be going off in their own direction'.

Disadvantages of working together

A minority of campaigners also identified some disadvantages in working with UNISON. These were raised by seven of the respondents that reported UNISON involvement and fell into two categories. There was a belief among a number of campaigners that UNISON's interest was in the preservation of jobs rather than the preservation of the service. These two objectives are not necessarily in conflict but one campaigner (C4) complained that:

There is a concern that they are more concerned about protecting jobs than ensuring that a vibrant service is maintained for the public good. They are disinclined to address issues such as efficiency and sharing functions across authorities.

By contrast, one UNISON officer interviewee (O2) reported that some activists felt that library campaigners sometimes seemed 'fixated on buildings rather than necessarily the services that are within them'. This difference in emphasis clearly has the potential for tension and the officer said that in situations where a council withdrew support for a particular library but offered to hand it over to the community created problems for an alliance

because obviously our focus is on our members' jobs and often the community is so desperate to keep some form of provision open that they might step up and say that they're willing to volunteer and run it themselves.

One rep (R16) interviewed, described the local branch's involvement with a user group in a previous campaign and that potential tension had been

overcome because that was about library closures and... we had a very, very active user group ... we wanted to keep libraries open, it wasn't just about our jobs and they wanted to keep libraries open so that worked.

But she added that

I think there's slightly more of a tension now... They are then talking about volunteers which, obviously as you can imagine, we have some misgivings about, because in other parts of the country already some libraries are being run solely I understand on volunteers, obviously which is taking jobs away from people. So there is a bit of a tension because although... they're not exactly wild about the idea of volunteers, when push comes to shove, which side are they going to come down on?...

In some respects the increasing use of volunteers is another element of the deskilling and deprofessionalisation of the library service. It reflects a devaluing of the work done in libraries – both by those who are professionally qualified librarians and those that are not. This was captured very well in an exchange at the *Love Your Libraries* conference (in February 2010) when the then Culture Minister lectured delegates that the library service needed to learn from Tesco. One library worker retorted:

The people, the staff are there to help. It's no good having a library where somebody's wanting to get involved in looking up their family history if nobody in the library knows anything about it. You can't have a Tesco sales assistant answering the questions about how they get into ancestry.

The use of volunteers is a very real (and growing) issue for UNISON, as reflected in the survey of members. This concluded several months before the Coalition took office and began pushing its policy of hugely increasing the contribution of volunteers in libraries, to the extent of encouraging the complete running of some libraries by volunteers as part of the 'Big Society'. So the problem is likely to have grown since the survey. UNISON have responded at a national level by arguing that this is less about the Big Society than about a small state and at a local level many library service members have mixed feelings about the use of volunteers.

Volunteers have been involved in the library service in some form for many years, supplementing the work of paid staff. The previous government began to promote greater use of volunteers, and the number of volunteers and the number of volunteer hours has gone up in every year since 2006-07, with a cumulative increase in volunteers over that period of 69.1% and of volunteer hours of 52.3% (CIPFA, 2011c).

Table 9f: Local authority encouragement of volunteers

	Number of respondents	%
Yes, local authority encourages the use of volunteers	1452	54.4
No, local authority does not encourage the use of volunteers	777	29.1
Don't know	439	16.5

The membership survey showed that over half of respondents (54.4%) worked in local authorities that encouraged the use of volunteers in libraries (Table 9f). 42.9% of respondents actually worked in a library with volunteers (Table 9g).

Table 9g: Work in a library that uses volunteers

	Number of respondents	%
Yes, work in a library that uses volunteers	1145	42.9
No, do not work in a library that uses volunteers	1449	54.3
Don't know	74	2.8

Respondents were asked whether there were any plans to replace staff with volunteers, rather than simply use them to supplement the work of staff. Most did not know, a small proportion (6.2%) reported that there were such plans and a third of respondents said that there were no plans (Table 9h).

Table 9h: Plans to replace staff with volunteers

	Number of respondents	%
Yes	165	6.2
No	890	33.4
Don't know	1613	60.5

However, whether or not there were plans at the time of the survey, there was already disquiet at the prospect of the replacement of staff with volunteers. One member surveyed, reported that

...there is definite pressure to use volunteers, that are effectively staff paid nothing. I would like the union to campaign strongly against the rich taking on unpaid (voluntary) work that the less well off desperately need to be paid to do.

Another survey respondent explained her attitude:

We value our one volunteer, who is an adult with learning disabilities. Her help with shelving which she does very well, frees other staff up to do other things. We would welcome other volunteers of her calibre as long as they did not replace paid staff.

And in a further survey response, a member complained that

If management wish to use volunteers they should have a clear volunteers' policy which all staff may read (volunteers deserve proper support and training too).

However, only 34.7% of respondents worked in a local authority that did have such a policy or protocol in relation to the use of volunteers (Table 9i).

Table 9i: Work in a local authority with a policy/protocol for the use of volunteers

	Number of respondents	%
Yes	925	34.7
No	152	5.7
Don't know	1591	59.6

In addition, less than half of the respondents (42.9%) that worked in places with volunteers, reported that training was provided to volunteers (Table 9j).

Table 9j: Training for volunteers

	Number of respondents	%	Valid %
Yes	727	27.2	42.9
No	198	7.4	11.7
Don't know	763	28.6	45.0
Not applicable (no volunteers)	980	36.7	

However, at least in some library campaign groups, there was a recognition that, while UNISON clearly had an obligation to defend its members' jobs and conditions, there was also room to work together. One campaigner (C5) noted:

UNISON members, naturally, are primarily interested in jobs and library users are primarily interested in keeping libraries open, even if that means using volunteers.

These can be viewed as contradictory objectives. We collaborated in the areas where there was agreement and respected the other's views, where there was no agreement.

While another (C33) commented:

Even if we disagree, far better to work it out between us.

The other perceived disadvantage identified was the possibility that by working with UNISON some people might see the campaign as a 'partisan organisation' (C24) or as being 'in UNISON's pocket' (C32). This partly related to some groups' determination to adopt an overt non-party political position and UNISON's (often uneasy) relationship with the Labour party. A similar concern was expressed within UNISON in that one officer (O4) pointed to the danger of losing the union's independent position in an alliance:

it quite worries me that UNISON will just get dragged along with them. You know when loads of different groups come together, every one of them can lose their own little soul in it unless there's some cohesion with them all so they speak with one voice.

There was a campaigner (C20) complaint about 'little support from upper echelons' of UNISON and two commented either about the low level of activity of UNISON members in the libraries or what was described as the 'negative image' (C24) that library staff had of UNISON.

The passivity or 'timidity' of UNISON members was noted by a few campaigner respondents (C20). One (C1) said that the:

local branch of UNISON is quite weak and to an extent quite demoralised so probably do not have resources to get involved in the campaign although we would really welcome their involvement.

Another (C20) commented that:

...when it comes to potential job losses certainly to be achieved with the current assault on public libraries, it surprises us there is so little fight back from UNISON members.

However, part of the answer to this may lie in the insight of some of the other campaigners.

One (C21) noted that

...library staff themselves were glad people were speaking out but mainly too afraid to do so themselves.

And another (C8) explained that staff:

...had been ordered not to have anything to do with the Campaign by [the council] but did so anonymously.

One campaigner (C33) revealed that:

Sometimes staff use a Friends group to say things they dare not say themselves.

Finally this campaigner (C33) highlighted a potential rather than an existing problem in terms of the impending impact of cuts:

UNISON takes a firm no-cuts no-redundancies line, which is dead right in principle, but something has to give in this era of cuts, so it may not be so easy to be fully together in future. Also, users are getting some chance to make changes in local branches - we wonder what will happen when we ask for opening later in the evening. This kind of potential dispute has not happened before, when [the council] ruled the service top-down.

Many of these tensions or potential tensions are recognised by UNISON officers. One (O2) noted in interview that campaign groups have had quite varied experiences of working with UNISON:

I think there's been cases where there's been considerable frustration on the part of Friends Groups, they've wanted to work with UNISON and haven't been able to really develop those sorts of relationships. I think that just reflects often what's happening within the branch with the fact that there are so many threats, redundancies, everything going on at the minute and that may mean that in certain circumstances the branch's focus is not on the library service and developing relationships locally with a Friends Group. But I think where it has happened, it has been fairly successful and again it comes back to that point around service quality and I think very much the voice of users is often sidelined and marginalised and local authorities don't use users as a resource often enough.

Some of this reflects the tensions apparent when a large, membership organisation and a relatively small campaign group attempt to work together. The latter may be more nimble, and quicker at taking decisions while the former has a democratic structure in which accountability has a high premium and in which decisions may take place only after fairly exhaustive

discussion and consultation. UNISON is aware of these challenges and has been working with Citizens UK to discuss how to improve its work within communities and with community groups.

Campaigns without UNISON involvement

Of the 10 respondents that reported no UNISON involvement in their campaign, eight provided some details. There was no case in which UNISON had been asked to participate but declined. Where the union was not involved it was because they were not approached or not asked to be involved. This was sometimes – but not always - the result of a conscious decision to exclude the union.

Of those that had a campaign with no UNISON involvement around half (three of seven respondents) would have liked to see the union involved. One campaigner respondent (C1) was actually a UNISON member who felt that

it is important for the union to be involved in supporting campaigns in the community as these affect their members.

Another (C6) suggested that UNISON involvement would allow them to speak up for staff (although admitted that 'we never thought to ask' UNISON to be involved). A third (C25) drew attention to the potential problems of staff involvement, even though in favour of UNISON involvement:

It may add further weight to the campaign. My impression has been that the librarians have been fearful of getting involved in the campaign. The council would not allow petitions to be held in the library (for example). As council staff they did not feel able to oppose council decisions.

These responses may indicate that a stronger push from the union and a more proactive engagement with local campaigns might pay dividends. It also suggests, as does some of the earlier evidence, that there needs to be some clear advice given to library service members as to where the line is drawn in terms of permitted trade union activity in campaigning so as to avoid (usually mischievous) threats that such action breaches local authority codes of conduct.

UNISON is aware of this problem (partly as a result of this research). Referring to 'Friends' groups, one officer (O2) interviewed, said:

there is frustration often that staff might say that they are very much in agreement with the campaign but feel quite conflicted about whether they can get actively involved.

In response to this, the union has advised individual members who have raised this issue but the officer (O2) conceded

we probably need to offer some actual firm guidance to branches and members about what activities could be undertaken and how they could best become involved in support campaigns without putting themselves in a difficult position.

Of the few campaigners that specifically ruled out working with UNISON, two saw it as a conflict of interest in that the campaign should be 'for and by the users of the local Library' (C9) and that the point of view of the staff and that of the users 'are two different perspectives and ought not to be confused' (C15). Another (C26) claimed that 'the community did not want UNISON' although no evidence was supplied to support this assertion and this conflicts somewhat with the evidence that library staff feel very highly valued by the community.

One UNISON officer (O4) interviewed, described two contrasting experiences of library campaigns. One 'did wonderful things in engaging with the public'. On the other hand, another campaign group was described in the following terms:

...they were fuddy duddies. They were people that were retired. They were into libraries, it belonged to them. They were very difficult to deal with... they didn't seem to worry about the public, they were more concerned about their own bit and their own connection with the library. I found it quite strange.

And

...some of these other groups are so aloof and some of them are quite anti-union - I had that feeling when I was talking to people sometimes.

So far, the results of UNISON's work with library service user groups are patchy but perhaps this is unsurprising with a new strategic turn in a union with a deliberately devolved power structure. There is also some disquiet, as expressed by one officer (O1), that with all the different demands competing for attention and resources, the union might not have provided sufficient national support to the campaigns in the localities. Given limited resources, this may

be inevitable and may simply emphasise the point that the key task is to win the debate in the branches and among the reps that this is a worthwhile strategy. On the other hand, the data from this limited survey of the most active campaign groups suggests that UNISON's involvement is broadly welcomed and that an increase in the level of activity would be viewed positively. Both sides of the bargain appear to have a good grasp of the balance of benefits of collaboration and the will to make it work.

9.5 The significance of the library campaign for the wider work of UNISON

Any discussion of possible wider significance for the union of the library campaign needs to consider whether the public library service is just different to other public services – inside and outside local government. Whether it is so fundamentally different as to invalidate any broader lessons is obviously an important factor for the union and its strategy. It was certainly the case that several of the union reps believe that the library service 'quite different from any other local government service' (R2). One rep (R3) interviewed, explained this in terms of the nature of the service in that it is a

lot less bureaucratic and corporate in the sense that some other council services – they're there to maybe fulfil a certain purpose and they follow the rules quite strictly. People go to maybe see somebody with a housing enquiry or something like that and they've got procedures to follow and all that... but the library's more of a friendly welcoming environment ...within libraries, often staff work there for a number of years and they get to know people, they get to know people very well.

Another interviewee (R15) put it a slightly different way:

All members of the community are free to come into the library, they don't just come to us when they have problems, which is what a lot of public service is – health service, housing, it's people with problems going to that service for that reason. People come to us for enjoyment and to find out information as well as when they have problems

Another rep (R17) interviewed, agreed that there was a general public service ethos but that within the library service there was an 'additional layer' based on the fact that

It's about accountability, the fact that it's free, access to everyone, non-discriminatory, values about equality... libraries have a commitment to a free access to information that can empower individuals... There's something about the profession as well,

something that professional librarians bring as well to a public service ethos tied in with what libraries are about.

The way of working as well as the nature of the work was also seen as an important factor.

One steward (R6) interviewee explained:

...in contrast say with a retail establishment, we aren't trying to sell anything to anybody... we are genuinely happy to give to a person whatever it is they need or whatever they want... It's just a matter of dealing with people as individuals and that's the nature of the service and maybe that builds up a feeling within the workforce, a pride. It's something also to do with something why the unions themselves are strong in libraries maybe, in that we're still an area where we have groups of workers work together in teams... very little hierarchy so even the managers, everyone is part of a team... The managers aren't necessarily authority figures... So that tends to build up a team working together ethos that maybe helps generate a public service ethos, a genuine feeling of people working together... Working closely in a team as a group of workers I think helps maintain that public service ethos culture.

Clearly there are differences between different services, but drawing on their knowledge and involvement in the library campaign and its engagement with user groups, the UNISON officers interviewed drew out a number of broader lessons for the union. First, the 'ownership' of the campaign within UNISON's structure was important. In this case the campaign is firmly embedded within the Local Government Service Group (with the close involvement and support of the Policy Unit). This brought a number of strengths to the campaign. The launch of the campaign began a process in which the campaign itself acted as an organisational tool among library members drawing some into activity for the first time and linking the reps together through a newly created email network, built for the purposes of the campaign, and run from the Local Government Service Group. One officer (O4) interviewed, noted that

...through that campaign we built up a massive connection with people that worked within libraries. So whether or not they were in a big branch didn't really matter because we'd got people there.

By locating the campaign within the Service Group, it was easier to link the issues of jobs, terms and conditions with the public service issues. So not only did the campaign provide a focus for bringing together library workers within the union – through seminars, conference fringe meetings, special conferences, in online formats – but it also brought together both the 'vested interest' and 'sword of justice' issues.

In turn, the direct involvement of the membership, particularly library service activists, strengthened the campaign in two ways. It energised the campaign at local level (although this was not the case everywhere) and through debate and discussion sharpened the union's analysis and policy. As one officer (O1) interviewed said:

working closely with the service groups and the service groups working closely with the members – remember we had conferences and seminars where they came, we got them to talk about all sorts of issues – led to much stronger, in that sense it makes the campaign much stronger because you know what you want.

Secondly, the campaign drew on both internal knowledge and expertise and external assistance (this researcher) to develop a clear position on the library service. In an interview, one officer (O1) argued that

I think we managed to develop, with your help, a very clear five point plan for where we wanted to see the service going and we don't always achieve that... there was a lot of pressure to produce blueprints for what we wanted to see from public service reform to throw back at the government. But my line was that there isn't one kind of blueprint. You have to drill down into each service to achieve that and I think in the library service we did and it was based on principles responding to the modernisation agenda and new technology, all of those things...

Thirdly, the campaign encouraged the building of alliances with user groups at both national and local level. This produced some new and, perhaps unexpected, allies. As one officer (O2) explained in interview:

...the scale of what's going on is really bringing together groups that you would normally see as disparate. You think of the lobby of Parliament [*Speak Up for Libraries*], the fact that UNISON and the WI were both involved in that. We're not the usual bed-fellows and that illustrates the strength of feeling around cuts and the general threat to the public sector.

Not only were alliances built, although this has been uneven around the country, but overall it was viewed as beneficial to the union and the library campaign, described by this officer (O2) as

...a good example of building relationships with organisations and user groups and individuals and information sharing and putting a different slant on some of the arguments through some of those alliances...

One of the lessons identified in relation to alliance work was the need to carefully choose the core issue around which the alliance could be built and then to accept that other elements of the union's policy would have to be won through debate and discussion within the alliance. As an example, one officer (O3) said that the basis for unity within the library campaign was about ensuring that a good service was delivered to the community:

And actually quite a few in *Speak Up for Libraries* are not necessarily convinced that it has to be delivered by a local authority and are thinking, well you could deliver this by a private company. But what they do want is that there is a service delivered and that that service is for a community. So there might be differences... but as a union it makes us bigger and stronger.

It also provoked some thoughts on the sustainability of alliances and the recognition that relationships take time to build and cannot be switched on and off to order. It was acknowledged that the union often took a reactive rather than a proactive stance. At local level, branches rarely initiated contact with a 'Friends' group until there was a problem. One officer (O4) interviewee, said:

I don't think that they saw a need. There didn't appear to be a need until there was a threat.

One officer (O3) interviewed, argued that a lesson learned at national level within the union was

We can't just have it as a one way street, that we just use our user groups when we've got a campaign and then don't maintain those relationships beyond that campaign at local level. I think we do that at our peril. In a lot of times I think we're a bit like user groups as well, that people put their energy in to do that grassroots 'saving' thing but once that's over or it's gone off the boil then everyone relaxes and gets on to something else.

There was a view that the union had managed to build and sustain relationships at national level with co-ordinating bodies and national campaigns which tended to be more stable organisations. This was much more difficult at local level as the campaigns themselves often appeared, grew and declined in response to a threat to local libraries, to the extent that one officer interviewed, believed that 'these alliances can live only for certain periods over certain campaigns'.

Officers saw the advantages of sustainable alliances that were not simply defensive operations, but believed that this was extremely difficult to do – especially in the current situation of austerity. One interviewee (O2) said:

Whether there is scope for those authorities that at the minute are not intending massive swingeing cuts to the library service, whether there's an opportunity there for branches and user groups to get in first and talk to the local authority about reviewing the library service and making proactive improvements before it gets to a dire situation, then I think that would be really positive. I'm not aware off the top of my head of anywhere where that's really happening at the minute because the general picture is quite bleak. But obviously that would be the ideal and even when proposals are made by local authorities, if they could actually speak to the branch, speak to user groups first – it's often the way that they're the last to hear about proposals. If a few more progressive authorities worked with the resources they have in terms of staff expertise and users' expertise then I think that would be really positive. Unfortunately I'm not sure now is the time when that's going to really happen in reality but that would be the ideal.

There are some examples of where the union has built sustainable, proactive alliances in order to try to shape public services, but these are few and far between. One such alliance is that created by the Newcastle local authority branch under the leadership of the late Kenny Bell and covered in some depth by Hilary Wainwright in her book on public service reform (Wainwright, 2009). A UNISON officer (O1) interviewed said:

That's the shining example to everybody, where on a number of fronts – always, not just one or two issues – on a number of fronts, really long term relationships were built up with communities and user groups and building their own agenda and taking it forward. But that takes a lot of resources and a lot of vision – not just trade unions, but very few people have. I think it's tremendously difficult but the future of public services probably depends on us trying to develop those kinds of things so I think it's something to aspire towards.

Perhaps the final lesson relates to the politics of public service reform. Referring to the fact that the campaign began under the last Labour government and now continues under the Coalition government, one officer (O3) noted in interview that:

I don't think we have won the message. I guess that is about the political will of every party. We haven't got a party at a national level who are saying that we believe in a publicly funded, publicly delivered service. So that's still quite a hard thing to be successful on isn't it? Because we haven't changed the Labour party to believe that privatisation isn't the only game in town.

Another (O1) reflected that when the union's campaign began,

...there was a kind of political vacuum in terms of public service reform... It was very uncomfortable... we were standing out alone taking a very highly political position. We're not a political party and it's not always comfortable but there was no-one else to do that...

This remains a problem for the union – beyond the focus of the library campaign.

9.6. Discussion

The continuing need for public service unions to influence the political process is a key element of the debate about alliances. In a period like the present when unions' traditional vehicles of industrial and political influence are relatively ineffective, the attraction to unions of engaging in alliances with other civil society actors is obvious. The difficult questions for unions have included deciding with whom to ally, on what basis and for what goal.

These questions touch on the heart of the thesis in that the public library workforce clearly has a continuing belief in the existence of the concept of the public service ethos, a belief that is held even more deeply by their local leadership – the reps. The survival and vitality of the PSE is particularly significant given the view of members that the employers have essentially withdrawn from any real commitment to it. This possession by the workers of the PSE has become a form of ideological shield (it justifies and explains their opposition to the policies of marketisation and cuts), it acts as a point of stability during a period of change, and it now acts as marker that differentiates them from the employers.

A highlighting of the PSE, with its focus on the quality of service, potentially offers a bridge to working with service users in alliances precisely because it does not emphasise the 'vested interest' of members in terms of pay, jobs and conditions. However, although the focus is on the quality of service, the union can legitimately argue that the counter posing of the service against the public service employment bargain is a false dichotomy. In order to provide a good quality service it is necessary to have a well motivated, skilled workforce that regards the employment bargain as a fair one. Thus the issues of service quality and the employment bargain are not separate but integral to one another.

Public service workers are in an advantageous position in terms of being able to use their role as public service providers to build a positive relationship with the local community and thus enhance their own power and that of the local community. The public library service is perhaps especially well-placed in this regards, being a highly regarded service, strongly associated with the local community through a series of (mostly) physically fixed locations and a stable user or 'customer' base.

The members' public service ethos and its associated commitment to the needs of local communities has the potential to play an important part in building 'deep' and long-lasting community coalitions. The relevance of the commitment to the public service ethos is that it provides the staff (and thereby indirectly their union) with credibility with service users in their campaigns. So if the union participates in, or instigates, coalitions in defence of the public library service in general or specific libraries facing threats, stakeholders see an ally that has more than vested interests involved. It is not enough to recognise the existence of a membership goal that goes beyond jobs, wages and conditions, but it is a solid base on which to build. As Tattersall (2005: 104) explains, it requires:

...a union's leadership to consciously transform how it frames its issues, connecting the union to a community movement. There is a need for the union leadership to recognise the union as a social actor not just a bargaining agent. This transition may be easier for unions already connected to the 'community' through the kind of work performed by their members, such as public sector unions...

The policy lead and recommendations for community engagement has come from the national and sectoral conferences of the union and been pushed by the paid officers but the drive for the ground level building of alliances can only come from the local branches. UNISON branches are now involved in many local library campaigns. However the organisational depth and breadth of this involvement varies and will have an impact on the sustainability of these relationships (Tattersall, 2008). It is here that the role of the library reps is decisive in leading the union at a local level and, perhaps taking the initiative in engaging with potential allies. In first, articulating and reinforcing the commitment of members to the PSE and then, crucially, acting upon it by building alliances with service users, the reps are laying the foundation of a form of community unionism that may have the capacity to draw on the strength of wider social forces outside the workplace, and thereby enhance the strength of the union within the workplace.

The experience of the existing campaign groups suggests that they are, in the main, sympathetic to working with the union representing the staff, especially if the alliance work is focussed on quality of service and the preservation of the network of public libraries – both of which are also in the interests of UNISON members in the service. UNISON now has enough experience itself at local and national level to be able to draw up a balance sheet that shows – despite the obvious difficulties and inevitable tensions that will arise – that there are great advantages for the union in alliance work and that the PSE offers them a tool with which to build these alliances.

Chapter Ten: Conclusion

10.1 Introduction

This research was premised on the fact that public sector trade unionism remains relatively under-researched and that there has been little research at all on trade unionism in the UK public library service. In addition, research on the public service ethos (in both the UK and the USA) has mostly been carried out from a political science or public administration perspective. This thesis helps to remedy these shortfalls. It is a research study about ideas and agency, about where ideas come from, what they mean in the context of work and trade unionism and their potential for union action. The place of ideas and ideology in workplace employment relations is also an under-researched area, as Heery and Conley (2007) note.

The aim of the study was to examine the attitude of public library service workers towards the public service ethos, within the context of union membership and union strategy. The thesis focused on a series of research questions:

- Has the public service ethos survived? And if it has, what does it mean for workers?
- Is there a relationship between commitment to the public service ethos and union membership and activism?
- Could the union utilise the ethos in its campaigning? And, if so, how?

This study was undertaken at a time of crisis for unions and covers some central areas of academic interest as well as issues of strategic importance for the labour movement. It adds to the literature in three ways. It shows: the continuation of a belief in the existence of a PSE among the general membership; that among the reps, an enhanced commitment to trade unionism and the PSE go together; and that this widespread commitment to the PSE could assist in building alliances with service user groups.

10.2 Survival of the PSE

The public library service was one of the first manifestations of what would become known as the welfare state. The collective provision of services to local communities - of which the library

was a pioneer – was closely bound up with a broader struggle for democratic rights and improvements in living conditions. The campaign for public libraries was a cause that was taken up by the radical left and the trade union movement. It was seen as an important public good and a constituent part of the struggle for decency and dignity for working people. Local authority provision was bitterly opposed by many Tories, although some of the more far-sighted employers offered support (usually on the basis that the industrial powerhouse of the 19th century world needed literate and numerate workers to operate the machines that produced the wealth). From the very beginning, supporters of the public library service had to fight for its existence. Not only that, once established, it became (and remained) a site of contestation, but one in which democratic values run deep.

These values have been absorbed into the bloodstream of the public library workforce and are passed from one generation of workers to the next. The adherence to the notion of a PSE among library workers reflects their view of the purpose of the service and its place in the community. It informs their working practice and provides them with a very powerful sense of being public servants providing a public service. Their work culture which valorises the characteristics associated with the PSE (accountability, access, equity, free provision and so on) represents a rejection of a marketised service and the commodification of knowledge connected with it.

Despite three decades of 'reform' of the public service and the adoption of various elements of marketisation by successive governments, the PSE remains a significant feature of British society. The public service ethos may well have been weakened by the impact of neoliberal reforms on the conditions of work within the public services. In fact the evidence in this thesis suggests that there *is* a relationship between the degree of belief in the existence of a PSE and the experience of workers in terms of the public service employment bargain.

However, much more noteworthy is the remarkable survival of the ethos. Far from being dead, as claimed by some commentators (e.g. Hall, 2012), its resilience is illustrated by the considered responses of a mature and reflexive membership and activist cadre and represents a potential strength that the unions could build upon. The continued strong basis of support for the PSE among public service workers rests not just on self interest but on a commitment to the ideas around it.

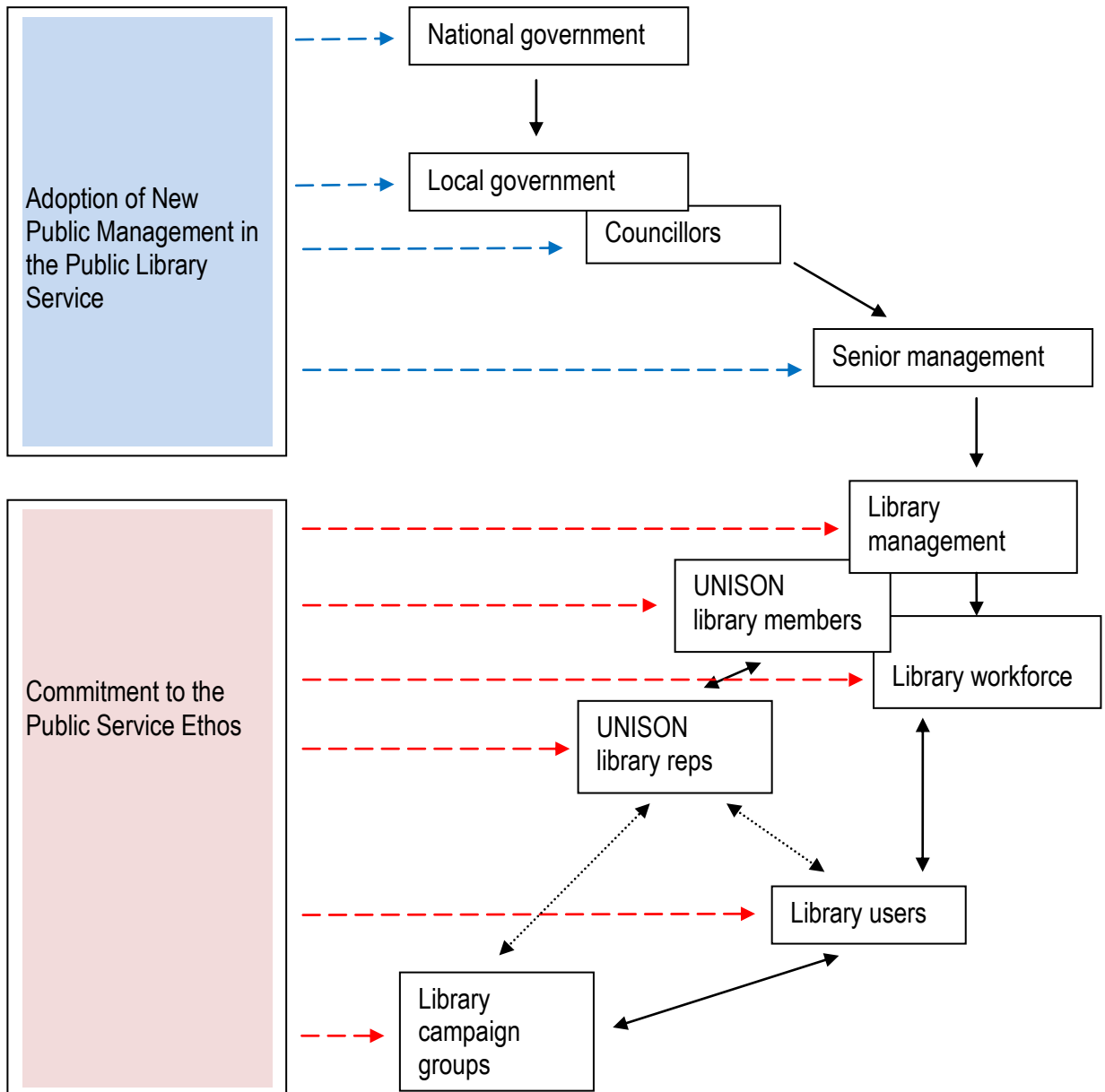
Further, although the PSE seems to have been largely abandoned by politicians and senior managers in the public services, it has been appropriated by the workforce as their own. Or at least, this is what the workers within the library service feel. Today instead of a widespread belief in the PSE which is shared throughout the public sector by the political leadership, the senior executives and management and staff, the workers believe that a commitment to the PSE is essentially limited to them (see Figure 10a). In the library service, workers clearly feel that they are left holding the baton and have become the sole possessors of this vocabulary. As Hyman (2007: 207) notes, the 'battle of ideas is also a battle of words'.

Mills (1940: 906) points out: 'Stable vocabularies of motive link anticipated consequences and specific actions'. The PSE not only falls to the workers but they gain ownership of the language associated with it and are able to deploy it to 'frame' the position that they find themselves in. Moreover it offers them the linguistic means to express the view that they are the guardians of the service in alliance with the interests of the service users, and that the blame for the injustice being dealt out to both the library service workers and the service users lies with the politicians pushing the NPM agenda.

The appropriation of the PSE by the workforce reveals a preparedness to defend a set of values and a particular view of the public good that stands counter posed to the prevailing political and managerial orthodoxy. This reflects their view of what the library service is, or should be. In their understanding of the PSE, the workers also connect the quality of service with the quality of working life. At the most basic level, this was expressed by respondents in terms of the impossibility of keeping libraries open for longer hours without the necessary staff, or to provide the level of skilled service without properly trained and qualified staff. They make a very strong connection between being poorly treated by the employer and providing a poor service to the public. They reject the notion of volunteers (other than as supplements to trained, paid staff) as a solution because of the inevitable associated decline in service quality. As one respondent put it:

...if you just want rooms with books, then it will be run by volunteers - if you want passionate, informed, educated and innovative people then we need to be recognised for what we contribute and the difference we make to society.

Figure 10a: Actors and Influences in the Public Library Service



Key:

Coloured arrows with dashed broken lines indicate lines of influence

Single directional black arrows represent lines of management.

Double directional black arrows represent relationships

Double directional black arrows with dotted broken lines represent potential relationships

Their pride in their work, their commitment to the service users, their willingness to 'go the extra mile' (a phrase used by Ryan-Collins et al, 2007, as shorthand for the public service ethos and actually used by 96 individual survey respondents to describe what the PSE meant to them) mark them out as 'principled agents' (Dilulio, 1994) who see their work as more than simply a way of paying the bills but a job that has intrinsic rewards. That is not to say that the public service employment bargain is not important. As one rep (R4) explained:

Just because I have a public service ethos and a pride in the profession doesn't mean to say that I shouldn't get reasonable pay and working conditions. The two should be able to run alongside.

In the minds of UNISON's library service members, it is not possible to uncouple the service and the job. In other words, the PSE is good for service delivery, and the public service employment bargain that previously underpinned the PSE is good for service delivery, in that it aligns a better experience for workers with better service for users. When this happy congruence is displaced by cuts and attacks on conditions, the evidence suggests that the library staff (or a significant majority of them) do not then reject the PSE, but rather use it as a coping mechanism or a shield, reflecting how their interpretation of the public service mission has become part of their own views and motivation – regardless of whether the employer any longer holds to this view.

10.3 The relationship of the PSE with the union

UNISON was identified by respondents as one of the best defenders and representatives of the PSE. It was seen as significantly more important and effective in defending the PSE than CILIP, the professional librarians' body, despite the fact the PSE might be considered to be an issue which would fall into the 'professional' rather than the union remit. However, it would be too strong to say that the union is seen as *the* representative of the PSE in the library service, although there is clearly the potential for it to be so.

UNISON and other public service unions embody a series of values in tune with the PSE and as collective organisations already play a socialisation role across different occupational and professional groups within the public sector. As institutions operating within the public services, they themselves embody the same sort of tensions of 'vested interest' and 'sword of justice' (Flanders, 1970) that their members negotiate daily.

The data on attitudes to the PSE reveal library staff as having a sense of themselves as a group distinct from, and to an increasing extent, defined in opposition, to senior management and the political leadership of local authorities. The existence of these values shared by the collective and championed by the reps clearly offers the possibility that collective social identity could be tied closely into participation in the union (Cregan et al, 2009). This possibility is strengthened by the fact that belief in the existence of a PSE is stronger among those who also have a commitment to the union (if we take willingness to volunteer for a representative role in the union as an indicator of the latter). Reps are in a central position – both close to the members within the workplace and as insiders in the union structure and a part of the institution. Kelly's observations (1998) are appropriate here. He argues that an important element of their job is to interpret what goes on at the workplace in a way which identifies workers' collective interest in distinction to that of the employer. This process of interpretation and argument assists in the creation of a collective identity. Preparatory activity of this kind is needed to lay the foundations for the basis for collective action at the workplace. Obviously, union reps cannot create a grievance where none exists. They do not have the ability to markedly influence the material basis of conditions that may lead to conflict. However, as Darlington (2009: 4) points out

they can stimulate awareness of grievances and of the potential for collective action for redress; they can take the lead in proposing and initiating such action; and they can provide cohesion to discontent by generalising from workers' immediate economic grievances to broader, even political, concerns.

The PSE can play a role in this framing process as the reps interpret the workplace situation through this lens, and use it as a mobilising rhetoric which resonates with members and emphasises the collective interest of members expressed through the union. By overtly reflecting the values of members around the PSE, the union can strengthen commitment to its workplace organisation, boosting participation and increasing the power resources on which it can draw.

10.4 Union campaigning

The PSE also presents the union with a basis for creating a bond between public service providers and public service users, as it represents a shared valuing of high quality public service. This potential point of contact with, or bridge to, service users' groups offers the union

– as the representative of the workers – an opportunity to build alliances with service users in defence of public services. Given the constellation of forces facing trade unions generally in the UK, this is something that they could utilise more effectively, especially in the public sector.

UNISON has embraced the strategy of building coalitions with service user and campaign groups and there are growing numbers of examples of such collaborations around the country in the fight to keep local libraries open. UNISON's campaign has been in many ways highly innovative, operating at different levels and engaging different actors. At a national level the union has committed resources – both staff and finances – to support local initiatives and take part in national events and coalitions. It has used its Local Government Service Group to support the branch campaigns with officer involvement, research back-up, educational and training resources and through a co-ordinating role bringing branches together for national seminars, conferences and lobbies.

Perhaps the most interesting development has been the encouragement of branch involvement with local service user and campaign groups. Membership belief in the existence of a PSE acts as a bridge to these groups, providing credibility in the creation of alliances around quality of service issues. By working with campaign groups and recognising that it is a social actor in the local community as well as a bargaining agent in the workplace (Tattersall, 2005), the reps can increase UNISON's power externally. By involving members with the campaign around an issue about which they feel strongly, the reps can also create a closer relationship with the members, thereby boosting commitment to the union, and increasing UNISON's power internally. It also may help to overcome any sectionalism that exists (around workplace, skill) in favour of a broader solidarity.

Obviously none of this is an automatic process, it requires agency – intervention by reps at the workplace - and vision and leadership from branch, regional and national level. The experience to date has been promising, if a little patchy in terms of uptake by branches. Perhaps this is not surprising when considered against the fact that there are over 380 local government branches of UNISON and 206 library authorities in the UK. The data gathered for this thesis shows campaign groups are prepared to work with UNISON and welcome the expertise and resources that they can offer. That is not to say that collaboration is without potential problems. Campaign groups may not support some of the traditional forms of trade union action such as strikes. On the other hand, there are many UNISON members – both in libraries and other services – who

are reluctant to take any type of action that would either undermine support with users by appearing to target them rather than the employer, or that would assist employer's objectives. For example, a strike in a library earmarked for closure is likely to hasten its demise. On the other hand a work-in or occupation supported by the local community would present the workforce and its service user allies with the initiative.

This is not a new dilemma for public service unions whose members have a high commitment to the PSE but it may focus the discussion around more imaginative and effective forms of action that sustain rather than undermine alliances with service users. It also offers a platform around which union members in the library service can seek to influence the labour process. A focus on the PSE demands from union members an engagement in the debate on the purpose and shape of the service in which they work. UNISON and other public service unions are ideally placed to be the vehicle for a re-articulation of the PSE in the face of neoliberal attacks, to link members' professional identity with their union identity and to place the PSE at the centre of the strategy for alliances in favour of an alternative public service policy.

10.5 Limitations and possibilities for further research

The sample of UNISON members in the library service that was generated from the UNISON membership database obviously excludes non-members. UNISON claim to have a majority of library service staff in membership, although this is difficult to verify as there are no independent sources of data on occupational or sectional/service based union membership totals or density *within* the local government sector. There is a potential problem of selection bias in the study in that it may be that the most sympathetic members of the union took part in the survey, precisely because the survey was publicised by the union, and they might be more likely to respond in a way that they think would gain the approval of the union.

The membership database suffers from being a snapshot of a dynamic population and, in this case, also from problems of categorisation. Some staff from university or school libraries are classified with public library staff in the union's membership database and these had to be removed from the sample manually. More importantly, an unknown number of library staff have been placed in a general 'local government' category and therefore may be missing from this study (although some will have been picked up from the branch information 'cascade'). As a

result of this research, UNISON officers have been discussing how to improve the quality of membership data held.

There is also no independent source of data that provides demographic information about the library workforce. CIPFA carries out an annual survey of library authorities but only collects very limited data on staff – numbers of full time equivalent staff (both professional and other). Therefore it is not possible to make detailed demographic comparisons between this sample and the library workforce as a whole.

The survey is of members' views not of their actions, so it is not possible to make any inferences about what they actually do in their daily work. However, for the purposes of this study, it was more important to establish whether they held the view that there is such a thing as the public service ethos and how it defined their attitudes to public service and to their union.

The focus on the PSE was developed by probing attitudes among those who agreed that a PSE existed (this was almost 60% of the sample). This question could have been supplemented with additional questions interrogating the meaning of the PSE. This could have been done through a series of Likert scale questions which may have provided more precision over the meaning of the PSE for members and their commitment (or not) to it. In attempting to avoid leading respondents, the questionnaire design missed some possibilities for exploring members' views on this matter. This was an objective in a scheduled second questionnaire survey (see below), using a variant of Perry's (1996) measurement scale of Public Service Motivation. While only a relatively small proportion of the sample specifically rejected the proposition that a PSE existed among library workers, a more substantial minority said that they did not know. It might have been useful to have probed both of these groups as to why they answered as they did, and on how they interpreted the term PSE. They all had opportunities for additional comments at the end of the questionnaire but a more targeted approach to these groups might have been revealing.

The discussion of who best represents and defends the PSE would have been stronger if the category of 'management' had been more rigorously defined. Given that many of the respondents would themselves be 'managers', there is a danger of confusion as to what is understood by that term.

The thesis makes only passing reference to the devolved administrations and it would have strengthened the study if it had included a detailed examination of the experience outside of England – particularly in Wales and Scotland where there is an avowedly more social democratic style of government. In addition, a deeper engagement with the notion of political contingency at local authority level might have been illuminating. This could have been done by comparing attitudes in councils with different political leadership or possibly through a series of case studies. Given the position of UNISON as a Labour affiliate and major donor, it would have been particularly interesting to see the level of conflict or co-operation with Labour councils in relation to the library service.

Another area for possible further research (based on a sub-set of data that has not been used for this thesis) would be to examine the impact on members' attitudes to the PSE of changes in the library service labour process. There are two very specific developments here: one is the increased use of electronic technology at the workplace (for example, the self-issuing of books and online applications) and the effect of this on workers contact with the service user; and secondly, the increasing tendency of councils to try to make libraries one stop shops for general council services, or at least as the initial contact point for these services. This may also change the worker relationship with the service user, as well as user perception of libraries.

In general, the collaboration with UNISON on this research was overwhelmingly mutually beneficial. However, there are some caveats to this. Sometimes compromises over the content of questions to be asked meant that some data was not collected or was collected but not in as detailed or extensive a form as I would have liked. For example, the length of service data could have been more useful if the options available to respondents had been broken down into five year periods. That would have enabled the possibility of evaluating the impact of experience and longevity in the job with views on the PSE. Similarly, a question on qualifications held, particularly professional librarianship qualifications could have elicited some useful data, particularly as there is some debate in the literature on the relationship between a professional and a public service ethos. Again, a fuller examination of 'activism' or respondents' involvement within the union might have been useful. None of these were excluded because of any principled objection from UNISON. Rather the issue was of keeping the questionnaire to a manageable length, while including as much information of use in bargaining and organisation, as well as meeting some of my own objectives in terms of the research study.

Another example of the difficulties in relying on the partner for access relates to a planned second questionnaire. Originally, I had hoped to conduct a follow-up survey earlier in 2012 which would revisit some of the questions posed in the 2010 questionnaire and add in some of those omitted from the previous one. This would have provided some potentially very valuable insights into the impact of any cuts since the Coalition government came to power and whether attitudes had changed at all in the two year period. The survey was agreed with UNISON in principle, but for a variety of reasons, mostly to do with internal calendars of accountability, this did not take place in time to be included within this thesis. It will take place later in 2012 and so the research will be taken forward with a new set of data.

10.6 Final remarks

These findings have a number of important implications for researchers, for UNISON and for other public service unions. First, it establishes that the PSE not only survives but forms an important part of members' view of their working life. Secondly, it suggests that the PSE could provide a focus around which to mobilise the membership for action. Thirdly, it illustrates that the local leaders – the reps and stewards – recognise and articulate the importance of the PSE and its links with the concept of both public provision of services and trade unionism, and are well placed to provide the link between the national leadership and local membership. Fourthly, the PSE offers a platform from which public service unions could construct an alliance of service users and workers in defence of high quality services and jobs (the melding of the twin characteristics of 'vested interest' and sword of justice').

The public library service is not a 'typical public service' – it may be that there is no such thing. It stands out in many respects even in local government. It could also be argued that public library service workers are not typical of the general local government or public service workforce (although there are some common characteristics as have been outlined in the thesis). But there are sufficient broad lessons that can be drawn from this study that would have a much wider application beyond libraries. The continued and tenacious commitment of public service workers to the PSE in the face of decades of neoliberal attacks on the public service employment bargain; the enhanced commitment of the reps to the PSE; the value of mobilisation theory in helping to understand the (potential) place of the PSE in framing the workplace experience; and the possibilities of alliances with service user groups are all key lessons that would almost certainly have resonance and relevance in other areas of local

government, within the health service, the central civil service as well as elsewhere in the public sector.

This thesis contributes to a greater understanding of why the public service ethos has survived and what it means to public service workers. It connects the continued existence of the ethos in the current hostile environment with its origins – or rather one strand of them – as part of a more generalised movement to democratise society. The library service formed part of a welfare state in which public service criteria were the basis for the provision of public services as a public good. In adhering to that position, public service workers find themselves in conflict with the neoliberal ‘commonsense’ that seeks to commodify public services. The deeply held PSE among members creates opportunities for UNISON (and, by extension, other public service unions) to mobilise members over a broader range of issues than simply jobs, pay and conditions. More importantly, this study shows that the quality of service provision and the workplace issues are inextricably linked. This offers the possibility of reaching out beyond the workplace to create alliances with service users in the community. It takes the application of mobilisation theory among trade unions in to new territory. For a labour movement desperate to develop new sources of power with which to resist the neoliberal onslaught, this is of vital importance.

This raises crucial questions about the future of the PSE, public service provision and trade union organisation. For how long will it be possible for public service workers to hold on to the idea of a PSE? What effect will the proposed mass privatisation of public services under the austerity programme have on attitudes to public service of both workers and service users? How will public service unions respond to these challenges? Will they be able to utilise the belief in a PSE among members to build effective coalitions with service users to oppose the proposed mass closures, cuts and privatisation?

Berating the ‘collectivist society’ in a *Sunday Times* interview in 1981, Mrs Thatcher said that she had much greater ambitions than just to change the economy of the country: ‘Economics are the method; the object is to change the heart and soul’ (Butt, 1981). If part of the objective of the public service reform of the past 30 years was to completely change the values and attitudes of those involved in delivering public services – to capture their souls - then on the basis of this study, it has failed.

Annex 1: Key dates in the development of the UK public library service

1850 Public Libraries Act

1852 The first free public library opened in Manchester

1853 Act extended to Scotland and Ireland

1855 Public Libraries Act. Limit on rates that could be levied for library services raised to 1d.

1876 Melvil Dewey publishes his Decimal Classification system, although it was to be some years before it became the standard system used in UK public libraries.

1877 Library Association founded. A professional association for libraries and librarians, one of its early aims was the introduction of accredited library qualifications.

1894 Clerkenwell becomes the first open access lending library. Until then readers had to select books from a printed catalogue and ask for them over the counter.

1912 Workers Educational Association (WEA) establishes the Central Library for Tutorial Classes (CLTC)

1915 Adams Report on *Library provision and policy*. This report to the Carnegie Trustees made the case for the urgent establishment of libraries in rural areas.

1916 Carnegie Foundation provides funding for transformation of CLTC into Central Library for Students. Foundation invested enormous sums in new library buildings at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries (some 380 across the United Kingdom as a whole).

1919 Public Libraries Act. Removed the penny rate limitation and allowed counties to become library authorities.

1924 *The Public Library System of Great Britain and Ireland* (Mitchell Report). Published by the Carnegie UK Trustees.

1927 First codifying of resources for libraries. The County Libraries Section of the Library Association recommends that a public library requires a minimum stock of 250 books per 1000 population.

1927 *Report on public libraries in England and Wales* (Kenyon Report). Published by the Board of Education, Libraries Committee,

1930 Central Library for Students became the National Central Library. It became the foundation for inter library loans and later became a part of the British Library.

1942 *The public library system of Great Britain* (McColvin Report) published. Commissioned by the Library Association, the report set out a blueprint for post-war reconstruction of the library service.

1959 *The structure of the public library service in England and Wales* (Roberts Report) published by the Ministry of Education.

1962 *Standards of public library service in England and Wales* (Bourdillon Report) published by the Ministry of Education. Outlined benchmarks for the 'basic requirements for an efficient public library'.

1964 Public Libraries and Museums Act

1995 Department for National heritage set up the Library and Information Commission (LIC) as a national source of expertise - advising government on all issues relating to the library and information sector.

1998 Annual Library Plans introduced.

1998-99 Devolution legislation results in the establishment of the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales and the Northern Ireland Assembly with devolved responsibility for the library service.

2000 The LIC replaced by Resource: The Council for Museums, Libraries and Archives, which in turn changed its name to the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) in February 2004.

2000 People's Network launched

2001 Public Library Standards (26) introduced in England

2002 Public Library Position Statements replace the Annual Library Plans in England.

2002 Audit Commission publishes *Building Better Library Services*.

2003 Department for Culture, Media and Sport publishes *Framework for the future*

2003 *Framework for the future: action plan 2003-06* published by Resource.

2004 Public Library Service Standards (10) replace Public Library Position Statements and the original Public Library Standards.

2005 House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee publishes *Public Libraries* report.

2007 Department for Communities and Local Government publishes *Developing the local government services market: new ways of working and new models of provision within the public library service* working paper produced by PricewaterhouseCoopers

2007 Department for Culture, Media and Sport publishes revised *Public Library Service Standards*.

2009 The Secretary of State ordered a local inquiry into the Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council library service in response to its planned programme of cuts.

2010 In March the Department for Culture, Media and Sport launched the *Modernisation Review of Public Libraries – A Policy Statement* following a consultation called *Empower, Inform, Enrich – the modernisation review of public libraries*

2010 In May a new Coalition Government took office formed by the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties

2010 On 1 July new Culture Minister Ed Vaizey announced a new support programme for public libraries. And on 16 August, he announced the ten projects chosen to take part in the *Future Libraries* support programme

2010 On 26 July the Secretary of State announced plans to abolish the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA). Its responsibilities will transfer to Arts Council England on 1 October 2011.

2010 In October DCMS announced the abolition of the current Public Lending Right (PLR) body and will transfer the administration of the PLR fund to another existing body. It also announced that total PLR funding will be reduced over the Spending Review period (15 per cent in real terms). It will not now be extended to audiobooks and e-books.

2011 In January the Government laid a Statutory Instrument in Parliament to reduce the PLR rate per loan from 6.29 pence to 6.25 pence.

2011 In March the Government announced a review of local government's statutory duties in England, including the statutory requirement on local authorities to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service to all residents within the authority, and the right of the Secretary of State to gather information about and inspect the service.

2011 In November, the House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee announced it will conduct an inquiry into library closures and into what constitutes a comprehensive and efficient library service.

2012 In March, the newly created *Speak Up for Libraries* Coalition holds a lobby of Parliament.

2012 In November, *Speak Up for Libraries* holds its first national conference.

Annex 2: Questionnaire survey for members

1. Name

2. DOB

3. Gender

4. Job title

5. Employer

6. Do you hold any position within UNISON (for example, as a rep)?

Y

N

6.a. If you answered 'Yes' to Question 6 and you do hold a position in UNISON, please identify what position you hold (for example, rep or branch secretary etc).

7. Where do you work?

A branch library:

A central library:

A mobile library:

Large reference library:

Central support for library service:

Other (please specify):

8. Roughly how many people work at your workplace (NB your employer will probably have several different workplaces but this question is focussed on where you actually work).

Under 10 employees:

10-25 employees:

26-50 employees:

51-100 employees:

101-200 employees:

201-500 employees:

Over 500 employees:

9. How many hours a week do you work (excluding any overtime)?

0-10 hours:

11-20 hours:

21-30 hours:

31-35 hours:

36 or more hours:

10. How long have you been employed in your current post?

Less than 6 months:

Between 6 months and a year:

Between 1 and 2 years:

Between 2 and 3 years:

Between 3 and 4 years:
Between 4 and 5 years:
More than 5 years

11. How long have you been employed in the library service?

Less than 6 months:
Between 6 months and a year:
Between 1 and 2 years:
Between 2 and 3 years:
Between 3 and 4 years:
Between 4 and 5 years:
More than 5 years:

12. Would you recommend the library service as a career?

Y
N
D/K

12.a. If you answered 'Yes' to Question 12, please state your reasons

12.b. If you answered 'No' to Question 12, please state your reasons

13. Do you feel secure in your post?

Y
N

14. Of the following options, please tick the service(s) that your library delivers in addition to lending books, DVDs, and audio:

Baby Bounce and Rhyme:
Chatterbox Reading Groups:
Teenage Reading Groups:
Summer Reading Challenge:
Support public with IT training:
Support public with Job Searching:
Support public with CV writing:
Holiday activities:
Exhibitions:
Reminiscence mornings:
Author talks:
Reading Groups:
Friends of Library Groups:
Other (please specify):

15. In your view, is there such a thing as a 'public service ethos' among library staff?

Y
N
D/K

15.a. If you answered 'Yes' to Question 15 and believe that there is a public service ethos among library staff, which of the following best represents and defends it?

Elected councillors:
Library service management:
Library staff trade unions, like UNISON:
Professional associations, like CILIP:
Senior local authority management:
Other (please specify):

15.b. If you answered 'Yes' to Question 15, please write down words that you associate with the idea of a public service ethos in the library service.

16. Do you think the library service would change if it was no longer part of the public sector?

Y
N
D/K

16.a. If you answered 'Yes' to Question 16, please explain how you think the service might change if it was no longer part of the public sector.

17. Are staff normally consulted -- either directly or through the union - before changes are made to your library service?

Y
N
D/K

18. Have you seen changes to the library service in your authority over the last two years?

Y
N

18.a. If you answered 'Yes' to Question 18, please tick the relevant box(es) below to identify the changes.

Reduced staffing levels:
Use of Volunteers:
Reduced hours:
Increased hours:
Other (please specify):

19. Has digitisation had any impact in your library?

Y
N
D/K

19.a. If you answered 'Yes' to Question 19, please explain how digitisation has affected your library?

20. In what ways might digitisation have a positive impact on the library service?

21. In what ways might digitisation have a negative impact on the library service?

22. Have there been any positive developments in your library service over the last two years?

Y

N
D/K

22.a. If you answered 'Yes' to Question 22, please outline the positive development(s).

23. What do you think should be done to improve and 'grow' libraries?

24. Does your authority encourage the use of volunteers?

Y
N
D/K

25. Are there volunteers in your library?

Y
N
D/K

26. Do volunteers work alone in the library?

Y
N
D/K
N/A

27. Who supervises the volunteers?

Library Manager:
Senior person on duty:
Volunteer coordinator:
Not applicable (no volunteers):
Other (please specify):

28. Are the volunteers CRB checked?

Y
N
D/K
Not applicable (no volunteers)

29. What do the volunteers do?

Administrative tasks:
Replace books on shelves:
Assist the public with IT:
Not applicable (no volunteers):
Other (please specify):

30. Are there any plans to replace staff with volunteers?

Y
N
D/K

31. Does your authority have a policy/protocol for the use of volunteers?

Y

N
D/K

32. Do the volunteers have any training?

Y
N
D/K
N/A

32.a. If you answered 'Yes' to Question 32, please state what form the training of volunteers takes.

33. In your opinion, are the staffing levels in your library adequate?

Y
N
D/K

34. Are adequate arrangements made to cover sickness/holidays?

Y
N
D/K

35. Do you have any part-time workers in your library?

Y
N
D/K

36. Do you have any full-time workers in your library?

Y
N
D/K

37. Has there been investment in your library service in the last two years?

Y
N
D/K

37.a. If you answered 'Yes' to Question 37, can you provide any details of the kind of investment that has been made in the library service?

38. Over the last two years, has your library service cut any services or delayed the introduction of any planned new services?

Y
N
D/K

38.a. If you answered 'Yes' to Question 38, please provide details below.

39. Do you feel valued by your management?

Y

N

40. Do you feel valued by the general public?

Y
N

41. In your view, does your authority value the library service?

Y
N

42. Do you feel you are given adequate training, as required?

Y
N

42.a. If you would like to expand on your answer to Question 42, please do so here

43. Have there been any cuts in the training budget in the last two years?

Y
N
D/K

44. Are there career opportunities within the library service in your authority?

Y
N
D/K

44.a. If you would like to expand on your answer to Question 44, please do so here

45. Would you like to be offered flexible working for an improved work/life balance?

Y
N

46. Do you feel stressed at work?

Y
N

47. How would you describe morale among the workforce in your library service?

Very low:
Low:
Neither low nor high:
High:
Very high:

48. Are there occasions when a member of staff works alone in the library?

Y
N
D/K

49. Have you experienced physical violence in the workplace from the public?

Y

N

50. Have you experienced verbal bullying from the public?

Y

N

51. Have you experienced bullying from other staff?

Y

N

52. Are you expected to lift heavy items?

Y

N

D/K

53. Have you been given training in respect of lifting heavy items?

Y

N

54. Do you have any further comments that you would like to add

Annex 3: Email to activists

The following email was circulated by UNISON HQ in June 2010 to UNISON activists within the public library service:

Dear Colleague

As you may know, UNISON commissioned me to write two reports as part of the Love Your Libraries campaign - 'Taking Stock' and the report on 'The People's Inquiry in to the public library service'

Having done a large scale survey of UNISON members in the library service, I am very keen to develop this further by talking to a much smaller group of UNISON reps and activists within the library service. I am interested in getting some more detailed views on the library service, library campaigns and the public service ethos.

I'd be very grateful if you would be prepared to talk to me on these issues. Obviously, these discussions would be conducted with the usual research rules on privacy, anonymity and confidentiality. In other words, participants will not be identified and any use made of the information or comments made in discussions will be anonymised.

It would be a great help to be able to talk with you in more detail and if you are able to do so, please email me at daviess27@cf.ac.uk and I'll contact you to arrange a time that's convenient for you

Annex 4: Library Reps Interview Schedule

A) Background: Job & Individual details

1. What is your current position and how long have you held it?
2. How long have you worked in the library service?

B) Background: TU organisation

1. How long have you been a member of UNISON?
2. Do you hold any position within UNISON (for example, as a rep)?
- what?
3. Have you *ever* held any position within UNISON?
- what?

C) Public Service Ethos (PSE)

1. In your view, is there such a thing as a 'public service ethos' among library staff?
2. What does it mean to you?
3. Is this a view that you've always had or is it something that developed with your work at the library?
4. Does your view of the PSE affect your daily work?
- How?
5. Where does it come from? Is it associated with professional status?
6. What is it about the library service that generates this association with a PSE? Does it take a particular form in the library service? Is there something distinctive about the library service that lends itself to a PSE?
7. Do you think your views on the PSE are shared by colleagues?
8. Does your view of the PSE affect your attitude to union membership?
- How?
9. In your opinion, does the union emphasise the PSE in its work in representing members?
If yes, in what way?

If no, how could it do so?

10. What opportunities, if any, does the PSE offer for strengthening the union?

If so, in what way and with what success?

11. Could the PSE play a part in winning support for the library service from the wider community?

How?

Annex 5: Selection of 66 Campaign, Friends and User Groups

Association of Friends of Dorset Libraries
Brent Save Our Six (SOS) Libraries
Byfleet Library Action Group, Surrey
Camden Public Libraries Users Group
Friends of Arbury Library, Cambridgeshire
Friends of Carnegie Library
Friends of Easingwold Library, North Yorkshire
Friends of Glastonbury Library, Somerset
Friends of Gloucestershire Libraries
Friends of Goring Library, Oxfordshire
Friends of Kensal Rise Library
Friends of Lambeth Libraries
Friends of Preston Library and Preston Community Library
Friends of Somerset Libraries
Friends of the Durning Library
Friends of the Isle of Wight Library Service
Friends of Waterloo Library
Friends of Wiveliscombe Library, Somerset
Friends of York Gardens Library and Community Centre
Save Headington Library, Oxfordshire
Hereford Library Users' Group
I love my Herts Library, Hertfordshire
Lechlade & District Civic Society, Gloucestershire
Libraries for Life for Londoners
Newnham Library Support Group, Glos
Old Coulsdon Library Supporters Group
Preston Library Campaign, Brent
Save Benson Library, Oxfordshire
Save Bentham Library, North Yorkshire
Save Bolton Libraries Campaign
Save Cricklewood Library Campaign
Save Croydon Libraries Campaign
Save Debenham Library, Suffolk
Save Doncaster Libraries
Save Ealing's Libraries
Save Eastfield Library, North Yorkshire
Save Friern Barnet Library, Barnet
Save Great Ayton Library, North Yorkshire
Save Kensal Rise Library, Brent
Save Kent Libraries
Save Leiston Library, Suffolk
Save Norbury Library, Croydon
Save North Yorkshire Libraries
Save Our Libraries on the Isle of Wight
Save Oxfordshire's Libraries

Save Preston Library Campaign, Brent
Save Robert Jeyes Library, Barking & Dagenham
Save Rosehill Library, Suffolk
Save Sanderstead Library, Croydon
Save Somerset Libraries
Save Sonning Common Library, Oxfordshire
Save St. James Library, Northamptonshire
Save Stony Stratford Library, Milton Keynes
Save Stradbroke Library, Suffolk
Save Suffolk Libraries
Save Sydenham Library, Lewisham
Save Unsworth Library, Bury
Save Upper Norwood Library, Croydon
Save York Gardens Library, Wandsworth
Surrey Library Action Movement
Upper Norwood Library Campaign
Users and Friends of Manor House Library, Lewisham
Watchet Library Friends Group, Somerset
We Heart Libraries, North Herts and Stevenage.
Woburn Sands Library, Milton Keynes
Wyre Forest Agenda

Source: Extracted from House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee (2012)
*Written Evidence accepted by the Culture, Media and Sport Committee for its inquiry into
Library closures*, 9 February 2012

Annex 6: Interview schedule for officers involved with library campaign

General questions on alliances and coalitions

1. In your view, how important is it for UNISON to develop alliances with service users?
2. Is this more important today than in the past? Why?
3. What do you think UNISON should be looking to get out of such alliances?
4. What are the problems or potential problems for UNISON in alliances with service users?
5. What's in it for service users? Are there potential problems for them as well?

Questions on the library campaign

1. The public library service has traditionally had organisations of 'Friends of this or that library'. How successful would you say that UNISON has been in developing alliances with library users?
Examples
2. In practice, such alliances have to be built at local level. How does the national union encourage branches in the building of such alliances? Is it *necessary* to encourage them, do they do it independently? What support does the national or regional structure of the union offer branches?
3. UNISON has been involved in alliances with service users, community groups etc in various forms since the cuts campaigns of the 1980s. However, most of these have tended to be defensive alliances – 'Save this or that library' etc. Are there possibilities for more proactive alliances about shaping the public services agenda? Has this been done? Could it be done? How could it be done?
4. Library staff are a relatively small part of the local government workforce and therefore of UNISON membership. They do not have a separate structure within the union. What impact does this have in terms of developing alliance work in the library campaign?
5. The library campaign has been running for several years now. Are there any lessons for the wider union about building and sustaining alliances?

Annex 7: Questionnaire for Campaign Groups

Q. 1 What is the name of your campaign

Q.2 UNISON is the union for library staff. Have UNISON members and the local UNISON branch had any involvement in your campaign?

Y
N

Q.3 In what way has UNISON and its members been involved? Please tick as many of the boxes as applicable.

UNISON members help in the running of the campaign

UNISON has provided some funding for the campaign

UNISON has provided other non-financial support (e.g. meeting facilities etc) Please provide details.

UNISON members have taken part in activities organised by the campaign

UNISON has invited the campaign to speak to a meeting(s) of UNISON library staff

Other (please use this option to add anything you would like to say about UNISON members' involvement in the campaign – either expanding on your answer above or something that you feel is not covered in the options above)

Q. 4 How would you characterise the involvement of UNISON and its members in the campaign?

Very positive

Positive

Neither positive nor negative

Negative

Very negative

Q. 5 If UNISON members and the local UNISON branch ARE involved in the campaign, what would you say have been the advantages gained for the campaign?

Q. 6 If UNISON members and the local UNISON branch ARE involved in the campaign, what would you say have been the disadvantages (if any) for the campaign?

Q. 7 Have there been any particular problem areas in trying to work with UNISON, the library staff's union and, if so, could you outline what these were and what was done about them?

Q.8 If UNISON members and the local UNISON branch have NOT had any involvement in the campaign, please tick the relevant boxes below

UNISON were approached and asked to be involved but declined

UNISON were not approached or asked to be involved

Other (please use this option to add anything you would like to say about the lack of involvement of UNISON members' in the campaign)

Q. 9 If UNISON members and the local UNISON branch have NOT had any involvement in the campaign, would you like to see them involved?

Y
N

Q.10 Could you explain why you answered in the way that you did for the previous question?

Q. 11 Is there anything else you would like to add?

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