

Implementation of the New Prison Library Specification

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1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The NFER is currently conducting an evaluation of the new Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) in three development regions. The research programme includes a separate strand of data collection which focuses solely on the new prison library specification, as piloted in the three regions.

In 2003, a survey was conducted of prison libraries which revealed huge variation in the delivery of services (Byram, et al 2004). This prompted the creation of a new library specification which sought to bring prison libraries more in line with provision available in the community. This aspect of the evaluation seeks to examine the implementation issues relating to the new specification as well as its impact to date.

1.2 Data collection

Views on the specification were collected via a 45 minute telephone interview with prison librarians, or where it was not possible to contact someone in this particular role, the researchers sought to interview line managers within the Public Library Authority (PLA). In order to obtain a comprehensive picture across the development regions, attempts were made to interview personnel from all prisons participating in the pilot.

In total, 27 interviews were completed between November 2005 and January 2006. The composition and characteristics of the interview sample are summarised in the table below.

Table 1.1 Composition and characteristics of interview sample

Interviewees		
22 prison librarians/library managers	5 managers from PLAs	6 no contact was made, 1 declined to take part
Regions		
South West region		13
North West region		9
North East region		5
Establishments		
28 establishments of which 25 served male prisoners, 3 served female prisoners		
Category A		1
Category B		9
Category C		14
Category D		1
YOI		3

In order to obtain background information on each library service, interviewees were asked to provide any relevant documents that described their library. Details from five establishments were received initially. Interviewees who had not responded were contacted by letter and were asked to complete an information sheet detailing the number of library staff, range of resources and accommodation/space available. A stamped addressed envelope for the return of any documents was enclosed. This elicited a further nine responses.

Of the 14 librarians who returned documents or information sheets detailing their libraries, the following areas were described:

Accommodation

Many libraries were situated within education departments. Types of accommodation varied although several were within learning resource centres and shared space with other agency staff such as housing, and careers personnel. In one case, a library was based on a main residential landing.

Staffing

Staff numbers ranged from one part-time librarian with one part-time library assistant to three full-time members of staff including a site librarian, a library assistant and a prison officer.

Resources

In two cases, library staff and offenders had no access to computers within the library. Of the remaining libraries, numbers of computers ranged from one to ten per library department. While a wide range of stock and resources were available, three libraries reported not currently stocking CDs and a further seven did not stock DVDs.

NB: Due to the variability (and lack) of information received about libraries it was not possible to include the range of provision as a variable in analysis.

1.3 About this report

The report begins by discussing the broader implementation issues associated with the new specification and therefore covers interviewees' views on the specification as a document and the main challenges and facilitating factors associated with implementation. Chapter three moves on to consider the overall impact, both positive and negative, of the specification. The remaining chapters look in closer detail at individual sections of the specification, for

example, the requirements for stock and resources. These latter chapters focus mainly on the challenges connected with implementing specific aspects of the specification. Chapter 9, entitled 'The way forward', presents interviewees' suggestions for improving the specification, as well as examples of promising practice or factors which would appear to contribute towards a successful implementation.

The report is structured as follows:

- Chapter 2** The implementation of the new specification
- Chapter 3** Impact of the new specification
- Chapter 4** Stock and resources
- Chapter 5** Staff and training
- Chapter 6** Library services
- Chapter 7** Management
- Chapter 8** Service level agreement (SLA)
- Chapter 9** The way forward

2 The implementation of the new library specification

2.1 Introduction

This section of the report considers the issues surrounding the implementation of the new library specification in terms of:

- interviewees' views on the specification as a document
- the progress made in implementation
- the challenges and facilitating factors associated with implementation.

2.2 Views on the specification as a document

The majority of the interviewees who commented on the specification as a document revealed that they generally found it to be useful and clearly written. Several suggested that one of the main benefits of the document was that it clearly stated the roles and responsibilities of all those involved and also reflected the practice that was currently taking place. Furthermore, the document was seen as representing the vision of how prison libraries should be. 'It's a good document and it helps to form where we want the prison library to be – it gives it a higher profile' (PLA representative, South West). In addition to its comprehensiveness and utility value, the specification was regarded by one librarian as 'inspiring' (Librarian, North East).

Criticisms of the document revolved around its length with several recommending that it be shortened. In addition, the content was seen as being overwhelming for some, with elements of it not seen as being relevant or appropriate to all prison library contexts and circumstances.

Interviewees commented on the targets included in the specification document, revealing variability in the likelihood of meeting them. Some suggested that many of the specifications' targets had already been met as a result of fulfilling previous requirements, whereas others suggested that some of the targets were beyond the influence of the library. Several commented that many of the targets were 'aspirational' representing a 'utopian vision' of well resourced, easily accessible learning and information centres. Within the constraints of time, resources and the prison regime, librarians asserted that they were meeting the targets to the best of their ability.

Most targets that are within the library's influence are being met or at least approached – the ones beyond their influence will not be met, such as escorting issues to get the inmates in the library to be able to

have 30 minutes browsing time, IT, and the lack of space for study facility.

Librarian, Female local prison

Several interviewees asserted that there was too much prescription surrounding the specified targets that were not appropriate to the particular circumstances of individual prisons and their readers' needs. It was suggested, for example, that the requirement for a large selection of large print books in the library, regardless of need, could be constituted as an inappropriate use of resources. Increased flexibility to adapt the specified targets according to need was called for, allowing libraries the flexibility to react and respond to their readership. Providing culturally appropriate materials was an issue frequently raised, with interviewees contending that the range of languages called for in the specification had often been supplemented, or superseded by the needs of inmates from an increasingly broad range of ethnic and cultural origins. This was the case in all three regions.

2.3 Progress made in implementation

The extent to which the new specification has been implemented in prison libraries varied between and within the development regions. Generally, interviewees in the South West region felt that they had progressed the least towards implementation. Of the nine interviewees reporting little or no progress in implementation, seven were from the South West (although it was also suggested that one library in this region had implemented the specification fully). Interviewees in the North East region most consistently reported that implementation was 'part way through' whilst the North West region's libraries were generally presented as spanning the range of implementation stages.

Several reasons were given for the lack of progress in implementation. Individual prison and Public Library Authority (PLA) circumstances were seen as contributory factors. For example, recent management changes in one particular prison, (including the Governor and the Head of Learning and Skills (HOLS)), combined with changes in senior management in the PLA was said to mean that the prison was 'in a state of flux'. Hence, these issues were beyond the librarian's influence, making the full implementation of the specification impossible at this time (Librarian, Category B prison). Similarly, the simultaneous changing of educational contractors in a prison meant that the HOLS was 'totally distracted' and unable to give any attention to the library specification: 'we are the least of their concerns at the moment... they have not been pressing hard for change in the library' (PLA representative, South West). In addition, interviewees from the South West region also highlighted funding difficulties suggesting that notification of funding had been very late and this had impacted severely on their ability to begin the

process of implementing the specification, especially in terms of recruiting additional staff.

Those suggesting that their libraries were further along in the implementation process often noted that much of this related to the level of services/facilities that they had in place prior to the introduction of the new specification, such as the requirements for meeting Prison Service Order PSO 6710. Others noted that they had done as much as they could until additional staff were appointed or the hours of existing staff were increased. It was also suggested that those parts of the specification that were deemed to be relevant and appropriate for their specific local circumstances had been implemented. Several librarians also commented that they implemented as much of the specification as was within their influence, but other factors, such as funding and constraints of the prison regime, (especially but not exclusively higher security prisons), had prevented other areas, such as ICT facilities, from being pursued more fully.

2.4 The challenges associated with implementation

Before enquiring about specific sections of the specification (see Chapters 4-8), interviewees were given the opportunity of highlighting the main challenges they had faced in implementing the new specification. In brief, these difficulties related to:

- operating within the prison regime
- how the library was viewed by the prison
- communication issues with the PLA and OLSU
- variability in prison circumstances.

As each of these challenges are discussed, interviewees' ideas for resolving them are also presented.

2.4.1 The prison regime

Factors related to operating a library within the prison environment were seen as constituting the biggest challenge to implementing the new specification. The lack of uniformed staff to provide escorts to allow inmates access to the library was the most commonly raised concern. Many interviewees noted that increased library staffing and extended opening hours were now in place, but the number of offenders accessing the library fell well short of capacity. Offender access to the library was also said to be limited by the core-day and structure of the prison regime, where library time often clashed with other educational or recreational activities. Lock-downs were also seen as a disruptive, but unavoidable challenge to implementing and meeting the specification.

Meeting the specification's ICT and internet recommendations was also seen as a major issue in the light of regimes' security concerns. Interviewees revealed a considerably diverse situation in terms of establishments' willingness and ability to accommodate ICT facilities for library staff and inmates.

In terms of solutions, increased staffing for escort duties alongside reconsideration of the core-day to better facilitate inmate access, combined with increased financial/resource provision were seen as positive steps that the regime could take. Furthermore, reductions in the time taken to obtain security clearance for new library staff would enhance the ability to effectively implement the specification. Through additional staffing, especially library assistants, the potential existed for increased opportunities for delivering some library services on the wings. Several interviewees commented that ICT developments would probably come about in time, although much of this was seen to depend on the outlook of particular Governors and strategic management within the prison.

2.4.2 Status of the library

The perceived priority afforded to the library by the prison regime was also seen as a key element in the implementation of the specification. The HOLS was regarded as central to this. As noted previously, one interviewee noted that at the time of the new specification's introduction, the HOLS was engaged in renegotiating all the education contracts for the prison, meaning that the library received very little attention. Difficulties in communication between other sections of the regime, such as Education, were also highlighted as a barrier to implementing the specification. Reinforcing the specification with a PSO, or linking it in with Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) of the prison, was noted as a means of ensuring that the regime fully supported the library in meeting the requirements. 'KPIs would encourage them to take a greater interest than they currently do' (PLA representative, South West).

2.4.3 Communication with the PLA

Several interviewees, especially from the South West region, suggested that there were issues concerning the PLA's handling of the new specification. Largely, this related to communication problems and the lack of an identifiable leadership/support structure to guide prison librarians through the process. It was suggested that librarians were often 'left out of the loop' and did not receive relevant information regarding the specification. Hence, improved communication within the PLA and greater involvement of librarians were called for.

2.4.4 Communication with the OLSU

In implementing the specification, interviewees also identified challenges relating to OLSU. Communication and funding issues were the key concerns. It was asserted by some librarians, (again predominantly, but not exclusively from the South West) that communication between OLSU and the PLA could have been better. Several interviewees suggested that notification of increased funding had only just been received which had led to serious problems in terms of recruiting new staff. In addition, it was contended that the PLA did not feel like an equal partner in the relationships with OLSU and the prison. Better communication with, and involvement of the PLA and librarians was called for. Interviewees advised establishing an improved means of dissemination and information exchange so that information pertinent to librarians was sent directly to them, rather than through HOLS or the PLA. Transparent and effective communication systems were seen as essential to the implementation of the new specification ensuring that all those involved were included in the process.

2.4.5 Variability in prison circumstances

Several interviewees commented on the nature and content of the specification itself in terms of its perceived inflexibility regarding requirements that were felt not to be appropriate to individual prison circumstances. The closer liaison with PLA managers and librarians in developing the specification was seen as a potential solution that would make it more useable and relevant. Similarly, the ability to 'opt out' of parts of the document that were deemed to not be appropriate was also called for.

Table 2.1 below summarises the main challenges raised by interviewees, alongside their suggested solutions.

Table 2.1 Challenges and solutions to OLASS implementation

	Challenges	Possible solutions
Prison-related factors	Restrictions of regime e.g. staffing for escorts.	Employ/dedicate more staff for escorting (maintain the Prison Library Officer role).
	Regime structure – core day restrictions preventing library visits.	Adjust structure of the core day to allow prisoners to visit the prison library.
	Relationships/communication difficulties between the prison library and other groups within the prison.	Better promotion of library, improve communications between library and prison management.
	Status of library within prison (e.g. the priority placed on the new specification by HOLS, prison management).	Better promotion of library, improve communications between library and prison management.
	Inadequate accommodation and resources for libraries within prisons.	Increased funding from prison to upgrade accommodation and resources.
	Lack of response from the prison to areas of the new specification e.g. requirement for IT facilities in library.	Undertaking on part of prison management to support new library specification.
	Slowness of regime to respond to changes (institutional inertia).	
PLA-related factors	Slowness/lack of response from PLA , especially in relation to appointing and establishing contracts for staff.	Better leadership within PLA for implementing the specification – ensure one clearly identifiable and responsible lead person.
OLSU-related factors	Communication issues – lack of information and feedback from OLSU.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve nature of relationship between OLSU and PLA – to become more partnership orientated. • Involve all parties more in discussion and information sharing – especially librarians themselves.
	Funding difficulties – including delays in notification and release of funding and uncertainties regarding funding level and continuation.	Ensure funding is released more effectively – better notification and simultaneous release within a region.
	Inflexibility of specification – does not take into account specific characteristics of individual prisons.	Opportunity to opt out of less relevant/inappropriate elements of the specification.
	Short timescale involved for the pilots	Specification should be backed by a PSO to ensure regime support and a speedier response.
Personnel factors	Experience and knowledge of library staff (regarding implementation of specification and ability to carry out its requirements).	Ensure librarians are well informed about the requirements of the specification – information sharing and/or training

2.5 Factors facilitating implementation

When asked what they saw as the main factors that had facilitated the implementation of the new library specification, interviewees identified issues of support, relationships/communication and capacity as being of key importance.

2.5.1 Support

Support from HOLS was an essential component of this and the overwhelming majority of respondents reported having good relationships with helpful and supportive HOLS. Similarly, but less frequently observed, support for the library from the governor and prison management structure was seen as being particularly helpful. Librarians also appreciated the support they had received from their PLA line managers and the authority in general in terms of advice and guidance and resource/service availability. An example of this involved the PLA offering clerical support and book deliveries to a prison library free of charge.

2.5.2 Relationships and communication

Efficient lines of communication between the library, the PLA and the prison regime was felt to have facilitated the specification's implementation. Awareness of, and involvement in the operation and management of the prison was seen by one interviewee as a particularly important aspect. Inter-department communication and membership of various prison groups – such as the resettlement team – had helped to integrate the library into the life of the prison so consolidating its importance and securing the cooperation of others in meeting the new requirements.

2.5.3 Capacity

Two capacity-related elements were identified. Firstly, the financial position of prison libraries was generally said to have been greatly enhanced through the specification allowing services, facilities and provision to be improved. Several interviewees commented on the particular value of the ring-fenced nature of this funding. Clearer accounting within the regime was said to lead to greater transparency ensuring that funding designated for the library was actually received.

Secondly, (as a result of this increased funding) staffing levels had increased allowing the specification's requirements to be pursued – of key importance here was the increased freedom of librarians to pursue non-desk activities. Reader development and involvement in the delivery of Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) were seen to benefit from this. The library assistant post was thus seen as an important development and a key facilitating factor.

The current position/circumstance of a library was also regarded as having an important role in influencing the ease with which the specification could be implemented. Librarians from well funded, well stocked libraries where communication and relationships with the HOLS, the regime and the PLA were good, suggested that meeting many of the requirements had not been problematic.

3 Impact of the new library specification

3.1 Introduction

This section presents interviewees' thoughts on the impact of the new specification. Although many interviewees suggested that it was difficult to make an accurate assessment in the early stages of the pilot programme, the following impacts were identified.

3.2 Positive impacts

Generally, the new specification was seen to bring positive benefits for those involved. In particular, the increased funding available was seen as dramatically improving the opportunities for providing an enhanced prison library service. The main benefits were thus seen as being the increased funding and resources available to prison libraries.

3.2.1 Increased staffing and development of roles/responsibilities

Increased funding allowed PLAs to offer additional hours for library staff as well as the opportunity to make new appointments. In addition to increased staffing capacity, and the easing of workload burden on some librarians, it was suggested that librarians could develop their role and remit. Changing roles were said to have created opportunities for skill acquisition and career development. Several interviewees detailed the courses and qualifications they were intending to embark on, or were currently pursuing, in order to meet the new role requirements. For example, one librarian, from a Category B prison, noted having enrolled on a teaching qualification to facilitate the training of library orderlies, as well as to become better equipped to teach basic literacy in the library. This was regarded as an opportunity rather than an imposition. It was contended that due to the nature of their backgrounds and prior experience, prison librarians in the North East region were more than capable of meeting the teaching and IAG roles of the new specification. It was said, of the previous nature of the post, that these staff have 'been over specified for the job they've been doing' (Group library Manager).

With increased hours and a broadening role, a number of interviewees noted that they were now able to concentrate on developing the services and facilities offered by the library as well as engaging in promotional and profile-raising activities within the prison establishment. Outreach, development work and work on the wings were seen as having benefited especially from this. Several noted that as a result, job satisfaction and staff morale had been significantly boosted as had the reputation and position of the library within the prison.

3.2.2 Enhanced resources

Increased funding had also led to improvements in resources and services available in prison libraries. Librarians noted that they had been able to expand and broaden the range of books and other stock, such as audio visual materials as a result. Offenders were seen to benefit greatly from this as were those members of staff involved in delivering educational provision to inmates. The increased opening hours and expanded staffing capacity in the library were seen as contributing to a more flexible service that was more accessible and better equipped to meet the needs of offenders.

3.2.3 Improved prison library status

The new specification was seen as having positively impacted on the library's profile, status and role within many prisons. One interviewee noted that certain requirements, such as ICT provision and the physical size requirements for a library, had made the library much more of an issue for the prison regime to consider. Others noted that the increased staffing had allowed librarians the time and opportunities to raise the profile of the library by promoting it and raising awareness throughout the establishment. For example, one librarian noted:

Freeing the librarian up to go out and have more contact with the lads on the wings will have quite an impact on them because a lot of them aren't bothered about coming to the library at the moment. Having a member of staff freed up to go and talk to them will have an impact that will encourage them to use the library or at least read books more.

Librarian, YOI

An interviewee from the South West region, suggested that the library was now regarded and treated as a department in its own right and consequently, the librarian as a head of department, was included in prison management meetings.

3.2.4 Opportunities for offenders

As well as benefiting from an enhanced library service, offenders were also seen to benefit from the extension of orderlies' responsibilities through the introduction of NVQ accreditation. This, however, was also interpreted by one interviewee as being a qualification of questionable benefits owing to the relatively low wages this post would attract. (It was argued that the time and money would be better invested in working towards a customer service qualification.)

3.3 Negative impacts

It should be noted that some potentially negative changes were also highlighted.

The new specification was seen, by some, to place increasing responsibilities on the PLA to make staff available to meet the library opening demands of the prison. Issues of staff cover, the cost of evening and weekend staffing were highlighted as potential difficulties for a PLA. The availability of a suitably trained and willing pool of staff within the PLA and the development of suitable contracts and security clearance were issues that would need addressing. Library staff themselves were also seen as possibly being expected to take on additional responsibilities under the new specification. The new specification was also seen as over-specified in terms of the staffing levels required for several libraries. For example, a librarian from a Category D prison felt staff hours were being increased ‘way too much for what the job entails’ and that the staffing specification was a ‘blanket approach’ that was not necessarily appropriate to smaller, low-security prisons where library visits were less restricted.

The only potentially negative impact on offenders was the possible reduction in the role and numbers of library orderlies as a result of increased numbers of library assistant posts.

3.4 Limited impact

Whilst interviews reported positive developments in terms of the service available, several warned that these could potentially be negated by the constraints of the prison regime. The principle here revolved round offender access to the library. Whilst the library may be better resourced, better staffed and able to offer extended opening hours, this would make little difference to the offenders if the prison regime was unable to provide sufficient officer cover to facilitate inmate’ access (Librarians from Category C and Category B prisons).

You can staff some of these libraries for as long as you want but if the prison staff aren’t escorting prisoners to it, what’s the point?

Librarian, Category C Prison

Table 3.1 below summarises the main impacts identified by interviewees.

Table 3.1 Impact of the new library specification

	Positive impacts	Negative or low impacts
Offenders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvements in service for offenders • Increased stock and resources • Increased access to, and use of, the library • Enhanced role of library orderlies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aspects of prison regime curtail and limit the impact • The new specification does not represent a significant departure/add major changes to the previous arrangements (under PSO 6710) • Library orderly role and numbers may be diminished as library assistant posts increase • Too soon to identify impacts in some libraries
Library staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased hours • Increased staffing • Enhanced role of library staff • Enhanced status of staff within prison establishment • Increased opportunities for improved communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased hours are not welcomed by all staff • New requirements for increased staffing levels may not be necessary in some prison libraries • Concerns over increasing roles and responsibilities beyond the remit of librarian's role • Training and remuneration issues related to new responsibilities
Prison staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching staff supported by improved stock and resources • Improved induction procedures • Wing officers benefit from improved flexibility of new library opening hours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concerns over the future of the Prison Library Officer role as a result of increasing number of library assistant posts • Specification may lead to increased pressure on uniformed staff to provide escorts to and from the library
PLA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased funding and increased staffing capacities • Increased transparency of funding • Increased recognition/raised profile of the role of the PLA in prison library provision • Improvements in library stock and resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased demands on PLA to ensure library opening will have implications for PLA staff to cover prison library staff's absence • Issues regarding contract re-negotiation for library staff

4 Staffing

4.1 Introduction

Having examined the general implementation issues and impacts of the new specification, the following chapters turn to focus on specific aspects of the document, namely:

- **staffing**
- **stock and resources**
- **library services**
- **management**
- **service level agreement (SLA).**

Interviewees were asked to comment on each area and to identify any implementation challenges (actual or anticipated). It should be noted that several of the issues raised in Chapter 2 surfaced again when specific aspects of the specification were discussed. Hence, some of the challenges already presented will be revisited.

In terms of staffing, the new specification sets out the key tasks of library staff, prison staff and library orderlies as well as establishing the criteria for other personnel-related issues, such as library staff hours, qualifications and training issues. This section presents interviewees' perspectives on the positive aspects of the specification for staff, the challenges and difficulties it entails, accompanied by some potential solutions.

As mentioned in Chapter 3 a major benefit for staff as a result of the new specification concerned an increase in hours (facilitated through additional funding). For many librarians, the additional funding meant a shift from part-time to full-time working and this was generally welcomed. The role of library staff was also extended, creating opportunities for skill acquisition and career development. For prison staff, the new specification meant that the library was now included in prison inductions (with consequent benefits for raising the profile of the library amongst other prison staff).

4.2 Implementing the requirements for staffing: perceived challenges

The main challenges relating to staffing included changes in staff roles and responsibilities, training needs, potential duplication of tasks, workload, covering library opening hours and the role of orderlies. These issues and others will now be discussed in more detail. An overview of challenges and their potential solutions is presented in Table 4.1 at the end of the chapter.

4.2.1 Increased responsibilities

Librarians across all three development regions expressed concerns that the new specification could have significant implications for the responsibilities of librarians and library assistants. Perceptions that the library was being steered towards becoming a predominantly educational resource were matched by some fears that librarians were also to take on greater teaching roles. Several noted that the specification could empower the prison regime, through the HOLS, to make increasing demands on prison library staff. One librarian, from a Category C prison, noted that she/he could be asked to take large-group classes for basic skills tuition and asserted that ‘potentially, there are no limits to what the HOLS could ask me to do – this is an unacceptable situation’. In addition to the potentially increased workload, concerns were also expressed by one interviewee in the South West region that increased teaching roles and involvement in IAG delivery could distract library staff from their core library responsibilities.

4.2.2 Training needs

The suitability of library staff to take on these additional responsibilities was also highlighted, especially in relation to basic skills. Although well stocked with an extensive selection of basic skills materials, a librarian contended that ‘teaching someone to read is very specialist’ (Librarian, YOI). Regarding the delivery of OCN Library qualification for orderlies, one librarian noted: ‘nobody asked me – I’ve got no qualifications for teaching and yet I’m supposed to deliver this’ (Librarian, Category C Prison). Others reiterated these views and also raised the issue of who should be responsible for covering the expense of library staff to undertake such training.

It must also be noted, however, that several other librarians considered that delivering some basics skills tuition was well within the capabilities of library staff, many of whom had backgrounds in, or experience of teaching and community/outreach type library service provision. As such, they were said to be equipped and willing to undertake such activities within the prison library environment.

4.2.3 Payment issues

Payment issues were also raised in relation to the additional responsibilities consistent with the new specification. Several mentioned that librarians could be asked to undertake teaching tasks without corresponding pay increases:

The prison librarian wage being substantially lower than that of a teacher – but we’re being asked to provide a professional role on the fraction of the wage.

Librarian, YOI

One librarian noted that their particular PLA was questioning the perceived disparity between the expectations of the library assistant role and the low pay scale accorded to it under the new specification. The salary was seen not to reflect the responsibilities that accompany the post (Librarian, Category C prison). Others echoed this, and predicted future recruitment problems making it increasingly difficult to meet the specification's staffing requirements so increasing the burden on existing staff.

4.2.4 Duplication of tasks

The increased responsibilities contained in the new specification were also seen as resulting in the possible duplication of tasks and services. Several interviewees noted that IAG is already provided by Connexions services and through basic skills tuition by the education department. The library's extension into these areas was seen as duplication, which could also be viewed as encroachment, by other prison departments and service providers.

4.2.5 Workload

The new specification was said by some to have increased the workload of librarians, through increased opening hours and the expansion of services. One librarian from a Category D prison noted that currently, she/he was not in a position to adequately perform all his/her duties in the time available. Whilst acknowledging the benefits of library assistant posts, other interviewees claimed that the new specification still demanded too much. The development of IAG and increased 'teaching roles' were the areas of most concern. Conversely, several interviewees also suggested the specification carried with it the danger of overstaffing for the size of the library and the activities/services on offer.

When we looked at the specification we were entitled to two full-time assistants and one full-time librarian and my attitude was, 'good grief, that's too much'. We don't need three full-time members of staff here.

Librarian, Category C Prison

Despite such views, the library assistant posts were generally welcomed as a means of reducing workload. In addition, the Prison Library Officer role was championed by some librarians who suggested it should be protected and extended. One such officer was described as being highly effective and committed to the library, encouraging and facilitating inmates' access. Implementation of the specification had thus been supported by a:

Wonderful library officer who runs around the prison bringing people, morning, noon and night – takes more pride in it – he's become a third librarian.

Librarian, North West

To further assist prison librarians, it was noted that PLA should build up a pool of suitably trained, security-cleared and willing staff who would be available to provide cover for library staff's absence, holidays and off-site time. Clearer guidance regarding the location of the responsibility for financing this was called for in the specification.

4.2.6 Opening hours and library access

In addition to workload, responsibility/role, training and payment issues, concerns relating to increased opening hours and access to the library were highlighted.

Several librarians, (mainly from the North West region) expressed concerns that staffing levels would be insufficient to operate the library to the specification's requirements as a result of factors such as employment legislation, leave entitlement and staff covering for others. The funding package was seen as being insufficient in several libraries. One librarian for example, noted that the specification could not be met as funding only covered 20 hours of staff time, which was below the requirement. Similarly, others spoke of the lack of provision for holiday cover, with several interviewees, (especially in the South West region) noting that the library has to close if the librarian is on holiday or off work due to illness. The role of the Prison Library Officer was seen as vital in such instances, as where such staff were present, the library could offer a service in the librarian's absence. The costs, security clearance processes and the general unwillingness of other PLA staff to provide cover were seen as major obstacles to implementing the specification by several interviewees.

4.2.7 Maintaining professional links

It was suggested that increasing opening hours, reductions in off-site time and involvement in a greater range of activities and services could lead to librarians feeling potentially more remote and isolated from their colleagues and professional communities. Several were concerned about this lack of, or reducing contact with the PLA in general, and exposure to other branch or community libraries. This was seen, by one librarian, as potentially damaging to one of the underlying intentions of the new specification – to replicate public library provision as closely as possible in the prison environment:

If you want the new prison library system to represent what is going on in the public system, then you have to see how the public system is run'.

Librarian from a Category C/YOI

Thus, communication and regular interaction within the wider PLA was seen as essential.

4.2.8 Recruitment issues

Uncertainties and (perceptions of) the insecurity of funding posed challenges to the successful implementation of the specification. It was asserted that if the funding to support increasing staffing levels was not guaranteed, PLAs would only be able to offer short-term, and possibly part-time contracts. In addition to possible difficulties for recruitment, this situation prompted several to suggest that the range and calibre of applicants for library assistant posts could be severely restricted.

Increased staffing levels, and the development of a team-orientated approach to delivering prison library services was said, in one region to have made the job more attractive. Furthermore, the ability to offer full time positions was said to have helped recruitment and encouraged other PLA staff to consider working in this sector.

4.2.9 Role of orderlies

Two interviewees questioned the specified increased role of orderlies suggesting that this may not be able to be fulfilled as intended. Their frequent inability to access ICT facilities and the internet would mean that reserving, issuing and ordering books for other inmates would not be possible (in libraries where these systems were computerised). In addition, one interviewee from a YOI suggested that the potential for bullying meant that orderlies were not involved in issuing stock whilst it was suggested that in a remand prison, the high turnover of prisoners meant it was difficult to recruit and retain men in the position.

Despite these concerns, orderlies were seen to be a great asset to the prison library. Indeed, the quality of work undertaken by the orderlies in one library prompted the librarian to suggest that the additional funding in place to appoint library assistants would be better directed towards buying-in additional officer cover. This would ensure increased escorting capacity thereby allowing more inmates to access the library.

Table 4.1 Staff issues

	Difficulties and challenges of new specification	Identified/suggested solutions
Staff roles / responsibilities	Increasing educational/teaching role of librarians without training or corresponding teaching salary.	Increased training opportunities – increased funding for staffing and pay levels.
	Need for qualifications in order to carry out new role.	Increased training opportunities for library staff.
	Possible recruitment problems if role appears less attractive/more demanding.	Increased clarity in the specification regarding expectations and responsibilities.
Workload issues	Extended hours will mean increased workload despite employment of library assistants.	
	Workload increase consistent with more IAG and teaching related tasks will have a negative impact – possible distraction from librarian duties.	
Opening hours / library access	Not enough staff to operate the library to the specification as a result of employment legislation, leave entitlement, staff covering for others – budget is insufficient.	Increased officer support – increased support from prison regime such as continuation / protection of the prison library officer role.
	Budget constraints limit library opening hours.	Train suitable people within the PLA to act as cover when required.
	Increasingly stringent security checks and the unwillingness and/or unsuitability of PLA staff mean that cover is an increasingly difficult area.	Negotiate with regime to speed up security vetting procedures and promote prison libraries within the PLA to encourage other staff to provide cover. Need to renegotiate PLA staff contracts and offer training for prison library work.
	Security concerns of weekends and evenings due to lower uniformed staff presence.	Negotiate with prison to ensure adequate levels of staffing and modify timetable accordingly.

	Difficulties and challenges of new specification	Identified/suggested solutions
Professional links	Potential for increased remoteness/isolation for prison librarians from their professional communities (reduction of off-site time).	Modify specification to include a requirement for prison librarian to also spend time in a PLA community/branch library – professional development and also inform effective practice within the prison library context.
Funding uncertainties – staff morale and recruitment issues	Funding for increased staff is not guaranteed and short term contracts may lead to recruitment difficulties (possibly limiting the calibre of applicants coming forward for library assistant posts).	Clarification of funding duration, transparency over funding distribution within prisons.
	Feeling that additional funding has not been used to employ more library staff or increase the hours of existing staff.	
Role of orderlies	The specified increased role of orderlies may not be able to be fulfilled – e.g. not issuing books due to potential bullying or inability to access internet.	
	Remand prisons – high turnover of orderlies – difficult in terms of repeated training implications – hard to recruit orderlies.	

5 Stock and resources

5.1 Introduction

Interviewees were asked to comment on the new specification regarding stock and resources. The specification outlines criteria for: the range of stock available (audio visual materials, books, reference, newspapers) including criteria for the minimum levels of stock and stock replenishment; stock that caters for all types of prisoner; prisoners access to stock (borrowing and censorship) and purpose of the stock (e.g. to support the education curriculum, develop basic skills of prisons, facilitate distance learning). Before discussing the challenges connected with stock and resources, some of the advantages arising from the new specification will be highlighted.

The increased funding available to develop stock and resources was regarded as a major benefit of the new specification. One librarian, for example noted that the increased funding amounted to £3800 and this was deemed to have led to a ‘fantastic position to be in – would have been severely restricted without that funding’ (Librarian, South West). Other libraries were also described as being ‘well funded and well stocked’ as a result (Librarian, North West).

The requirements of the specification were seen to have prompted re-evaluations of stock by some librarians. This had resulted in adaptations of existing stock to better meet the changing needs of prison populations. In describing the updating and upgrading of basic skills materials, one librarian noted:

The spec (sic) has made people look at their stock – there was the danger that everybody was being a little bit complacent so this made people think about their stock.

Librarian, Category C prison

Librarians’ knowledge of their readership needs was now seen as being matched by increased capacity and flexibility to purchase the relevant materials. Similarly, increased funding levels were also said to have enabled librarians to discuss with other sections of the prison, especially education, the nature of new stock to be purchased. As well as higher levels of funding, the fact that it was now protected through ring-fencing, was deemed to be a very positive development.

5.2 Implementing the requirements for stock and resources: perceived challenges

The difficulties and challenges associated with the stock and resources criteria included the following:

- **the new funding formula**
- **requirements for stock replenishment**
- **regime/establishment constraints**
- **access to audio visual resources**
- **providing sufficient foreign language materials**
- **newspapers**
- **meeting the educational needs of offenders.**

Table 5.1 at the end of the chapter presents a summary of these challenges and possible solutions.

5.2.1 New funding formula

Generally, interviewees were positive about the increased levels of funding available to them although some concerns were registered about the new funding formula. Whilst one noted that the funding arrangements were simpler and easier to understand others stated they were more complicated. The central concern here related to what was funded and what was not. 'Backroom costs' of prison library provision such as clerical support were noted as being missing from the funding formula.

Similarly, capitation funding was seen to be problematic in terms of the nature of stock that could be purchased. The librarian at a training prison noted, for example, that a book fund would soon be exhausted when buying stock to support the educational needs of such a prison, as hardbacks, textbooks and instructional/technical manuals are very much more expensive than paperbacks. The specification was said not to take into account the expense of meeting specific needs within the capitation formula. As a possible solution to some of the funding issues, it was suggested that modified funding arrangements could be developed to be responsive to, and reflect the needs of, different types of institutions to reflect stock needs (e.g. to allow for the greater expense of text materials).

5.2.2 Stock ownership, replenishment and loss issues

Concerns were voiced about the potential changes in the status of prison library stock and its transfer to Prison Service ownership; 'that is totally wrong, it is public library stock, it is never the property of the prison' (PLA manager).

The five year cycle of stock replenishment was also seen as being problematic due to the availability of funding. Several librarians contended that they would not be able to meet this requirement with the current levels of funding. As noted previously, the expense of specific text materials led to particular problems: 'I try to keep the standards high, so I don't think we'll be able to meet the 20 per cent replenishment' (PLA representative). Consequently, without additional funding, stock levels could not be adequately maintained. This, however, was not the majority view.

The replenishment target would also be threatened by high stock loss levels in some libraries and the suggested increase in recommended borrowing levels would have implications for stock levels; 'the shelves would be bare' according to one librarian in the South West.

Several librarians suggested possible solutions to countering stock losses. These included procedural and management developments to better monitor and retain stock, in conjunction with systems of wing accountability and prisoner responsibility for borrowed items. Although a member of staff in one library took on additional duties in terms of retrieving unreturned stock items from the wings, one library representative asserted that the prison regime itself should take greater responsibility in this area. Similarly, improved communication between prisons when inmates were transferred was also seen as a means of countering stock loss.

5.2.3 Regime/establishment constraints

In terms of stock and resources issues, the prison regime was identified as constraining the library's ability to meet the specification's requirements. This could occur through the establishment's staffing limitations, through for example, the unavailability of officers to escort inmates to the library for their timetabled session, or through the unavailability of appropriate resources. Offenders' access to reference material was said to be limited by the capacity constraints of the 'very small study room' in one prison library in the South West, whilst the increasingly common supply of reference materials in CD ROM format was problematic in a Category B establishment with no access to the relevant hardware.

5.2.4 Foreign language materials

Representatives of libraries in all three development regions made reference to the increasing demand for a broadening range of foreign language materials consistent with an increase in the numbers and diversity of inmates of different nationalities. It was commented that this could be very demanding financially for the PLA and represented a situation that would need attention in the near future. Similarly, the demographic constitution of another PLA region was

said to be causing difficulties for a librarian to source the appropriate material for an increasing number of offenders, as the PLA stock resources did not contain such material. Higher security prisons housed inmates from wider geographical regions, so there was often a mismatch between prison and local area demographics. Local prisons may not experience this problem to the same extent so the specification's requirements may be easier to meet in these establishments.

The most commonly stated solution to this issue focussed on the library and the PLA developing good links and relationships with other suppliers and sources of foreign language materials. Internet access was also suggested and calls were made for the development of area collections of foreign language materials for libraries to access. The availability of 'one-off' grants for libraries to purchase stock reflecting the changing composition of its population was also suggested.

5.2.5 Audio-visual materials

Several librarians contended that their particular libraries did not make CDs and DVDs available to inmates as called for in the specification. In some cases this resulted from security concerns and the potential cost to the PLA due to losses of these items.

The lack of security means that we can't, or won't stock CDs or DVDs as they would just disappear. The idea of having this sort of stock is wonderful, but it just isn't going to happen in these present circumstances.

Librarian, Category B prison

As a consequence of operating the prison library in accordance with other PLA libraries, one librarian noted that it was not possible to issue CDs and videos to offenders as 'in the big wide world we would charge for those ... so the PLA would want to charge the prisoners for those' (Librarian, South West). Furthermore, restrictions imposed by some prison regimes meant that the appropriate hardware was not permitted or available for CDs and DVDs – some prisons, for example, were only equipped with cassette players, rendering the CD recommendations of the specification inappropriate. Despite the specification calling for the provision of more audio-visual materials, it was also contended by one interviewee from a YOI that these may not be what the inmates actually wanted or indeed currently used and concern was expressed that considerable funding could thus be targeted inappropriately on resources that would be under-utilised.

5.2.6 Newspapers

It was suggested that the new specification could lead to prison governors cancelling the stage newspapers that are delivered to the wings and accessed by inmates on a rotational basis. In addition to the financial issues of newspapers and periodicals being seen as the library's responsibility, several logistical problems were raised. In addition to security of the material, these chiefly revolved round the physical capacity of the library to accommodate several inmates wishing to read newspapers as well as the time limitations and access to the library. As a result of such issues, at least one library reported no longer stocking newspapers.

5.2.7 Meeting the educational needs of offenders

The shift towards an increasing educational orientation of the library was said to have consequent implications for stock acquisition. Predominantly this involved the need to considerably enhance the stock for inmates following GCSE and vocational courses for example, and basics skills was an area of particular concern. Variations were apparent in this area as some librarians noted that their libraries, reflecting practice in other PLA libraries would not hold specific academic textbooks or instructional materials, suggesting, for example that, 'if somebody wants GCSE French text book, that's up to Education to sort out' (Librarian, Category B Prison). Despite the problems it might entail, several librarians were keen to stress the importance of providing basic skills materials based on the high proportion of offenders with literacy needs and indeed that such materials specific to adult learners were limited.

Other librarians, whilst acknowledging this need, contended that the strength and value of prison libraries was also derived from their recreational orientation. Several expressed the fear that the new specification could be used to 'push it to be more like a college library'. In this way it was feared that offenders would be less inclined to access the library:

This will not work as the lads don't read much anyway – educational books would shelf-sit whilst the entire budget could be spent on true-crime and the shelves would be empty.

Librarian, YOI

Table 5.1 Stock and resources

	Difficulties and challenges of new specification	Identified/suggested solutions
Funding	Funding solely for book fund does not cover backroom expenses, such as deliveries and clerical support.	Continue receiving support from PLAs and communicate with prison for financial assistance.
	Meeting the 20 per cent stock replenishment target will be difficult given current levels of capitation (especially in libraries with a high demand for technical manuals and educational texts – e.g. training prisons).	Modifications to the specification (funding formula) to take into account the specific needs of local readerships.
Meeting offenders needs	Foreign language materials – demand can be diverse, fluctuating and expensive to meet.	Communication with other suppliers. Use of internet for inmates to access foreign language materials
	Security and cost considerations inhibit the supply of audio visual materials , such as CDs and DVDs.	Develop an area collection of ‘other’ language materials and culturally appropriate stock – inter-library loans – including one-off grants to reflect changing prison circumstances.
	Lack of suitable hardware in the prison to facilitate the use of CDs and DVDs (for example, inmates only having access to cassette players).	Improved flexibility over the prison library budget
Borrowing and stock access	Timetable clashes or insufficient officer capacity may affect offenders’ access to the library	Liaise with regime.
	Stock loss implications – due to increased borrowing entitlement and access	Establish improved recovery procedures through communication and negotiation with regime.
Shift in emphasis of library stock	Emphasis towards educational orientation may deter recreational readers.	Remain committed to meeting all the needs of prison readers.
	Need to reconsider stock in relation to educational orientation – especially in terms of providing more basic skills material.	Close liaison with education providers to support the needs of learners through providing appropriate material.

6 Library services

6.1 Introduction

The specification contains requirements/recommendations for library services including ICT provision, reader development, support for distance learning and information, advice and guidance (IAG).

As highlighted earlier, the positive developments consistent with the new specification identified by interviewees largely focussed on libraries' increased ability to offer enhanced services and facilities. Underpinning this, increased staffing capacity was said to have led to opportunities for increased service delivery as library staff have more time to engage in activities, such as reader development. The library assistant post was seen as a significant factor in allowing librarians the additional time and flexibility to pursue non desk-based work, such as outreach and work on the wings.

6.2 Implementing the requirements for library services: perceived challenges

In addition to the positive developments, difficulties and challenges were identified, revolving around the following issues:

- **ICT facilities**
- **opening hours and library access**
- **the role of the library.**

These, along with suggested solutions are presented at the end of the chapter in Table 6.1.

6.2.1 ICT facilities

The availability of, and access to, ICT facilities in prison libraries was seen as one of the most problematic aspects of the new specification. Despite the specification's recommendations, perceived to be a reflection of the increasing national profile of internet access, several interviewees noted establishment resistance. This was proving to be especially difficult for one PLA to reconcile, given its emphasis on ICT and public access to the internet in its community libraries. It was generally felt that this was an issue that would not be resolved in the near future and was beyond the influence of librarians, the PLA and HOLS. 'The prison Governor says no and that's it – might have more luck with the next governor' (Librarian, Category C prison).

Concerns over security underpinned prison establishments' reluctance to accept the introduction of ICT facilities, especially in relation to internet access. It must be noted, however, that this was not universal as several interviewees noted that prisons in their areas had been supportive of, and active in facilitating, ICT provision, even in high security regimes.

In addition to limitations in offender use of ICT facilities, several interviewees noted that their libraries were suffering as a result of limited ICT resources and services – of prime concern was the inability to link directly to the PLA library management system. Variability was apparent in libraries' current ability to meet this specification requirement. Whilst some librarians reported being fully linked to the PLA systems, others noted that limited access was available, a common scenario being able to access the library catalogue via CD ROM but unable to make reservations or order stock on line.

Given the specification's requirement for improved linkage, a PLA representative raised the issue of funding and who was responsible for linking prison libraries to the PLA system, given that the specification made no additional finance available for this. Similarly, a librarian from a Category D prison noted that their particular library still operated the manual system of tickets and pockets as the prison had so far not been forthcoming in making funds available to facilitate the necessary additional hardware and phone line. It was suggested by an interviewee from a female prison that without the facility of a computerised read-only on-line catalogue, 'the women are being discriminated against as every public library in the county would have that level of service'.

More generally, a number of interviewees noted that there was a lack of computer hardware and software in the library. It was suggested that to make up for this deficit, computer equipment could be shared with other departments. In one establishment, services were further affected by the fact that the prison did not have funding for ICT support staff, hence there was no help on hand should staff experience problems with computer equipment.

6.2.2 Opening hours and access difficulties

Aspects of working within the prison were seen as imposing challenges to implementing the specification. Reader development activities, such as poetry groups and the presence of a writer in residence for example, were seen on occasion, to be hindered by regime constraints of 'lock-up' and the lack of uniformed staff to provide escorts and supervision. 'I can be here all the hours that God sends, but we cannot open if we don't have a prison officer here' (Librarian, Category B prison).

Timetabling and core-day implications were also said to negate the positive impact of the specification's extended opening hours and increased staffing

levels. Increased library opening hours in the afternoons often clashed with workshops and educational classes. It was contended that the specification represents 'a blanket approach that the library should be open X amount of hours – it didn't look at how the library was already being used' (Librarian, Category B prison).

Similarly, the individual circumstances of the library were said to have been overlooked in relation to reader development issues. The potentially frequent and rapid mobility of inmates at one Category B local prison led to difficulties for the librarian in establishing and maintaining such groups. In addition, it was asserted that it would be much more straightforward to operate such groups in institutions and for inmates where security issues were less of a concern.

For some interviewees, the accommodation provided for the library did not to match the requirements of the specification – there was simply not enough space to offer the desired services.

6.2.3 Role of the library

In addition to general concerns over the increasing educational emphasis and orientation of the library, other interviewees suggested that in terms of IAG for example, the library was not the most appropriate arena for delivery. Again, issues of encroachment and operating in areas where library staff's expertise was not central were raised. Several interviewees suggested that IAG would be better delivered through resettlement teams:

That is their purpose and their area of expertise and what they are paid to do. Getting the library to do this is a fundamental misunderstanding.

Librarian, Category B prison.

In addition to the duplication of service delivery that this could also entail, one librarian highlighted the logistical problems that involvement in IAG could entail, largely in terms of the library not having the physical capacity to house a great deal of advice material, nor the inmates having the space to make effective use of it. It was contended that the library's role was to reinforce and assist those with the chief responsibility for IAG by sourcing and supplying the books and materials requested.

Lastly, one interviewee spoke of problems giving post-sentence guidance and support. For example, arranging access to community libraries for prisoners once released can be more difficult for prisons that do not serve the local population. This interviewee proposed a national scheme whereby all prisoners would be provided with a library pack and could register with their local library by presenting a card and number.

Table 6.1 Library services

	Challenges	Potential solutions
ICT provision	Library management system – limited links to PLA system.	
	Restrictions around offender use of ICT resources.	Overcome prison regime resistance and inertia re ICT and security concerns.
	Lack of funding for hardware/software and for ICT support staff.	Cultivate relationships with other departments, such as Education and resettlement and share ICT resources/facilities.
Opening hours and access difficulties	Access to services – affected by the availability of prison officers to escort inmates to and from library. Timetabling and core-day structure may also restrict offender access to the library.	Encourage officers to visit the library and understand its potential so as to encourage offenders to access it more. Communicate with regime and negotiate support/escorts and modify timetabling to facilitate greater access. Ensure that library timetabling is appropriate to the needs of individual prison populations.
	Restrictions imposed by lock-up – e.g. on reader development activities.	Allow librarian more time to do outreach work – on the wings, hospital, detox units etc.
	Physical space available imposes limits on the services on offer.	Negotiate with regime for improved infrastructure, or more appropriate space within the prison.
Role of the library	Concern from other departments , and from some libraries, about the changing nature of the provision on offer and possible encroachment or duplication of services, especially in relation to IAG.	Improve communication and dialogue with other department and continue to develop good relationships with HOLS.
	Problems providing post sentence support - arranging access to community libraries for offenders released from prisons that do not serve the local population.	National solution to post sentence support – offender leaves prison with library resource pack and negotiated access to a specified library on release.

7 Management

7.1 Introduction

The specification sets out the requirements for the management of the service including the role of prison management, Head of Learning and Skills and the PLA; arrangements for self assessment (including performance measures, targets and standards); communications between the prison and PLA and management information systems.

When asked about the management of the library service a number of interviewees cited communication problems involving the prison, other departments/services within the prison (e.g. education and resettlement) and also with the PLA. Conversely, several interviewees felt that communications were good and that there were no issues in this area. Indeed in one instance the specification was said to have enhanced communications between the PLA and the prison, with an increase in the number of meetings with the HOLS. Generally, interviewees were satisfied with the nature and quality of communication.

It should be noted that in the case of both 'management' and the 'SLA' (see Chapter 8) interviewees identified fewer issues, relative to the previous sections.

7.2 Implementing the management requirements: perceived challenges

The main management challenges concerned either communication difficulties within the prison or between the prison library and the PLA.

7.2.1 Communications within the prison

A small number of interviewees spoke of communication difficulties within the prison. These concerned a lack of interest in the library on the part of regime management and in one establishment this was exacerbated by the physical location of the library. It was said to be relatively inaccessible, making spontaneous communication difficult. However, another librarian said that communication was an issue across prison departments and was not confined to the library:

There's a lot of information gathered in the prison that doesn't always get filtered through to all the different departments and that's something we found when we had the inspectors in. That's something we've got to address, so it's me working more closely with education.

Librarian, Category C Prison

A couple of interviewees also mentioned that although the specification advised meeting with the 'number one' prison governor, this would be extremely difficult to organise. Several approaches were said to have been made without success.

To facilitate effective communications interviewees recommended promoting the library through the prison and cultivating good working relationships, especially with the HOLS, and increasing the numbers of meetings with or visits to the library by the PLA. One interviewee felt that the library would benefit from being factored into key performance targets, as this would give the library some increased gravitas within the regime management. Without this kind of backing, it was felt that prison management would have little incentive to ensure that library received the support it needed to function effectively and fulfil the new specification.

7.2.2 Communications with the PLA

Three interviewees highlighted concerns about their communication links with the PLA. One librarian considered two meetings a year with the PLA as insufficient and another mentioned that the library was not linked to the PLA management information system:

One of the things I'm concerned about is we haven't got a computerised management link to the PLA. I've mentioned it several times at management meetings. There is supposedly some funding around, but nobody knows where it is or whether we can get it. That's a target, but I can't meet it at the moment.

Librarian, Category C prison

The implication here is that some librarians were unhappy with the current levels of communication and felt that links should be strengthened. In addition, the issue of having to work under two managers was also raised. One librarian noted that this was potentially problematic, as the HOLS and the PLA may sometimes have opposing priorities and the librarian could be caught between these positions.

Finally, a group manager from a PLA saw the biggest management challenge as recruiting and retaining staff to work in prison libraries. They suspected that once they had trained up staff they would move on to more attractive posts. To address a potential shortage of recruits, the PLA were planning to hold an open day for community staff in the hope of enlarging the pool of librarians willing to work in prisons.

8 Service level agreement (SLA)

8.1 Introduction

According to the new specification, the SLA should identify the responsibilities of the PLA and the prison and the elements covered should include: management, services, stock, resources and staffing. This section of the report describes the perceived challenges connected with this aspect of the specification.

8.2 Implementing the SLA: perceived challenges

When asked to comment on the SLA, interviewees spoke of challenges encountered during the revision of the SLA, challenges associated with putting the SLA into practice and concerns about the actual content of the SLA.

8.2.1 Revising the SLA

Most interviewees reported that there was an SLA agreement already in place between the PLA and the prison. However, this document was said to require updating in order to reflect the requirements of the new specification. For example, one librarian noted that a reference to sickness cover would need to be added as it was not in the current SLA. Two interviewees stated that the SLA had already been reviewed, with statements added, for example, about stock loss and changes to the library hours. In the case of five prison libraries, the SLA was in the process of being updated and some remarked that amending the SLA can be quite time consuming as it involved meetings between the governor, HOLs and the PLA:

At the moment me and my manager in the PLA, we're going through it but it all takes time and then we have to go through it with the HOLs in the prison and then we have to meet with the governor, as well as keeping the library open and the job going.

Librarian, Category D prison

Two librarians spoke of some difficulties negotiating the details of the SLA. In one case this was because the new SLA was a much fuller document and it had taken a long time to compile. The process was compounded further by the fact that no-one had assumed a lead role in pulling the document together. In another region, the SLA was the subject of a dispute. The PLA was not prepared sign up to it until there were assurances that community library staff would not have to undertake duties that they were neither paid, or trained to do. In addition, it was also felt that the SLA was not clear enough in terms of what was expected of the PLA.

8.2.2 Putting the SLA into practice

Three interviewees implied that challenges centred on ensuring that the SLA was workable and could be put into operation. For example, one librarian suggested that the success of the SLA would depend on whether there was sufficient funding to support its requirements. Another librarian from a different region said that whilst there was a pressure on the PLA to support the library in implementing the specification, if the prison did not supply officers for escorting offenders to the library, what realistically could the PLA do? Similarly, another interview confirmed that in the past a significant difficulty had been ensuring that the prison service fulfilled their set of responsibilities.

8.2.3 Content of the SLA

Three interviewees queried specific aspects of the specification which they felt could be problematic. Firstly, doubts were voiced over the ability of PLA to replace 20 per cent of stock each year. Secondly, the PLA was said to be unhappy that the prison would be taking ownership rights of the stock and lastly, one SLA included a statement about the ethnic minority population, which was felt to be too rigid given the fluctuating profile of the prisoner population.

9 The way forward

9.1 Introduction

This final chapter looks at what lessons can be learnt from the experiences of the three development regions. With a national roll out scheduled for April 2006, it is particularly timely to consider what factors will contribute towards a successful implementation. Having discussed challenges associated with the new specification this chapter begins by collating interviewees' thoughts on how the specification as a document could be further improved. The chapter then moves on to highlight promising practice and issues for a national roll out, which, when combined, perhaps point to success factors in implementing the specification.

9.2 Improvements to the specification

After discussing stock, staffing, services, management and the SLA, interviewees were asked whether there were any ways in which these sections of the specification could be improved. Their responses are detailed in the table below and point to elements of the specification which perhaps require further attention and/or clarification.

Table 9.1 Suggested modifications to the specification

	Suggested modifications
Staffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarification of the extent of additions to the roles and responsibilities of library staff. • The necessity for contract renegotiation and associated remuneration associated with increased responsibilities. • Clarification of responsibility for financing the training requirements of prison librarians to undertake enhanced or expanded duties. • Clarification concerning staffing cover and the extent of the PLA and the prison's responsibility. • Clarification over the role of the Prison Library Officer. • Protection of the ring-fenced nature of staff funding so that under-spend is not lost and absorbed into general prison budgets. • Enhanced and protected time for prison librarians to work in public libraries.
Library stock and resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow for flexibility according to type, characteristics and circumstances of individual institutions. • Clarification of stock ownership issues and remove the assumption that the PLA will contribute some of its own stock to prison libraries. • Increased guidance regarding the frequency of periodical rotation and the degree of funding to be committed to this form of material. • Protection of the importance of recreational/leisure reading and the amenity role of the library.
Library services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexibility to implement only those elements of the specification deemed to be appropriate to individual libraries. • Inclusion of an element to assist in mediating between the library's needs and the discipline needs of the establishment in relation to providing and facilitating access.
Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusion of HOLS in library management and greater involvement in/knowledge of library provision. • Incorporation of librarian into management/admin structure of the prison. • Increased profile of librarian as a Head of Service within the prison • Consistent information disseminated simultaneously intra-and inter-regionally and increased transparency.
SLA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce the breadth and depth of the specification areas to simplify SLA drafting and increase usability. • Clarify the roles and responsibilities of library staff.

9.3 Success factors

In previous chapters the report has signaled many of the potential challenges to be faced by prison libraries but interviewees also drew attention to some successes and examples of promising practice. It should be noted that at the time of data collection, many libraries were still in the early stages of

implementation, therefore it was difficult for interviewees to identify established good practice in every area of the specification. Responses concerning good practice have therefore been combined with data obtained from a question on national roll out issues and are presented in Table 9.2 under the umbrella heading 'success factors'.

These responses serve as a helpful summary of the main issues which may require consideration to ensure that prison libraries across the country can successfully operationalise the new specification.

Table 9.2 Success factors in implementing the new specification

	Success factors
Staffing issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness raising and communication could be increased via improved library inductions for prison staff • Continued and increased librarian involvement with other PLA libraries to maintain contact within the professional field to assist in the sharing of information and good practice • The need to overcome regimes' staffing limitations from impeding the specification's implementation • Institutional inertia and the length of time taken, for example to gain security clearance for library staff, may severely restrict Implementation – consider undertaking the process of recruitment as soon as possible to avoid considerable delay.
Library stock and resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having secured commitment and support from all involved to meet the needs of the prison population • Having established good working relationships and close liaison with Education to try and stock the material they need to support their delivery of offender learning provision. • Having developed good understandings of readership needs and being prepared to be responsive to changes.
Library services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having employed library assistants and development workers to facilitate and promote a range of library services within the prison community.
Management issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having strong leadership within the PLA and the presence of a clear, identifiable driver to deliver or ensure a consistent and effective approach to implementation • Having developed good relationships with HOLS and wing officers as a means of increasing support for the library • Having developed a good relationship with the Governor so that the librarian is seen as a senior staff member • Having effective communication systems and procedures based on a culture of integration and involvement. This has facilitated joined-up working and multi-agency working, (especially in relation to IAG provision) • Having raised the profile of the library in the prison through the specification's introduction.
SLA issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PLA being responsible for drafting the SLA (they have more specialist knowledge and experience than HOLS).

9.4 Conclusion

The evaluation was required to explore different aspects of the specification and these have been reported separately (Chapters 4-8). However, a number of recurring themes appear to run through interviewee responses and this conclusion seeks to highlight those issues which were perhaps most prevalent.

9.4.1 Overall views on the specification

Firstly, it is important to recognize that many of the prison libraries were only in the early stages of implementing the new library specification and that in some cases, nothing had yet been put in place. On balance though, interviewees did not identify, or foresee, many major difficulties with the new specification and its implementation. The requirements/content of the specification were not, on the whole, seen to present insurmountable difficulties in terms of library and staff capabilities and competences to comply or deliver. Much of the new specification was seen as already being in place, in part a reflection of the good practice and procedures associated with the effective operation of a library, and also as a reflection of the existing PSO relating to library provision.

9.4.2 The influence of regime factors

It was quite apparent that the prison regime could potentially present a stumbling block to the full implementation of the library specification. It was deemed challenging to provide a service comparable to that of an ordinary branch or community library within the extra-ordinary circumstances and contexts of a prison environment. The main issues here involved the difficulties associated with the prison facilitating offenders' access to the library to the specified extent (e.g. providing prison officer escorts). In addition, security constraints could affect the length of time to get new staff in post and also the provision of certain services, especially ICT and internet access.

9.4.3 A changing role

Whilst some interviewees welcomed the enhanced responsibilities afforded to librarians, others were concerned about the possible impact of an increased educational role. Here, interviewees were unsure whether librarians were sufficiently trained (and paid) to undertake some of the proposed tasks and others feared it may lead to a duplication of services (e.g. delivery of IAG). It was suggested that the specification was still too vague in terms of defining exactly what library staff would be expected to do. As well as clarifying precisely the expectations of library staff, the offer of additional training may help address some of the reservations expressed.

9.4.4 The importance of communication

Several of the challenges identified throughout the report appear to relate to communication issues between the key players – for example, delays in confirmation of funding, information about the specification not filtering through and problems assembling HOLS, librarians, the PLA and Governors to review the specification. These difficulties were seen to result in delays in implementing the specification and a sense of uncertainty amongst librarians or concerns about what was expected of them. More generally, poor communication links may be a factor in determining how the regime management views the library. Already, it has been stated that implementation can be significantly hampered by regime constraints. Therefore, it is perhaps particularly critical that effective communications/relationships are developed to ensure that the library has a high profile within the prison and that other prison staff are committed and supportive towards the library and its services.

9.4.5 Tailoring the specification

Finally, interviewees' comments suggested a need for greater flexibility in the interpretation of the specification. The particular circumstances of the prison library were felt to affect the degree to which the specification could be implemented e.g. opening hours would need to reflect the regime of the prison. Thus, it was felt that prison libraries should perhaps be allowed to tailor the specification more to suit their particular context, rather than assuming a blanket approach is appropriate for all.

References

BYRAM, P., WHALLEY, G. and COWBURN, M. (2004). Survey of Prison Libraries 2004. Preston: RCU Ltd.

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