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# Getting Research into Policy and Practice: A Review of the Work of Bob Usherwood

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## ABSTRACT

Professor Bob Usherwood is a leading scholar in the field of public librarianship who spent three decades of his working life at the University of Sheffield, where he founded the Centre for the Public Library and Information in Society to pursue the mission of “Getting Research Into Policy and Practice.” His career took him from librarian and chief officer to faculty member and a personal chair and included important roles in professional organizations, such as president of The Library Association. Usherwood’s published output of books, research reports, journal articles, and other material is selectively reviewed, concentrating on publications related to his personal research and funded projects. His research interests are in three interrelated areas: library and information service management, public policy decisions and their effects on libraries, and the impact of libraries on individuals and communities. A distinctive feature is his use of different publication venues to reach diverse audiences and the promotion of qualitative methodologies to demonstrate the value and impact of libraries. Major concerns identified in his work include library values, public service, professional engagement, intellectual standards, and literary excellence, which are issues of continuing relevance for researchers, practitioners, and managers of library services today.

## INTRODUCTION

Bob Usherwood spent two-thirds of his professional life at the University of Sheffield, joining the Postgraduate School of Librarianship and Information Science in 1976 as a lecturer in librarianship and retiring as a professor emeritus in 2005, working part-time for his last two years in the department. His published output totals around two hundred items

of various kinds, including books, pamphlets, book chapters, conference papers, research reports, and articles and book reviews in peer-reviewed journals and professional periodicals. Unusually for a faculty member in a leading research-led information school, where refereed journals are generally the preferred venue for publication, Usherwood managed to produce four books during the 1980s and 1990s, although he had to wait until his semiretirement to find the time to work on his fifth book, *Equity and Excellence in the Public Library* (published in 2007), indicating the increased pressures on academicians over the past decade that have affected the output of even the most determined writers. He continues to contribute to professional and national debate on libraries in his retirement and currently edits *Post-Lib*, a journal for retired librarians.

Usherwood joined the school as a senior member of the library profession, with substantial experience in the public library sector and a high profile in the wider professional community. He had worked in a large county system as a trainee and then special collections librarian at Devon Libraries in the southwest of England, followed by positions of increasing seniority in the London boroughs of Havering, Sutton (where he had charge of the landmark New Central Library), and Lambeth, where he held the position of chief librarian, as senior assistant director (libraries) in the Directorate of Amenity Services. He was also actively engaged in professional associations after a lengthy term on the committee of the South East Division of the Association of Assistant Librarians (AAL, now the Career Development Group) and a shorter period on the committee of the London & Home Counties Branch of The Library Association (LA).

In addition, of particular significance here, Usherwood had already shown an appetite for journalism and started contributing to practitioner literature: he became editor of *Masthead*, the library school journal of the former North Western Polytechnic (now London Metropolitan University) in 1965; editor of *Outpost*, the journal of the Devon & Cornwall AAL, in 1966; and, finally, editor of *Assistant Librarian*, the national journal of the AAL (now published under the fittingly more assertive title, *Impact*), a position he held from 1970 to 1973. His eight years in London prior to moving north interestingly also included a brief appointment (from 1970 to 1972) as a lecturer at the School of Librarianship of the then Polytechnic of North London (where he had studied from 1965 to 1966), which at the time was among the largest professional schools of librarianship in the United Kingdom and one with a reputation for radical thinking.

In 1971, with funding from the AAL, Usherwood visited Northern Ireland, at the height of the Troubles, to investigate the effect of the conflict on library organizations and services. The accounts that he then published, in two articles with characteristically arresting titles, "Books, bombs and bullets" and "Libraries under stress" (Usherwood, 1972a, 1972b), were the first widely disseminated reports on the subject and have rightly been

hailed as “landmark studies” (Topping & Evans, 2005, p. 375). In this early work, we can already see some of the traits that were to become hallmarks of his library research, in particular his appetite for investigating the “big issues” in library and information work and his concern to “disseminate findings appropriately to different audiences” and “to the relevant community so that it can be acted upon” (Goulding & Usherwood, 2003, p. 138). From the outset, Usherwood regarded developing the relationship between research and professional practice as an important aspect of his work and often chose to publish articles that could have appeared in refereed journals in the professional press, because of his aim to put research into practice. His two articles on the Troubles were accordingly published in *Assistant Librarian* and the American professional magazine *Wilson Library Bulletin* (Usherwood, 1972a, 1972b).

During his time at Sheffield, Usherwood taught a range of core and elective courses for the MA Librarianship program, including the Introduction to Management, Human Resource Management, Marketing and Public Relations, and Public Libraries and their Communities. In keeping with the university and school missions, his teaching was research-led—informed by his own and other research, incorporating practical research projects into student assignments, and promoting inquiry-based learning (Goulding & Usherwood, 2003). His teaching also drew on his own practical experience in the field and continuing engagement with the library profession, which in turn informed his research. He served on and led committees and working parties of the LA and other professional organizations throughout his academic career, and his contribution was recognized through honorary fellowship of the LA in 1992, fellowship of the Institute of Information Scientists in 1993, and the presidency of the LA in 1998. He served on the Library Advisory Council for England in the 1970s and was one of two British librarians invited to participate in the White House Conference on Libraries in 1991. He chaired the Organizing Committee for the 2002 IFLA Conference, when he adopted a novel thematic cross-sector approach to the customary introduction to the library and information services of the host nation (Usherwood, 2002c), and was a member of the Booker Prize Management Committee.

Usherwood worked on more than twenty externally funded research grants and contracts of different sizes from diverse sources, in most cases having secured the funding personally as project head/principal investigator, including awards from professional bodies as well as the main U.K. funding bodies for library and information science, such as the British Library Research and Development Department (BLRDD, later the Research and Innovation Centre); the Library and Information Commission (LIC); the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA); and the Arts and Humanities Research Board (AHRB, now a Research Council). He supervised fifteen doctoral projects in librarianship, including several that

launched successful academic careers in the United Kingdom and other countries, and two that resulted in well-reviewed books (Curry, 1997; Goulding, 1996), in addition to numerous master's dissertation projects, undertaken as a requirement of the MA in Librarianship. He examined doctoral theses in the United Kingdom and Australia and served on the editorial boards of the *Journal of Documentation*, *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, *Library Management*, and *Libri*. In 1996, he established Sheffield's Centre for the Public Library and Information in Society (CP-LIS) to provide a focus for the school's work in the public library sector; encourage interaction between academicians, professionals, and policy makers; and promote the transfer of research into policy and practice.

Although promoted and used as a practical guide for library professionals and students, Usherwood's first full-length book, *The Visible Library—Practical Public Relations for Public Librarians*, was based on his personal research on the subject, including a study visit to investigate practice in the United States that was funded by an award from the LA London & Home Counties Branch in 1977 (Usherwood, 1981b, 1981c). Usherwood (1974) had already established his expertise in public relations with a contribution to an early volume in *Studies in Library Management*, and his book was received enthusiastically, recommended as an essential purchase, and described by one reviewer as "an excellent guide to practice, well presented and enjoyable to read, echoing the author's own public speaking style" (Dudley, 1982, p. 64); the text also received attention internationally and was later translated into Russian. Public relations and marketing were significant interests for Usherwood, receiving explicit attention in the 1980s, when he complemented his book with articles for practitioners in the *Library Association Record* and *ASLIB Proceedings* (Usherwood, 1980b, 1981a), edited a set of conference papers for the AAL (Usherwood, 1984), and contributed to an important collection of papers, edited by one of his research collaborators at Loughborough University, Margaret Kinnell Evans (Usherwood, 1989a).

Usherwood's doctoral research (begun in the mid-1980s and completed in 1992) investigated the political dimension of public librarianship and formed the basis of another well received book, *Public Library Politics: The Role of the Elected Member*, filling a gap in the literature that had existed for more than fifty years, when the last substantial treatment of the subject was published (Usherwood, 1993). Despite its specific U.K. context, the narrative proved "enlightening and entertaining reading" for an Australian reviewer (Willmott, 1994), in addition to attracting positive attention locally. Readers today may be surprised to learn that the author managed to interview a total of fifty politicians in person or by telephone for his study (a response rate of nearly 70 percent), who were selected as members of the library committee or its equivalent in twelve local authorities and whose actual words are used extensively in both the book and an earlier ar-

ticle reporting his emerging findings (Usherwood, 1991). Although some of the language used here reflects the particular political jargon of the day, many of the issues explored are still with us, such as the involvement of the private sector and volunteer workers in library service delivery. Two diagrams illustrating the various influences at work on politicians and others within and outside the council organization were also published in a later article and could still profitably be used to educate library students or indeed any staff who need reminding that “public library managers have to be politically sensitive and have an understanding of the world of politics and politicians” (Usherwood, 1994, p. 135). Usherwood’s (1987) analysis in *Public Library Journal* of lessons learned from the literature is similarly still worth consulting.

During the 1990s, Usherwood was project head for two British Library-funded investigations and joint head for two other BL projects where the funding was shared with Loughborough University. The first project, undertaken with Philippa Levy (a future head of the Sheffield iSchool) as research associate, was a timely investigation of interpersonal skills training for library and information work that anticipated the surge of interest in personal skills development from the early 1990s associated with the adoption of customer service programs and team-based structures across all library sectors. The extensive dissemination strategy deployed for this project exemplifies Usherwood’s determination to use multiple channels to communicate important research to different audiences and his concern also to act on the findings. In addition to the official report published by the BL (Levy & Usherwood, 1992), the project was publicized in the *Library Association Record* (Levy & Usherwood, 1989), reported in professional periodicals aimed at library personnel specialists and law librarians (Levy, 1990, 1992b), and presented at three conferences serving diverse constituencies (Levy, 1994; Levy & Usherwood, 1991a, 1991b). The project also resulted in a publication for practitioners in the LA *Library Training Guides* series (Levy, 1993) in addition to curriculum development within Master’s programs at Sheffield, which was reported in an academic journal (Levy, 1992a).

Two other projects formed a program of work, funded by the BL and undertaken with colleagues at Loughborough University, which explored the application of quality management concepts and self-assessment tools in public libraries, extending previous work on quality management in the UK library sector, which had largely concentrated on academic libraries. Again, the formal report published by the BL (Evans, Jones, & Usherwood, 1999) was accompanied by a practitioner guide published by the LA, aimed at library senior managers and staff developers (Kinnell, Usherwood, & Jones, 1999), and selected aspects of the research were also disseminated in practitioner-oriented journals through three articles in *Public Library Journal* (Evans, Jones, & Usherwood, 1999; Jones, Kinnell,

& Usherwood, 1998; Milner, Kinnell, & Usherwood, 1994) and one in *Library Management* (Milner, Kinnell, & Usherwood, 1995) in addition to academic and professional conference presentations in the United Kingdom (Usherwood, 1995) and overseas (Evans, 2000). Other dimensions of the project were thoughtfully discussed in an academic journal article that explained how the adopted action research methodology (within an overarching framework of a comparative case study) was crucial in enabling the project team to engage the three participating public library authorities as research collaborators, who took ownership of the project and development of the assessment tools, in contrast to the skepticism previously identified in the sector (Jones, Kinnell, & Usherwood, 2000).

In addition to the quality management work with Loughborough, during 1994, Usherwood was involved in a project reportedly described at the time (Conway, 1997, p. 218) as “the largest piece of research into public libraries ever undertaken in the world,” as a member of the team contracted by the Department of National Heritage (DNH) to carry out a review of the public library service in England and Wales. Toward the end of the following year, he launched another personal research project, sending out a postal survey (modeled on an instrument designed by the British Institute of Management) to all chief librarians in the United Kingdom, investigating their perceptions of managerial and organizational changes taking place within their sector. The questionnaire asked for tick-box responses on more than seventy dimensions of what has been labeled as “new managerialism,” and invited free-text comments on the ten broad areas covered. It achieved an impressive 69 percent response rate, and the results, along with data gathered from other recent research, formed the basis of his next book, *Rediscovering Public Library Management* (Usherwood, 1996).

Usherwood’s (1996) management book provides an evidence-based critique of the application of private sector techniques to public service organizations, with reference to an array of initiatives promulgated by the government of the day. While it can be argued that concepts such as customer care, quality management, and performance measurement are not inherently damaging, and indeed are potentially beneficial, the problem perceived at the time by Usherwood and others stemmed from the unthinking adoption of such practices without due consideration of the setting and their cumulative effect in eroding the public service ethos that had previously characterized good management practice in local authorities and their libraries. The text is clearly situated in a particular context, and specific points may be hard for later readers to appreciate, but ultimately it is a book about purpose and values, and many of the arguments advanced were to surface again in Usherwood’s work, notably in his most recent book on *Equity and Excellence* (Usherwood, 2007a). Described by one reviewer as a “visionary text” rather than a “‘how to’ book,” whose

value resided in its “portrayal of the ‘public service’ viewpoint” (Broady, 1997, pp. 188–189), it was also especially welcomed at the time for its insider view of the DNH Public Library Review (Conway, 1997) that was provided in an eight-page appendix.

Usherwood’s next BL project was much more ambitious in its aims and also innovative in its methodology, experimenting with a “social process audit” to evaluate public libraries by examining the outcomes, impact, and value of libraries in a large city in the north of England and a rural county in the southwest. Using interviews with stakeholders (library staff and politicians—elected members of local authorities) and focus groups with local residents (library users and nonusers), the study confirmed the value of the public library’s traditional functions in culture, education, literacy, leisure, and information but also identified important social and caring roles, as well as economic impact, and discussed the “bottom line” issue of equity in service delivery, arguing for the need to look beyond input and output figures for more meaningful evidence, such as people’s experiences and perceptions of services. An important element in the research design was the use of a workshop to discuss and review a preliminary report of the project findings with library professionals and politicians, with comments from the event then used to inform further consideration of the data and identify issues for future attention, which were taken into account in the final project report (Linley & Usherwood, 1998, p. 14). Such workshops with selected project participants and/or other research stakeholders were frequently an integral part of Usherwood’s research projects (e.g., Toyne & Usherwood, 2001, p. 21; Train, Usherwood, & Brooks, 2002, p. 26; Usherwood et al., 2001, p. 19; Usherwood, Wilson, & Bryson, 2005c, p. 21) and supported the process of getting research into policy and practice by building understanding and support with key audiences prior to formal dissemination.

Usherwood’s concern to put the research into practice is also evident here in a specific section in the final report of the social audit project on “Making use of the findings,” which encourages practitioners and policy makers in other authorities to adopt the methodology, and concludes by presenting a “Framework for an informed value judgement” as a practical tool that managers can use to identify factors helping or hindering attainment of social objectives (Linley & Usherwood, 1998, pp. 86–89). Providing a framework of this type, rather than a prescriptive model, also meant that practitioners in other sectors could readily see how the approach could be used in other contexts. In addition, the project researchers, Usherwood and former MA Librarianship student Rebecca Linley, again disseminated their work widely, using academic and professional venues. The research attracted interest internationally and was presented at the LA conference in Ireland (Usherwood, 1999a) and the IFLA Conference in Amsterdam and then selected for publication in the *IFLA Journal*



(Usherwood & Linley, 1999). The issue of equity was the focus of an academic article in the *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science* (Usherwood & Linley, 2000). Usherwood and Linley (1997, 1998) also promoted the use of qualitative indicators, rather than the habitual quantitative measures, to audiences beyond the library world, publishing short pieces in the *Municipal Journal* and *The Bookseller*.

Usherwood followed up his original social audit with further research that built on this approach. A project for the South West Museums Libraries & Archives Council assessed the collaborative impact of libraries, archives, and museums in parts of the region, developing the methodology used previously but also training staff in social audit and other techniques as an integral part of the project, thus enabling them to demonstrate and monitor the outcomes of their service after the end of the project (Bryson, Usherwood, & Streatfield, 2002; Usherwood, 2002b). In another study (funded by the AHRB), investigating the value and impact of imaginative literature provided by public libraries, he combined the social audit methodology with the “uses and gratifications” techniques used by researchers in the mass media and the “reader response approach” used in understanding the meanings of literature. The study again used interviews and focus groups to cross-check the views of multiple stakeholders (elected members, library staff, arts and cultural workers, library users, and nonusers), short questionnaires to public library authorities, and the customary postfieldwork prereport workshop; characteristically, the findings were disseminated via academic and professional journals in addition to the formal report (Toyne & Usherwood, 2001; Usherwood & Toyne, 2000, 2002).

In addition, Usherwood continued to seek opportunities to argue the case for qualitative methods as a more meaningful way of assessing value and impact, drawing on his social audit research and other Sheffield projects that had used qualitative data to measure impact, such as the Sheffield Libraries strike study (another example of investigating big, controversial issues), which drew on semistructured interviews, user comments/complaints, media coverage, and loans data (Proctor, Usherwood, & Sobczyk, 1996; Proctor, Sobczyk, & Usherwood, 1996; Sobczyk, Proctor, & Usherwood, 1997). In 1999, he returned to the IFLA Conference, for a Library Theory and Research workshop in Bangkok, with an article that reviewed several qualitative studies, and then moved on to the dissemination and implementation of public library research, arguing for the establishment of a central resource to collate information on academic, practitioner, and other studies and local public library appointments with a research focus to facilitate the communication and take-up of research by library managers and policy makers (Usherwood, 1999b). He concluded this short article with an upfront statement about the responsibility of researchers to ensure their work illuminates the activities of library users and helps professionals and policy makers assess the quality of their services. Sub-



sequent papers at the Australian public libraries conference in 2001 and another IFLA theory and research workshop in 2002 conveyed similar messages (Usherwood, 2002a, 2002b).

### RECRUIT, RETAIN, AND LEAD

The Public Library Workforce Study (Usherwood et al., 2001) was a two-year large-scale high-profile investigation funded by the LIC (the short-lived successor of the BL Research and Innovation Centre). Coinciding with massive development in the sector arising from long-overdue government investment in the technological infrastructure for public libraries via the People's Network program, the project was another landmark study and has been widely cited and quoted in the UK and internationally, notably by the authors of national workforce studies in other countries, such as the 8Rs Research Team (2005) in Canada and the neXus study in Australia (Hallam, 2008). Specific areas investigated included employers' needs, career choice, staff selection, workforce development, career aspirations, and succession planning. The importance of the study to the sector is indicated by the response of 174 public library authorities (84 percent) to the first-stage postal survey on recruitment, retention, training, and leadership issues (Usherwood, Proctor, Bower, Stevens, & Coe, 2000). Other data sources included interviews, focus groups, the customary stakeholder workshop, and input from master's dissertations at Sheffield on relevant topics that had been encouraged by the research team as a novel additional dimension to the project as it was getting under way.

Among the key findings of the Public Library Workforce Study was the frequently quoted statement that "there was a lack of leadership in the public library profession, and no identified way in which a new generation of leaders might be fostered" (Usherwood et al., 2001, p. 102), which was accompanied by a recommendation in the report that chief librarians, information schools, and the LA investigate the provision of leadership development programs. It was the MLA (LIC's successor) that eventually funded a very large-scale national leadership development program for the public library sector, Leading Modern Public Libraries, in which 663 library staff participated over a three-year period, and funded an in-depth independent evaluation of the program (Forrest, 2007). Usherwood (by then working part-time) was a member of the team awarded the contract for the independent evaluation, which was another mixed-methods study, involving questionnaires, interviews, and observation of program participants, as well as document analysis of course materials (Streatfield, Wilson, Corrall, & Usherwood, 2007). One direct and unexpected outcome of the Public Library Workforce Study was that Usherwood was commissioned by MLA to undertake a similar study for the archives and records management workforce, which used a design based on the methodology previously used (Hartley & Usherwood, 2004).

The last major funded research project initiated and led by Usherwood provides another example of his determination to confront fundamental questions facing library and information professionals. This two-year project (funded by AHRB from October 2002) set out to investigate the continuing relevance of traditional “repositories of public knowledge”—museums, libraries, and archives—in the modern information age. Among other questions, the study aimed to establish whether people still needed and valued access to these traditional repositories, if they used them when trying to understand contemporary social concerns, and their perceived trustworthiness and authenticity in comparison with other sources of information. The study used a national telephone survey of more than one thousand people, regional focus groups covering six key demographics, and an invitation workshop in London for professionals and academics in the field (Usherwood, Wilson, & Bryson, 2005c). In addition to the project report disseminated via the CPLIS web site, the findings were summarized and discussed in two research articles, including an article in the practitioner-oriented *Library and Information Research* (Usherwood, Wilson, & Bryson, 2005a, 2005b).

Yet again, rich qualitative data enabled the research team to go beyond simple usage statistics to define an important distinction between “use value” and “social value” as a justification for continuing public funding of libraries, archives, and museums in the digital age and to assert more contentiously that these relevant valued and trusted repositories, along with public service broadcasters, are among the few “true information organizations” and as such need to be viewed as distinct from many other so-called information organizations that in reality are “‘attention seeking’ rather than information organizations” (Usherwood et al., 2005c, p. 89). Explaining how such repositories are positively differentiated from mass media by their provision of historical context, alternative viewpoints, artistic interpretation, and mediated service, yet disadvantaged by opening hours that often do not fit the lifestyles and *life stages* of key demographic groups, the report offers important insights and valuable guidance for practitioners and policy makers faced by apparently conflicting messages about perceptions of libraries, archives, and museums and provides the depth often lacking in large-scale market research studies such as the high-profile OCLC *Perceptions of Libraries* reports (De Rosa et al., 2010).

Following his official retirement in 2005, Usherwood embarked on another investigation of the challenges facing public library practitioners, this time examining professional perspectives on the apparent tensions between a commitment to equity and social inclusion, on the one hand, and maintaining high intellectual and literary standards, on the other. The resulting text, *Equity and Excellence in the Public Library: Why Ignorance Is Not Our Heritage* (2007a), discusses his findings from a questionnaire survey distributed to senior practitioners in English library authorities and

students taking the public libraries course at Sheffield. Drawing also on an extensive range of literature, the book revisits issues raised in his 1996 volume—notably the influence of the private, commercial sector on public institutions, and the question of “value versus demand” in materials selection. However, though grounded in the same belief that public libraries can and should reconnect with their traditional values, Usherwood (2007a, p. vii) seems less confident here about achieving this in practice, apologizing in the preface for the book’s “polemical” tone that arose from his frustration, disappointment, and depression at some of the attitudes that he found among contemporary professionals.

In a *Library Review* article published in the same year as *Equity and Excellence*, Usherwood (2007b) revisits his concerns about professional values in public libraries by returning to arguments advanced in a similar article written more than a quarter of a century earlier (Usherwood, 1980a), and he reiterates the disappointment expressed in his book. Usherwood (2007b) notes some progress in the adoption by the LA and its successor body, the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP), of a code of conduct/professional practice—an area where Usherwood (1981d) himself played a leading role as chair of the LA working party—and some improvements too in the relationship between library school academics and public library managers, but he expresses continuing concerns about the limited impact of research on policy and practice and the “dispiriting anti-intellectual attitudes” still discernible in the profession (Usherwood, 2007b, p. 675). He also repeats here his concerns about the cult of the *customer* and obsession with technology that seem to have displaced serious debate about ethics or values and criticizes the anti-professionalism that he detected among senior practitioners. The end of the article identifies signs of a possible rehabilitation of the professions in U.K. society but also observes that public librarians first need to recognize and engage with the skills and values of their profession.

It is probably indicative of the changing attitudes detected by Usherwood (2007a, 2007b) that *Equity and Excellence* received a mixed reception from reviewers, attracting a more varied set of responses than his previous books—which is arguably a measure of its success, in that the text helped to stimulate the type of debate that had seemed to be absent from contemporary professional discourse. A notable example was the public debate staged by SINTO (a partnership of library and information services based in Sheffield) in early 2009, in which Usherwood confronted one of the book’s strongest critics, John Pateman (2008, p. 44), who described the work as “important and persuasive . . . educational, entertaining, inspirational” but argued that “the world has moved on and [Usherwood’s] notions of excellence belong to the past.” Chaired by a local Councillor (the cabinet member responsible for libraries in Sheffield), the discussion ranged over multiple issues related to staffing, services, and stock but

centered on the question of whether professional judgment or popular demand should determine the selection of library materials (Walker & Manecke, 2009). Ultimately, the audience was undecided, but the high level of engagement by local practitioners was a positive sign in itself.

The present review of Usherwood's work has concentrated on his research, with particular reference to his efforts to put research into policy and practice. It has covered only part of his published output, omitting many conference papers, book chapters, and shorter articles in professional periodicals and other works, his journalism, and book reviews. It has also been selective in the coverage of his research but has aimed nevertheless to capture and convey the key themes and dominant concerns of his work, which have emerged here as library values, public service, professional engagement, intellectual standards, literary excellence, and, noticeably, research impact. While much of his writing, especially in his books, can be viewed as a response to the particular challenges of the time, many of the issues discussed still resonate decades later. Most of his funded research projects have also made valuable and lasting contributions beyond their specific findings, notably by introducing new methodologies to the library and information sector, by demonstrating the benefits of using qualitative and mixed methods to evidence value and impact, and by illustrating different ways of engaging the interests of diverse stakeholders. Usherwood's books, in particular, show how faculty members can communicate serious issues to library practitioners in an entertaining way.

The quality of Usherwood's work—using "quality" here in the management sense of fitness for purpose or use—is unquestionable, and reviewing the research described here has confirmed that his reputation as one of the leading scholars in the field of librarianship is fully deserved. The establishment of the Centre for the Public Library and Information in Society in the late 1990s has meant that many of the publications cited here along with numerous other valuable public library research reports can be easily accessed via the CPLIS web site, including more than one hundred master's dissertations on public library topics, which represent a very important part of Usherwood's legacy at the University of Sheffield, and a visible reminder of the benefits of engaging students of librarianship in academic research.

Bob Usherwood, like many other librarians of his generation, was strongly influenced by, and took significant inspiration from, the writings of Richard Hoggart, whom he quotes several times in both *Rediscovering Public Library Management* and *Equity and Excellence in the Public Library*, and whose seminal text, *The Uses of Literacy*, he revisited on the fiftieth anniversary of its publication (Usherwood, 2009). In turn, borrowing from the title of Usherwood's (2002c) account of library and information services in the United Kingdom, he himself has given current and future generations of academics and practitioners both "the inspiration and the facts" to

inform and enhance their research and practice. As a final accolade in this Sheffield fiftieth anniversary assessment of Usherwood's work, it seems fitting then to conclude here with a quotation from the eminent British sociologist, Frank Webster (2009, p. 51), who aptly described *Equity and Excellence* as "Richard Hoggart for librarians."

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