Refereed article
A distance learning course in research skills for public librarians – an evaluation

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Abstract

Considers a number of issues related to the development, at the University of Central England in Birmingham, of a distance learning course in research skills for public librarians. The course was initially developed as part of the Library and Information Commission funded project, Developing Research in Public Libraries. Discusses the need for a stronger culture of research in public libraries and the immediate and long-term benefits, for public librarians, of a distance learning course in research skills. The evaluation of a pilot distance-learning course indicated that librarians enrolled on the course perceived it as offering much needed training in a range of research skills. The main concerns relate to the lack of support from public library managers and the limited opportunities for librarians to share their knowledge with their colleagues. Reinforces the arguments for a distance learning course in research training that offers librarians the opportunity to develop and consolidate their research skills in their own time and at their own pace. However, the authors recognise that such a course can only accomplish its aims if public library authorities are prepared to support and encourage staff enrolled on the course.

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Introduction

This paper considers a number of issues related to the development of a pilot distance learning course in research skills for public librarians. The course was developed as part of the British Library Research and Innovation Centre (BLRIC) funded research project on Developing Research in Public Libraries (DRIPL) that was conducted by the Centre for Information Research (CIRT) at the University of Central England in Birmingham (UCE) between August 1997 and July 1999[1]. The course was devised, administered and tutored by staff in the Centre for Information Research and the School of Information Studies at UCE. The purpose of the paper is to consider some of the immediate and long-term benefits for public librarians of a course that offered much needed training in research skills. The paper also discusses some of the concerns raised by students and tutors about certain aspects of course delivery, as well as the effects on students of the generally poor levels of support and encouragement received from their public library employers. The arguments presented in this paper are the result of ongoing feedback from the students and tutors involved in the pilot course; comments from members of the steering group who had staff enrolled on the course; and the findings of the DRIPL report (Thebridge *et al.*, 1999). This is supplemented by information gleaned from follow-up questionnaires that were sent out, in March 2000, to all 32 students who had enrolled on the course. A total of 21 questionnaires were returned, representing a 66 per cent response rate.

Background to course

The DRIPL project resulted from general concern within the library profession at the shortage of research expertise in the public library sector. An earlier BLRIC-funded report into *Research in Public Libraries*, written by John Pluse and Ray Prytherch (Pluse and Prytherch, 1996), had resulted in the establishment of a database containing details of public library related research and investigation projects carried out since 1982. The report had also provided a table of priority topics for research and made recommendations for an appropriate

mechanism for co-ordinating research and investigation activity in the future. Although Pluse and Prytherch's mapping work provided a sound base for the future of public library research strategy, its recommendation for the establishment of a single body to take on responsibility for co-ordinating research was not carried out. The Library and Information Commission's 1998 report, *Prospects: A Strategy for Action*, built on the work of Pluse and Prytherch and consolidated many of the strategic research issues which public library managers specifically need to address. The report (Library and Information Commission, 1998, p. 20) argued that:

> Research skills should form part of core competences for library and information workers at all levels and in all sectors of the information community. These skills include:
> - Analytical thinking and problem solving.
> - An understanding of research methodologies.
> - Critical appraisal of research.
> - How to apply research in practice.
> - Writing effective research proposals.

The report (Library and Information Commission, 1998, p. 21) went on to suggest that there was a need to:

> address ways of ensuring that high quality research skills are available within the library and information sector.

In particular there was a need to determine how to:

- Identify and promote best practice in research instruction in the initial education and training of information workers.
- Deliver these skills also through continuing professional development programmes to ensure that they reach the widest possible community.
- Use open and distance learning methods effectively.
- Co-ordinate the various training provision in the public and private sectors.

Following the publication of Pluse and Prytherch's report, BLRIC put out an invitation to tender for the *Developing Research in Public Libraries* project (Thebridge *et al.*, 1999, p. 7). The main objectives of the project were to develop the research expertise of public librarians and to provide training in effective methods of disseminating results. The successful proposal to conduct the project, tendered by the Centre for

Information Research (CIRT) at the University of Central England in Birmingham, identified three main aims (Thebridge *et al.*, 1999, p. 7), to:

(1) Develop research expertise in the public library sector.
(2) Encourage practitioners to undertake and act on research and to develop effective methods of disseminating research results.
(3) Develop a long-term strategy to ensure that the research expertise and dissemination methods developed continued beyond the end of the project.

A substantial element of the project was the design and piloting of a course in research skills for public librarians. The objectives of the course (Thebridge *et al.*, 1999, p. 8) were to:

- Help public librarians to identify researchable problems.
- Show how research ideas can be turned into proposals suitable for research funders.
- Help public librarians identify potential funders for research.
- Explore and promote appropriate research methodologies.
- Train public librarians in research methods.

Initially, a traditionally taught course was designed and piloted with a group of 14 public librarians in December 1997. As a result of the pilot, the course was refined and delivered as a three-day course in eight locations: Cambridge; Leeds; Liverpool; Bristol; Belfast; Glasgow; London; and Birmingham. Each of the courses was attended by between 12 and 22 public librarians (see Thebridge *et al.*, 1999, pp. 9-11).

In addition to the three-day course, the project had a remit to establish a distance learning course to make the training available to authorities that were geographically remote or did not have the resources to spare staff, and for staff who preferred to learn in this way. It was felt that a distance learning option would give authorities the flexibility they required to allow staff to acquire basic research skills at their own pace. The course was offered as a pilot scheme free of charge and was advertised directly to all public library authorities as well as in the professional press. It was decided that priority

would be given to applicants from authorities that had not sent delegates to any of the three-day courses. Heads of service were asked for a commitment to support staff by allowing them study leave and flexibility in their work patterns. Although there was no accreditation for the course (i.e. students would not receive a recognised qualification on the successful completion of the course), students were informed that they could use the course as a means of entry to the then MA/MSc Information and Library Studies Research Entry course at the University of Central England in Birmingham. They could choose to undertake a more extensive research proposal as one of their assignments and, if successful in their application, could be considered as being exempt from the research methods stage of the course (see Thebridge *et al.*, 1999, pp. 16-17).

Setting up the course

Designing, administering and tutoring a new distance learning course under the time constraints imposed by project deadlines presented a number of challenges for the staff involved in the project. First, it was necessary to secure, relatively quickly, an adequate number of students to make the course viable. Eventually, 32 students from 19 different authorities were enrolled on to the course but there was no selection procedure. The decision of the course team not to exclude anyone from the course on grounds of inappropriate academic qualifications led to difficulties later on, as the students enrolled on the course came from different levels of seniority in the profession and from different research backgrounds. This meant that course modules did not meet the requirements and expectations of all students.

Second, materials had to be designed and sent out to students within a very short time-scale. Owing to unavoidable delays at the beginning of the course and the time constraints necessitated by the project deadline, students had only a limited time (one month) to complete each of the six modules. As most of the students were in full-time employment, it was recognised that many would struggle to keep up with the workload.

Finally, there was some confusion about the relationship between personal tutors and students. Although the course administrator gave all students the names and contact details of their tutors, it was left to students to make the first contact. With hindsight, it would have been preferable for the tutors to have made the initial contact with their students, as some students may have been uncertain about the availability of their tutors or too reserved to make the initial approach.

Course content

The course comprised six modules that guided students through the research process. The modules were as follows:

(1) *Introduction – what is research?* The contents of this module included defining research; carrying out a literature review; and approaches to research.
(2) *Research methods 1.* This included selecting samples and designing questionnaires.
(3) *Research methods 2.* This module introduced students to other research methods, notably observation and content analysis.
(4) *Analysis.* The module introduced students to qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis.
(5) *Planning and managing projects.* The contents of this module included securing funding and writing proposals.
(6) *Presentation and dissemination.* This module contained a tutorial on styles and levels of presentation required and on the dissemination of research findings.

Each module comprised a workbook containing a tutorial, a number of short tasks, two major assignments, answers to the short tasks and an evaluation form. A glossary of research terms and a general bibliography were sent to students with the first module and further reading, where appropriate, was incorporated into individual modules.

Each module contained two assignments that had to be completed satisfactorily before the student could advance to the next module. Subjects for assignments included the following:

- A memo to the participant's library manager outlining a proposal for the British Library's call for research

proposals as part of the value and impact in libraries programme.

- A literature review to support the outline proposal.
- Design of a questionnaire to provide data on the public's perception of opening hours in the student's library service.
- Design of an interview programme to follow on from inconclusive data received in a questionnaire.
- Review of observation styles and outline of a library situation which could be improved by observation, showing how this could be achieved.
- Conversion of statistics into charts and graphs suitable for inclusion in a public library's annual report.

The course also included a study day for students at the University of Central England which, although not essential to the completion of the course, encouraged participants to meet their tutors and other students on the course and to benefit from group research workshops (see Thebridge *et al.,* 1999, pp. 17-18).

Completion and feedback

Table I displays the completion figures for the distance learning course.

More than a third successfully passed the course, but almost half the students failed to complete the first module and then dropped out.

As this was a pilot course, evaluation was of the utmost importance. The course organisers and tutors were particularly interested in the students' perceptions of:

- The strengths of the course.
- The skills that the students felt they had learned or developed on the course.
- Ways in which the skills could be put into practice.
- Plans to cascade their training to other staff.
- Ways in which the course could be strengthened.

In the light of the number of students who did not complete the course, the course organisers and tutors were also interested in:

- The level of study leave and mentor support that students received from their employers.
- Reasons for withdrawing from the course.

In order to achieve a detailed evaluation of the course, a range of methods was used to encourage constructive feedback. These included the following:

- An evaluation form sent out to students with each module.
- A course evaluation form sent out to all students.
- A study day giving students the opportunity to express their views on the course.
- Informal feedback with course administrator and through tutors.
- Feedback from tutors.
- Feedback from three project steering group members who had members of their staff enrolled on the course (see Thebridge *et al.*, 1999, p. 20).
- A follow-up evaluation questionnaire sent out to all students in March 2000.

Strengths and benefits of the course

Most of the students responded positively to the contents of the course and even those who had withdrawn from the course at an early stage felt that they had benefited in some way from participating in it. One participant said that she had "enjoyed the course and found it useful and relevant" to her work. The same respondent mentioned the sense of achievement she had felt on completing the course and commented on how the course had "heightened" her "awareness of research methods" and made her "more likely to use these" in the future. Others described the course as "very good", "interesting and stimulating", "extensive", "worth it", and "useful and well structured".

Students praised the course as having helped them develop and consolidate a range of skills that would benefit them in their work.

Apart from providing the participants with opportunities to think about research issues in public libraries, the course had consolidated their own personal experience of research. This was emphasised by one participant who

Table I Completion of distance learning course

	Modules completed						
Module number	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
Number of students	32	12	0	2	2	1	1	14
Percentage	100.0	38.0		6.0	6.0	3.0	3.0	44.0

considered the course to be a "good refresher" as he "had done research methods" during his degree course.

Others felt that the course had increased their awareness of research methods. One participant praised the course for having "broadened" her view "as to methods" and made her "think about a research element when writing project proformas". A second believed that the "knowledge acquired and the research needed to complete the modules were excellent practice to attain the skills which can be looked at again to refresh my memory". Another participant indicated that the course had helped her to think more methodically and had given her a better understanding of how to carry out research.

Participants also believed that the course had helped them develop a greater understanding of appropriate methods. One participant suggested that he felt "better able to build evaluation into the work" that he would be doing on reader development. A second participant indicated that the course had helped her to focus better the way she approached her research when she began work on a new project. Another felt that the course had provided a "good background in working out consultation methods" for his new job, thus enabling him to know "what to use and when".

Other benefits mentioned by the participants included developing their confidence in their research skills; developing their ability to communicate more easily with senior colleagues and external bodies; and enabling them to appreciate the need to share the outcomes of their research.

Opportunities to put skills into practice and to cascade training

Seven of the ten respondents to the follow-up survey who had successfully completed the course had been able to use their skills in the workplace. Areas in which respondents indicated that they had been able to use newly learned skills included:

- Needs assessment for young library users
- Training needs analysis for information communications training (ICT).
- User surveys.
- Evaluation of the Bookstart initiative[2].

- Chartered Institute of Public Finance Accountancy (CIPFA) adult and children's surveys.
- Funding bids.
- Exit surveys.
- Research into the library needs of young people in schools.

However, other respondents felt that research was a low priority in their authorities and that they were unlikely to have opportunities to use the skills they had acquired on the course.

Unfortunately, only three of the respondents had taken or been given the opportunity to cascade what they had learned on the course to their colleagues. Reasons given by respondents for the failure to pass on skills learned on the course included shortage of time and the low priority of research in specific authorities.

In the three authorities where the newly acquired research skills were to be cascaded to staff, plans appeared to be low-key and *ad hoc*. One authority was organising a training session in the autumn for any interested members of staff, at another authority the member of staff who had been enrolled on the course was to give a short presentation, and at the third authority cascading was still at the "planning stage".

The lack of opportunities at many authorities for staff to get involved in training initiatives and the lack of any policy or will to involve staff in research training suggest that research may have a low priority among some public library authorities. The provision of training in research for public librarians will only be worthwhile for the individual and the training institution when public library authorities are prepared to acknowledge the importance of research; provide support to employees who wish to develop research skills; and give them opportunities to use the skills they have learned and pass them on to their colleagues.

Practical issues relating to course development and the delivery of the distance learning course

Time-scale
The time-scale for setting up and delivering the pilot course was determined by project deadlines. The course was due to run from November 1998 to May 1999 but delays caused by the difficulties of securing adequate numbers of students and preparing

the first module meant that the start of the course had to be postponed until January 1999. The delayed start led to the final deadline for submission of work being extended initially until July 1999. However, the deadline was later extended to September 1999 to enable more students to complete the course. The original requirement for the course to be completed in seven months imposed a tight timescale on students that would not usually be expected on a distance learning course.

Some students appreciated the tight deadlines, indicating that it made them focus on completing each module. Only one of the 12 students who completed the course complained about the tight deadlines. However, nine of the 20 students who withdrew from the course indicated that they could not cope with the workload on top of demanding jobs. It is significant that six of these withdrew before completing the first module, suggesting, perhaps, that they were not prepared for the demands on time required for the course and the level of difficulty of its contents.

The problems regarding the time-scale for the pilot course were recognised by the organisers and tutors of the course as being due primarily to the constraints imposed by project deadlines and difficulties in recruiting students and designing materials for a new course in a short time span. Neither the time constraints nor the design of materials should present a problem if the course is offered in the future. Furthermore, the provision of more time for recruitment in the future could be used to ensure that the course is marketed more effectively and that students who are enrolled on to the course are aware of the level of commitment and the standards of work that are expected from them.

Learning support

The evaluation process indicated that students who were struggling to complete modules did not approach their tutors. The course team felt that one of the reasons for this might be that the term "tutor" was off-putting to some participants and that a more accessible title such as "mentor" or "helper" would be more appropriate. However, it is also evident that the lack of early contact between tutors and students in some instances made students reticent about approaching tutors when they were

undergoing difficulties with the course. Although students were given the names and contact details of their tutors at an early stage, many may well have been too reserved or uncertain about the availability of their tutors to make the initial contact at an early stage. In future it would be beneficial if tutors made the initial contact at the beginning of the course.

Furthermore, a number of students suggested that it would be more useful to have the study day near the beginning, than in the middle of the course. This would enable students to meet their tutors and each other and to establish networks at an early stage of the course. One of the biggest problems for distance learners is their sense of studying in isolation. If, at times of difficulty, they are confident of being able to talk to other students or contact their tutors, they are more likely to find the motivation to overcome their difficulties.

It was also evident from the students' evaluation forms and the comments of steering group members who had staff enrolled on the course that line managers did not, on the whole, provide adequate support for employees who were studying the course. Fourteen of the respondents to the follow-up survey (67 per cent) complained that their employers had not given them any study leave for the duration of the course. Furthermore, those who had received study leave were offered only the occasional day. In addition, only three of the respondents (14 per cent) had received mentor support from their employers. What is interesting about these figures is that six of the seven respondents who had received study leave and all three respondents who had received mentor support successfully completed the course, indicating that the lack of support from employers was a factor in students not completing the course. It is crucial, then, to the success of the course and the training of library and information services professionals in general that employers are encouraged to make a commitment to providing study time and mentor support for their employees. As was emphasised in the recent LIC funded project, *Training the Future*:

> Support is essential to successful learning. The amounts of support staff need will vary widely from one person to the next, but nearly everyone needs encouragement. Line managers have a key support role that includes motivating staff, taking an interest in learners' progress and

ensuring adequate time for learning (Jones *et al.*, 1999, p. 47).

Some of the course tutors raised concerns about the framework for marking and returning modules. As there were a number of tutors involved with marking course assignments it was felt that it was difficult to ensure that they were all marking to the same standard. Although there was some discussion and comparison of submitted work among tutors, it was felt that in future a more formal framework was necessary. Furthermore, the decision not to grade work but simply to award "pass" or "fail" marks was questioned by some of the respondents who indicated that they would have worked harder if they had been given a grade. As one student commented: "I found the fact that we were not marked on a percentage basis, only passed or failed, meant I did not strive as hard as I could have". Grading assignments might also give students a clearer indication of how they are progressing on the course.

Course modules
Format and workbook design
In general the students felt that the design of the workbooks made them easy to work through. However, some students thought that having the answers to the tasks at the back of the workbook made it difficult for them to complete the tasks without looking up the answers first. As a result of this concern the course designers agreed to consider the possibility of sending the answers out separately, perhaps with the next module. One student suggested that "it would be more fitting to use more up to date methods of delivery – online/CD-ROM". While the advantages of this are recognisable it would, nevertheless, create a number of problems. For example, those students who did not have access to ICT facilities at home or at work would be put at a clear disadvantage to others. It should be borne in mind that many public libraries are not yet connected to the Internet and do not offer CD-ROM facilities. Even with the course material in print form some students found it difficult to access required resources. One student complained that "access to sources and materials was presumed to be available in the workplace when in fact it involved specific visits to academic institutions". Although the use of the Internet or CD-ROM for delivering some parts of the course might be possible in the near future, delivery of the course in paper form is the only way, at present, to ensure that the material is accessible to all current and potential students.

Supporting materials and administration
Although, in general terms, most students were happy with the way the course had been administered, it was felt that the administration of the registration procedure would need improving. Students would have liked a fuller outline of course content and some indication of the commitment expected from them before registering. It was also felt that the bibliography and glossary could have been sent out in advance of the first module to give students longer to find key texts. This was particularly relevant in the light of the tight time-scale for the first module, which included a literature review.

It should be acknowledged, however, that these problems resulted primarily from the difficulties of designing a new course and producing course materials within the constraints of project deadlines. As the course has now been established and the materials produced, there is no reason for these problems to be repeated in future years.

Other comments regarding supporting material included the suggestion that copies of extracts from key texts and short articles should be provided as part of the course work. The course team agreed to investigate the possibility of providing this material in the future.

Course workload
In the final evaluation, students were asked whether they considered the course workload to have been "harder than they expected"; "as they expected"; or "easier than they expected". Of the eight respondents who had completed the course, two said it was harder, two that it was easier, and four said it was what they had expected. Among responses from students who had withdrawn from the course, one felt that his newness to library work had been a drawback, while another complained that she had been unable to access adequate bibliographic resources. One student believed that she would not have completed the course without the support of her employer because "some knowledge of research techniques is assumed". The different perceptions among students of the level of difficulty of the course suggest that the

research experience of students enrolled on the course ranged from complete beginner to fairly proficient, and that students who had different levels of experience had different expectations of the course.

Concerns about the wide range of ability among students enrolled on the course were reinforced by the comments of tutors. While most students had little difficulty completing the assignments, a small number were required to re-submit their work because it appeared that they had failed to understand the requirements. Difficulties tended to occur with individuals' levels of expertise and therefore there was no need to make wholesale changes to the content of the module. It was considered important that, in order to complete the course, students should be expected to draw on practical public library experience as well as academic strengths. In general it was felt that, rather than lower the academic standards of the course, it would be preferable to ensure that potential students were aware of the expectations of the course and prepared to make the required commitment. The maintenance of standards was particularly important if completion of the course was going to lead to accreditation for validated Master's degree courses. The tutoring process could be tailored to offer additional help and advice to more inexperienced students.

As at least one student felt that there should have been guidelines about the standard of presentation required, it was decided that in future a statement about standards of presentation, along with clearer guidelines about standards of work submitted would need to be given.

Module content – tasks
Course feedback supported the view of the course designers that some tasks were less challenging than others. However, the course writers believed that it was important to ensure that students did not feel intimidated by tasks that were always very demanding and that they were given opportunities to develop their confidence.

Module content – assignments
The assignments varied considerably between modules and represented the area where most change would need to occur in any revision of the course. Although sample answers were devised for some assignments, it was felt that it might be helpful to provide them for all

marked work. This is a revision that needs to be thought through carefully. Although sample answers may be appropriate for some of the assignments, providing them for all assignments could encourage uniformity at the expense of intellectual rigour.

The evaluation showed that there was a great deal of student anxiety over the literature review in Module 1 and that the course team underestimated the challenge that a literature review might pose to some librarians who had not written "academic" prose for some time. Many students were overwhelmed by the size of the task and some did not appreciate the difference between a literature review and a literature search, despite the clear explanation provided in the module. A few students found it difficult to access the resources required to produce an adequate review. Although the course writers spent a great deal of time assessing the pros and cons of incorporating such a major assignment in the first module, it is evident from the difficulties encountered that these issues need to be addressed again. Considering that 14 students (44 per cent) withdrew from the course without completing this module, it might well be psychologically advantageous to present a less demanding module at the beginning of the course to enable students to gain confidence before tackling relatively difficult tasks.

In addition, there was some concern that, whereas the first five modules had two assignments, Module 6 had three. Although the three were shorter than the two for the previous modules, it was recognised as being psychologically unhelpful for students to be confronted with an additional assignment at this stage in the course. As all the previous modules contained two assignments, students would approach the final module expecting the same number of assignments. It could well be dispiriting for them to discover that they are expected to complete an extra assignment. Some re-working of this module is necessary to reduce the number of assignments to two.

Conclusions

Summary of general benefits of the course

- The course was generally well received by students. Many found it enjoyable,

"useful and relevant", "interesting and stimulating", "extensive" and "well structured".

- The course offered much-needed training for public librarians. Most of the students praised the course as having helped them to develop and consolidate a range of skills that would benefit them in their work

- The course reinforced the research strengths of students. A number of the students who had successfully completed the course had been able to use newly acquired skills in the workplace. Projects on which the skills had been used included user surveys, evaluations and funding bids.

Course content and administration

- The study day should have taken place at the beginning of the course, enabling students to make early contact with tutors and other students.

- Tutors should have made initial contact by phone, to enable relationships to be established at an early stage.

- Procedures for marking consistency need to be established. Grading of marks could be considered.

- The short time-scale for the course caused problems for some of the students.

- The literature review was too demanding to be included in the first module. Although there were a number of reasons for students withdrawing from the course, it is worrying that 14 students (44 per cent) withdrew from the course without completing this module.

- Clearer guidelines about the time commitment, level of experience, knowledge or academic qualifications required for the course should be provided.

- There were concerns about the wide range of ability among students enrolled on the course. It is apparent that some students were unprepared for the academic expectations of the course.

- Providing course materials on the Internet or CD-ROM ought to be considered. However, it needs to be borne in mind that a number of potential students do not have easy access to ICT facilities.

- Successful students should be awarded a certificate of attainment which could be used for career development purposes. The possibility of exemptions from part of a Master's course could have been promoted more strongly.

Support from library authorities

- It was evident that library authorities were not, on the whole, providing adequate support for employees who were enrolled on the course. Only 33 per cent of respondents to the course evaluation had received study leave, and only 14 per cent had received mentor support from their employers.

- There was little opportunity for students to share what they had learned on the course with their colleagues. Only three of the respondents had taken or been given the opportunity to pass on their newly acquired skills to colleagues.

The future of training in research for public librarians

The course successfully provided public librarians with much-needed training in research skills. The advantage of offering the training in the form of a distance learning course is that it enables students to study in their own time and at their own pace and to have in their possession a range of course materials that they can refer to at a later date. The positive reception of the course among students is encouraging, and it is clear that the course filled a genuine gap in the market. It would be advantageous to public librarians if the course could be continued, although some of the concerns raised by students and tutors would need to be addressed.

One key finding from the evaluation is that library authorities need to be encouraged to offer more individual support to staff enrolled on such a course. This support includes study leave and mentoring. Just as important, library authorities should be encouraged to provide employees who have completed the course the opportunity to use their skills and to pass on their knowledge to their colleagues. It might be necessary to provide employers with detailed guidelines about minimum levels of support required. The evaluation indicated that support from employers was crucial to the success of the student.

The evaluation of the pilot distance-learning course reinforces the arguments for a course that offers public librarians the opportunity to develop and consolidate their research skills in their own time and at their own pace. Courses such as the one piloted at UCE provide opportunities for public library authorities to develop or strengthen their research cultures in order to meet the demands that will be placed on public libraries in the twenty-first century. However, it is important to stress that research skills cannot be imposed on the public library culture from outside. The authorities themselves have a key role to play in the research training of their staff and courses such as the one offered at UCE can only accomplish their aims with the support and encouragement of public library managers.

Notes

1 In April 1999 the British Library Research and Innovation Centre (BLRIC) became part of the Library and Information Commission (LIC), now Resource: The Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries.

2 Bookstart was initially a co-operative project between Birmingham library services and Young Book Trust that provided free book packs to the parents of babies in the region, at the babies' eight-month developmental check. The project has subsequently been adopted by a number of authorities throughout the country and is currently sponsored by Sainsbury's.

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