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A snapshot of the U.K. with reference to children's libraries and literature

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Good afternoon colleagues and welcome to the United Kingdom. I am Karen Usher. I am the current Chair of CILIP's special interest group - the Youth Libraries Group which is why I have been invited to speak to you today.

I am also a School Librarian. I work in a comprehensive school with 1700 (12-18 yr. old) students in East Yorkshire. OFSTED, who inspect schools in England, say we are a 'good' school. We have very good exam results but the socio-economic background of our students suggests that our exam results are not a surprise. The School is in a rural area with well off parents and well motivated students. The Library is too small (about 160 square metres) but is used for research, homework and leisure reading by a large number of the students. There are two of us staffing it on a part-time basis so students have access throughout the school day. I am in charge of my library and very happy to be there.

I have been involved with YLG for over 20 years and can honestly say that things have always been in a state of change and always will be. Children's Library Services move with the times and continue to do their best to serve the diverse needs of their customers.

Training for work with children, either in public or school libraries has almost disappeared from higher education courses as the emphasis moved to management and computer based skills. In the last couple of

years the courses run by Aberystwyth and UCE on working with children have been joined by courses at West Sussex and Bristol, some are practitioner led. We must congratulate them on their farsightedness. Graduates who find themselves providing a service to children and young people often have learned 'on the hoof' with in-service and regional training to develop the professional skills necessary to provide these services. CILIP, the Youth Libraries Group, the Schools Libraries Group and the School Library Association run many courses providing continuous professional development.

In the past most authorities would have their 'children's librarians' and depending on the size of the Authority, its structure and the status of its senior children's specialist the service would deliver a range of provision to children: Books, storytime activities and author visits, a School Library Service.....

During the last twenty years there have been numerous reorganisations and reviews - almost all resulting in staff or service reductions. Structures have changed, specialists have disappeared in some areas altogether, in others, teams have taken on services to everyone by everyone.

In the North East of England today one authority is dispensing with its children's specialists while another authority, just down the road is introducing them. The local Head of Library Services' policy prevails in their authority and the result is a huge diversity of provision and of expectation from our users.

However, on a brighter note, in June 2002 a questionnaire sent to members of ASCEL (Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians) showed that 70% of all authorities have a designated Early Years Library Post. This represents a massive expansion of a new stream of specialists. At the same time 56% of libraries are members of Early Years Childcare Development Partnerships which have an increasing strategic importance in the delivery of children's services.

The Fair Funding process has made most School Library Services self-financing business units. At its most simple this free market process devolves money to Schools to buy the services they want and not those that are dictated by their Local Authority. Again this has led to diversity of provision but where they exist the average amount expended per pupil by School Library Services has stayed the same since 1995.

Library services in the U.K. are under examination today more than ever before, performance and measurement are the driving forces behind management thinking and all of this impacts on the frontline services. Which brings me to Best Value.

"Best Value" is a challenging framework to improve local services. Under best value, local authorities are required to assess their own performance and put in place measures to ensure continual improvements in these services. They must demonstrate value for money, cost effectiveness and high quality of service.

In recent years Lifelong Learning has become a popular catchall. It encompasses so much of what libraries have always done, and are continuing to embrace. In policy terms, this is usually defined as post-16 learning, in an informal or non-statutory setting, but public library services in particular have been quick to adapt the term, and the ethos behind it, to a range of learning-focused services, including Bookstart, Homework Clubs and study support, summer reading programmes, reading groups (for all ages), family learning activities and many more.

Information and Computing Technologies are an increasing part of everyday life. Libraries have been using new technologies since they first arrived as a management tool but increasingly access for our users has become an integral part of our service and now we have the Peoples Network. A multi-million pound project, which aims to see over 4000 libraries connected to the Internet and on-line services by the end of

2002. By March this year 69% of the U.K.'s libraries were connected. These services are usually available to all users. The People's Network, delivers free Internet access and other computer facilities to all through the public library. It satisfies another Government aim of providing inclusive, high-quality, customer-focused access to learning. This supports, materially, other areas of development such as Lifelong Learning and Homework Clubs.

Social inclusion is another overarching government aim that libraries have always aspired to. As children's librarians we have always taken care to provide books, activities and resources that appeal to the broadest range of children. Many projects have targeted specific groups: Kent's Services to Asylum Seekers and Refugee Children, Tameside's School Library Service project with looked after children and Lewisham Libraries work with Permanently Excluded Pupils to name but three. There are many other social inclusion projects.

The Bookstart initiative was developed by the BookTrust to encourage all parents and carers to share books with their babies from a very early age - a pack, containing books and information on local libraries, was presented at baby's 7-9 month check-up, generally by the health visitor. The initiative began in 1992, and two-year funding support by Sainsbury's (a major UK supermarket chain) meant that by summer 2000 210 schemes covered 92% of the UK.

Bookstart's approach mirrors the fundamental inclusivity of libraries - every child can have a library card so every child has been entitled to book ownership through Bookstart. A recent input of £500,000 of funding from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport to Bookstart has enabled it to continue developing in anticipation of the New Opportunities Funding in 2004. For instance a new Bookstart Handbook is being prepared. Children's Librarians are looking forward to working with health professionals and will be responsible for local content, delivery and monitoring.

As with many other initiatives monitoring and evaluation have become an integral part of the children's librarians work - we need to show the value and effects of what we are doing. This in turn supports new bids for new projects.

Children's librarians across the country have also been keen to be involved in the Sure Start programme. The Sure Start programme is a targeted initiative and aims to provide a range of childcare and parental support services to give children from disadvantaged backgrounds improved life chances. A recent survey showed 92% of Sure Start projects had library partnership at some level. Libraries are able to play a significant role in fulfilling Objective 3 of the Sure Start programme 'Improving children's ability to learn'. Integral to this is the increased use of libraries by families with young children in Sure Start areas.

Reader development is the umbrella term coined for activities to encourage reading. Children's librarians have always organised activities that encourage reader development - school visits, storytimes, book related activities, and author/illustrator visits. In a climate of measurement and outcomes it is necessary to define why we do what we do and why it is worthwhile. A recent bid to the DCMS/Wolfson Public Libraries Challenge Fund by LaunchPad has resulted in 'Their Reading Futures' This programme is a huge joint project involving everybody interested in children's librarianship. It aims to redefine, support and refresh reader development work with young people, strengthening and enhancing children's service and improving equality of access. Their Reading Futures is a three year programme and this September should see the launch of a website that will enable all local authorities to audit their present provision, help train their staff and plan for future development.

LaunchPad has now merged with Well Worth Reading and The Reading Partnership to form The Reading Agency. This innovative organisation will continue other ground breaking initiatives. For example this is the fourth year of the Summer Reading Challenge. 'The Reading Planet' promotion has registered half a million children, aged 4 - 11 years old in over 4000 libraries across the UK this summer. As a national scheme the Reading Challenge has the economies of scale which produces high quality material to tempt our young readers. Next year's challenge is already planned and we all look forward to the theme being revealed.

An area where reader interest and involvement has grown enormously is in Awards and Prizes. (OHP of list) On this list are 37 Book prizes and Awards, 32 administered within the U.K. At least 12 involve children and young people in their deliberations. I believe we should listen to and value the opinion of young people.

I also believe we should value adults and their long experience and commitment to the promotion of books and literature. Which is why I am proud to be this year's Chair of Carnegie and Kate Greenaway Judging Panel. On our panel we do not use the word 'best'. As adults with a very wide range of experience, over 200 years in this case we know we can only pick an outstanding work. However I am particularly pleased that this year we recognised the outstanding literary talent of Terry Pratchett - a popular genre author, in 'The Amazing Maurice and his Educated Rodents'. We also recognised the outstanding qualities and importance of illustration in an information book with Chris Riddell's 'Pirate Diary' Please come and see these wonderful books in the Model Children's Library, we can talk about books (conspiratorial air!!)

The Carnegie and Kate Greenaway Medals have an extensive Shadowing Scheme. This year over 600 schools read the shortlists at the same time as the judges and made their forthright comments on the Shadowing website. The aim of the scheme is to encouraging the reading of quality literature and to stimulate discussion - talking about books again.

Special mention must be made here of the achievement of Philip Pullman who won the overall prize in this year's Whitbread Award for 'The Amber Spyglass', the third book in the 'His Dark Materials' trilogy. Written as a trilogy for young people these imaginative, complex and stimulating books are a challenge to all readers

I am particularly fond of talking about books but do have a question about prizes. Have we gone book prize mad? How worthwhile is a prize if only those nominees who turn up for the announcement are eligible to win? Will there come a time when almost every one of the 208 local authorities in the U.K. have their own award? Can we keep the momentum of support from readers, librarians, management and publishers? Not to mention the authors who already do so much for their public but who often down events so they can write!!

Publishing for children in the UK is flourishing. We have new audiences, thanks to authors like J.K.Rowling and Philip Pullman. Still more new authors bringing us fresh ideas to brighten our horizons. There are new formats in the form of e-publishing. Publishers still have working partnership with libraries to promote new titles and the joy of reading in general but they also are widening their horizons and the general consumer grows in importance. They are subject to business targets as never before so marketing is focused and inventive to catch the buyers eye, whether they are librarian or consumer. Over 9,000 children's books were published last year, public libraries spent 87 million pounds on books. Of the eleven authors issuing over 1 million books FIVE are children's writers. So there's lots to read and lots of people doing it!

I've left things out but there is so much going on in the UK as there is everywhere else. Here at IFLA we get to hear what other countries are doing, expand our horizons and learn from others. I hope you get the chance to indulge.

Lastly, the Model Children's Library. Supported by Judith Elkin in particular, CILIP has given the Youth Libraries Group 144 squares metres of valuable exhibition space and let me loose! Both Janet Liebster and Joan Thompson of CILIP gave me lots of help and advice. A Steering group was then formed and all the pieces came together. DEMCO Interiors have donated a superb library and brought in Milliken Carpets. The British Council, represented by Judith Wheeler, have been tireless in their support and are responsible for the wonderful display of material from their 'Magic Pencil' exhibition. They have also provided the feet you will see in the Exhibition, the postcards and many little touches that make the MCL a splendid place to visit. I am particularly proud of the storytellers from the four home nations that we are welcoming and the 160 children that will come and listen to them (not all at once!!) I believe this is a first for IFLA and we thank all concerned for their leap of faith in letting us arrange this. Seventeen publishers have also supported us and everything and everyone involved is listed on the website constructed for us by Andy Thomsen of Hampshire Libraries. Lastly and most importantly I would like to thank Glasgow Libraries for their help, particularly Carmela Vezza - our on the spot person, a Children's Librarian and Chair of YLG Scotland.

For this address I must thank Jonathan Douglas, Anne Marley and Sarah Wilkie for their assistance and encouragement. I am sure they will recognise where I've quoted them verbatim.

I hope you will visit the Model Children's Library and talk to us all.

In conclusion I would say that the current state of children's libraries and literature in the U.K. is innovative, energetic and flourishing.

So much going on and children's librarians are always willing to take on more in their efforts to serve the most important part of our community - the children - the future.

Thank you.