



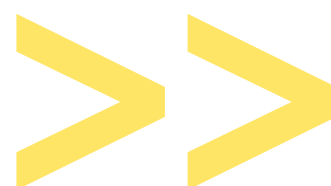
LASER
FOUNDATION
FINAL REPORT 2007
PUBLIC LIBRARIES
WHAT NEXT?

LASER FOUNDATION

SEPTEMBER 2001-APRIL 2007

Laser (London and South Eastern Library Region) was set up in 1928, with its role established by statute in the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964. Its work was to foster resource sharing via inter-library lending, and in the '80s and '90s it gained prominence in automating the procedures and developing what became the *de facto* national interlending system. It developed an international reputation for research and the promotion of electronic networks, standards and services to support interlending, cooperation, cross-sectoral resource discovery, sharing, access and delivery.

WHAT



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In 2000 the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) made a decision to make library regions coterminous with government regions. This undermined the viability of Laser as many of its members now came under different regional funding bodies.

From the various options presented to the Board it was a unanimous decision to dissolve the company and transfer its assets to a charity to be called the Laser Foundation. Its funds were to be used to promote improvements to library facilities available to the public. (For the organisation of the foundation please see Appendix 2.)

NEXT

FINAL REPORT

ON THE WORK OF THE LASER FOUNDATION

PUBLIC LIBRARIES – WHAT NEXT?

INTRODUCTION

The foundation encouraged the broadest spectrum of funding proposals and issued calls in 2002 and 2004. At all times it was prepared to welcome speculative bids. This was felt to be particularly important after the demise of the much-respected British Library Research and Innovation Centre (formerly the Research and Development Department), and, indeed, of the relatively tiny British National Bibliography Research Fund. They and their incomes had been subsumed into the Library and Information Commission, and subsequently into Resource (now the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council). No more was heard of them, and the Laser Foundation became the sector's only independent grant-making body.

FOUNDED



The Laser Foundation funded research which had wide applicability within the public library service; it also commissioned discussion papers on the service's future.

There were four dominant themes among the grants made by the foundation: the future of public libraries; complying with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995; projects which were information technology related; and consultation with hard to reach communities. All of these are recalled in the following pages. The first one – the future of the service – has the most space as it generated a great deal of debate and controversy. All reports mentioned in the text can be accessed via <http://www.bl.uk/about/cooperation/laser-pubs.html> (until end March 2009).

For most of the life of the foundation the nitty-gritty of receiving, acknowledging, sending out for review, preparing reports for the Board, and the bulk of the correspondence with applicants was carried out under contract by the British Library Cooperation and Partnership Programme.

“Professor Bullock was hugely generous of his time, indefatigable in his application, and the foundation was moulded by him”

FOUNDATION

The work was done with enviable speed and efficiency and the Board wishes to take this opportunity to pay tribute to BLCPP under Stephanie Kenna.

The foundation was fortunate in its first chairman, Professor Fred Bullock. He oversaw the conversion of the old Laser public library service company into the Laser Foundation. He was hugely generous of his time, indefatigable in his application, and the foundation was moulded by him. Professor Bullock was succeeded in 2003 by Professor Bernard Naylor, a distinguished former university librarian. Among much else, he oversaw the publication of the controversial Coates report (see page 8), and what may in due course prove even more influential, the report of the “futures” group (see page 10). Bernard Naylor was succeeded in 2005 by David Whitaker whose sad role it has been to oversee the closing down of the foundation, its assets now used up.

Throughout the life of the foundation its Company Secretary has been Frances Hendrix. Frances is widely known in the library profession as tireless – both in energy and enthusiasm – efficient, dedicated, and iconoclastic. The foundation owes her a huge debt. And as well as being efficient she has been a joy to work with.



DAVID WHITAKER, OBE
Chairman

During its lifetime The Foundation has been the only independent, and independently minded, grant giving public library body...

WORK FUNDED:

1. FUTURE OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES: THE DEBATE 2002-2006

Of the four studies described below which were commissioned by the Laser Foundation, two attracted the most attention, both inside and outside the profession. They were *Overdue: how to create a modern public library service* (April 2003) by Charles Leadbeater of the think-tank Demos, and Tim Coates' *Who's in charge: responsibilities for the public library service* (2004).

LIBRARY



Building better libraries

The Audit Commission pointed out that in 2000/01 councils spent some £770m on library services, equivalent to almost £40 per household; that visits to libraries had fallen by around two percent every year since 1993/4, with total visits down by 65 million to 288 million, some 64 million short of the targets set in national standards; that loans of books and other materials had fallen by almost one quarter since 1993/4, "a trend which, if continued, would reach zero in around 20 years time", and that "the average cost of a visit has risen 18 percent over the last seven years, to over £2.60 (not far short of the cost of buying many books)".

There was praise for a small number of examples of excellence and productive change. Overall the report was a call for action, notably from local councils. "Elected members and senior council officers should provide clear leadership and commitment to library services – contributing to and agreeing a clear vision for the future of library services and holding managers to account for the resources they use and the delivery of national standards and local targets".

In February 2003 the DCMS provided what was generally regarded as a weak response, *Framework for the future*. It devoted much of its space to what libraries can be, and indeed some of them are. There was little if any sense of the crisis implicit in the analysis from the Audit Commission, although the decline in the number of visits had been reversed, largely as a result of the national ICT provision via the People's Network.

Understandably, some people saw both reports as hostile, and the foundation itself was accused of hostility to the service. The foundation had no influence on the content of the reports. The Audit Commission's *Building better libraries* (May 2002) had identified the area as one of major importance. The foundation would have been remiss not to fund contributions to a debate which has dominated its lifetime and which, later, was to attract the attention of a House of Commons Select Committee (page 9).

DEBATE

Overdue: How to create a modern public library service

Framework had been written with the assistance of Demos. One of Demos' associates, Charles Leadbeater, had reservations about the way it had been presented. The Laser Foundation agreed to provide funds for Overdue. This report became known as "Sleepwalking", a word taken from its final paragraph: "The public library system and its funders must embrace ambitious national goals to restore confidence in the public library network as a whole. That will be achieved only with a new mix of central and local initiatives, orchestrated by a National Library Development Agency. Libraries will attract additional resources only when those responsible for them – professional librarians, local politicians, central government – put their house in order. Libraries are sleepwalking to disaster: it's time they woke up".

Introducing Leadbeater's report, launched at a conference in July 2003, Professor Bullock, then chairman of the Laser Foundation, wrote that "The DCMS Framework document was a brave attempt by DCMS to provide a strategic direction for public libraries. However, it has turned out to be short on vision, and even shorter on funding. Chief librarians and professional bodies have commented that Framework does not go far enough nor, crucially, does it approach the problems of providing mechanics to implement radical and lasting change".

Leadbeater saw the chief weakness of public libraries as their fragmentation. "There are 149 library authorities, each with its own agenda. They are funded by a clutch of central government departments and other agencies such as the National Lottery, which are poorly coordinated". He noted that DCMS was responsible for library policy, but had no money; the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister was the major funder, but set no goals; the Department for Education and Skills and the National Lottery financed programmes but had little influence over the national network.

Public service renewal, he wrote, needed strong political leadership to challenge complacency, set ambitious goals and legitimise innovation. There was little sign of this. On leadership in the profession itself he wrote that management development had been neglected, senior librarians recruited 20 or 30 years ago would soon retire, and their successors lacked leadership skills.

He advocated a National Library Development Agency with a ten year public service agreement with the Treasury to deliver:

- Policymaking and funding
- The setting of standards by which to judge performance
- The taking over by other bodies of persistently failing services
- Workforce development planning
- Investment in innovation

In spite of the obvious commonsense of these conclusions, response has been laboured and largely ineffective (see section on Select Committee).

Coates claimed that councillors had failed to focus on the decline in public libraries and were party to a large waste of public money... And while [the report] accepted that libraries were not just about lending books, it pointed out that reading is the prime reason for people to visit a library.

INVOLV

Who's in charge?

Who's in charge? was published in April 2004. It, too, addressed the problems highlighted by the Audit Commission but not confronted by Framework. It was more aggressive in its criticism of local government councillors and of senior librarians, than "Sleepwalking". Its author, Tim Coates, repeated Leadbeater's accusation that "many involved in public libraries are in a state of denial".

Who's in charge? reiterated that in the previous ten years:

- The number of books borrowed had fallen by 35%
- The cost of its service was up by 39%
- The book budget was 9% of the total
- That it cost £20 to get a £10 book on the shelf
- That many professional staff have no contact with the public
- That the public "does not want a new kind of library, it wants a good efficient library that is up-to-date and pleasant to use"

While it accepted that libraries were not just about lending books it pointed out that reading is the prime reason for people to visit a library.

Among its recommendations were:

- Servicing be simplified and standardised and buying centralised to reduce costs
- Management and administrative staff numbers be slashed to fund inter alia longer opening hours
- Demarcation between professional and non-professional staff to cease
- A body of path-finder library services be set up to exemplify best practice
- Expenditure on books and reading material be trebled, opening hours increased by average of 50%, both to be paid for by a re-allocation of resources
- That elected councillors and chief officers responsible for library services exert the necessary leadership to provide a service which adequately serves their community

Coates claimed that councillors had failed to focus on the decline in public libraries and were party to a large waste of public money: "They should re-establish their control and deliver a service in line with public expectations". Chief librarians were blamed for keeping their councils in the dark about the true state, and decline, of the service. The Audit Commission was blamed for not following up on its 2000 report.

Coates' views were controversial, challenging, and much disputed. They remain the focus of fierce debate.

House of Commons Select Committee

The House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee reported on public libraries in February 2005. Its tone was more sombre than that of the Audit Commission: "We regard a situation in which core performance indicators, and gross throughput, are falling – but overall costs are rising – as a signal of a service in distress".

It was dismissive of DCMS, "after some casting about, the Department has now settled on a system whereby libraries are measured against ten national standards. However, we believe that this list represents rather limited ambitions which, even so, are not being fulfilled".

"We strongly recommend", it said, "that the meeting of national library standards by a local authority be made a key factor in the eventual overall Comprehensive Performance Assessment score to establish a mutually reinforcing mechanism to link national and local responsibilities in this area which has long been the subject of 'frustration' for the Secretary of State among others".[†]

The Select Committee quoted, approvingly, Coates' evidence to it, and suggestions for peer intervention in failing services.

[†] The Secretary of State told the Committee in 2003: "I simply do not have the levers to compel local authorities to observe library standards."



MOVEMENT

"We regard a situation in which core performance indicators, and gross throughput, are falling – but overall costs are rising – as a signal of a service in distress"

Clore Duffield Foundation Fellowship

The Laser Foundation has worked with the Clore Duffield Foundation to fund a Clore Fellow from the public library sector.

The Clore Duffield Foundation is a grant-giving organisation which concentrates its support on education, the arts, museum and gallery education, cultural leadership training, health and social welfare, whilst placing a particular emphasis on supporting children, young people and society's more vulnerable individuals. The foundation is chaired by Dame Vivien Duffield DBE. For the 2006-07 round of fellowships the Laser Foundation funded Zoinul Abidin. Zoinul did a BTEC in business and finance and then a master's degree in business studies. He is also doing an MSc in Public Policy. He manages one of Tower Hamlets' innovative Ideas Stores.

Futures Group

The most cheering work that the foundation sponsored was the report (March 2005) of a conference at which a group of young library middle-managers was asked to look at the future of the service over the next 15 years.

Among the conclusions were:

- There will continue to be a need for a public library service which is free at the point of delivery; there will also be a need for premium services which may be home delivery, professional research services, access to the national back catalogue, etc, all of which should be on a full cost-recovery basis
- Library services must follow retailing in being customer-led
- In a world of rapid social and technological change libraries too must learn both to change and to encourage the careers of those who can manage change
- Library staff may have to adopt a corporate appearance, wearing uniform, or adhering to a dress code. They must spend more time on the floor, and be as well trained as good shop assistants in customer relations. Good staff must be properly paid; less than adequate staff must be helped to leave
- The introduction of radio frequency identification systems (RFID) into libraries may revolutionise allocation of staff time
- Management skills are in short supply. Library school syllabuses are out of touch with today's needs
- The division of responsibility for libraries between national and local government is serving the public badly. A radical change in both governance and method of funding is needed
- In the future there will be no "one size fits all" library. Each will reflect local needs. Some will share a site with other local services, or with commercial premises; others may be virtual

IMPLEMENT

Libraries impact project

As libraries have a low profile in central government's understanding of local government activities the Laser Foundation was glad to fund Price Waterhouse Coopers (PwC), an accountancy and research company, to produce a report on the value and impact of public libraries, launched in July 2005 at a Laser Foundation-organised conference.

PwC was asked to establish how to "develop and use measures to enable a library service to identify its impact on any of four of the shared priorities between national and local government – children, education, health and older people".

In conjunction with pilot library services across the country PwC developed methodologies for all four areas which it hoped would provide "a practical tool for library management and staff to measure the impact of their work and to support service improvement".

These measures were strongly echoed by those put forward by the Audit Commission and DCMS to gauge the effectiveness of public library authorities in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment process.

2. IMPLEMENTING THE DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION ACT 1995

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) places a duty on local authorities and other service providers to make “reasonable adjustments” to their services and premises to ensure equal access for people with disabilities. The deadline for compliance was 2005. The aims of the Act are very much in line with current thinking in public libraries to improve access for all sectors of the community.

The Laser Foundation was pleased to approve three bids from public libraries for funding that helped them implement innovative approaches to meet their legal obligations...

INTEGRATION

Lewisham Library Service

Lewisham Library and Information Service built upon improvements already made to physical access to the borough’s libraries and services by installing modern equipment and software for library users with disabilities, and by installing induction loops in nine libraries. Dolphin’s “SuperNova” and “Cicero” products were installed as were high resolution flat-screen monitors, wrist-rests, trackerballs and ergonomic keyboards and mice. Staff were given awareness training on the needs of disabled users and training on how the new equipment worked.

Wokingham Libraries and Information Service

Wokingham Libraries and Information Service built on and extended their provision of services for library users in line with the DDA. Library users gained access to a trackerball and high-visibility keyboard and text-to-speech software in all libraries, speech-to-text software at the three largest libraries and additional search indexes on the library catalogue. Wokingham also provided a wheelchair workstation at the three largest libraries and hearing induction loops at all libraries, including the renewal of the existing system at the Central Library (Wokingham).

Reading Borough Libraries

Reading Borough Libraries improved services to, and trained staff to interact more effectively with, children with visual, hearing and learning difficulties. This grant allowed for part of the children’s library at Reading Central Library to be adapted as a sensory area, with a tactile floor and giant “Bubble Wall”. Books (tactile, noisy, smelly, large print, Braille, signed, word free, etc), subtitled videos/DVDs for the deaf, audio described and signed videos, and shelving for these new collections were provided. Two PCs plus chairs and desks were installed, with specialist accessories (such as trackerball, large keys, etc) and software designed to meet the needs of sensory-impaired children.

Reading Libraries raised staff awareness and trained several members of staff in the use of sign language. They evaluated the use of the equipment to discover the type of materials for which there was a clear need and areas where work was needed to improve take up.

3. e-INNOVATIONS FOR PUBLIC LIBRARIES: IMPROVING ACCESS

Since 2002 the Laser Foundation has explored and funded a number of e-innovation initiatives for public libraries. e-innovations - particularly the internet and new communications technologies - are transforming the possibilities available to public library user communities. People of all ages are now reaping the benefits for leisure, learning, work and in the building of stronger communities. This is particularly so for young people who have grown up in a culture where the electronic environment is an integral part of their lives.

INNOV

e-books and e-serials

Studies of e-books and e-serials innovation were commissioned by the foundation to inform debate. These were led by James Dearnley of Loughborough University. The studies revealed that e-content take-up in public libraries had finally come of age in 2006. The major causal factor identified is that matters pertaining to subscriptions for e-content are now being successfully addressed. By 2006 an almost explosive rise in take-up is observed across a diverse range of e-content – particularly for serials and reference sources. Benefits identified in the studies include widening access to collections in branch libraries and 24/7 remote access. These circumstances stress how the internet and new communication skills are becoming an increasingly integral part of people's lives.

Newsplan

The foundation funded a project which successfully restored web access to the Newsplan London and South East Database. Newsplan is a cooperative programme for the microfilming and preservation of local newspapers and for making them accessible to users. Arising from the completion of the project a significant consequential increase in use of the restored website and database is apparent.

Location Register of Twentieth-Century English Literary Manuscripts and Letters

A grant to the University of Reading successfully facilitated a complete re-surveying of holdings of literary manuscripts in public libraries in the British Isles; the entering of all new findings in the new online database of the Location Register of English Literary Manuscripts and Letters; and, adjustment of Location Register data when required. In doing so it promoted new technologies to increase awareness of, and access to, the widely distributed national collection of literary archives in public libraries. Available at: www.locationregister.com

The foundation commissioned Linda Berube, formerly the Co-East Regional Manager, to contribute a broad overview of these changes. *On the Road Again: The next e-innovations for public libraries*, reflected that access to reading, information and learning remain at the heart of the public library business; however, to promote books and reading public libraries will need to compete for a place in the contemporary environment, particularly that of young people.



INNOVATION

Accessing our archival and manuscript heritage

This award to the Senate House Library was made to provide access for lifelong learners to archives, manuscripts and manuscript studies. The award was funded from the residual funds of the former Laser Electronic Access to Resources in Libraries (EARL) consortium, with a supplementary grant from the Laser Foundation. The project has been successfully completed and has been widely promoted. It has proved to be of particular interest to family and local historians.

Available at: www.helpers.shl.lon.ac.uk

Full Disclosure

Full Disclosure was a British Library-led initiative extending to all museums, libraries and archives in the UK. It aimed to achieve easy online discovery of all major sources of all freely accessible UK information by potential users. Full Disclosure supported and encouraged the conversion of information on index cards to online databases. It also supported the retrospective cataloguing of all uncatalogued collections so that their immense value could be realised.

Together with the British Library and the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, the Laser Foundation contributed towards a full time project officer post from 2003 to 2005 to progress the Full Disclosure initiative and supported retro-conversion and retrospective cataloguing projects in 2003 and 2004. In 2005 the initiative was reviewed by the three co-sponsors and it was agreed that Full Disclosure would continue, but with a lower profile through the website at <http://www.bl.uk/about/cooperation/fdhome.html> and through the provision of advice on preparing bids for retrospective cataloguing and retrospective catalogue conversion and on sources of funding.

4. CONSULTATION WITH HARD TO REACH GROUPS

To have a sustainable future, public library services must be relevant to the communities they serve and thus consultation is an essential element in the planning of future services or new libraries. It can be very difficult to consult effectively with groups in the community that are hard to reach, or that may think library services are not for them, in order to find out how we can meet their needs and expectations. Therefore the Laser Foundation funded three consultation projects that showed particular imagination and innovation in overcoming such barriers. Two projects related specifically to the planning process for new libraries in socially deprived areas, whilst the third was an important national survey into the attitudes and expectations of young people in relation to public libraries.

WHAT

Public Libraries: Destination Unknown

This report was published in March 2006 in conjunction with a highly successful and heavily oversubscribed Laser Foundation conference. It had been commissioned from the research organisation Define at the request of Lord McIntosh of Haringey, then minister with responsibility for libraries. DCMS asked the foundation to part-fund it. (The foundation forebore to ask what had happened to the funds of the BLRIC - formerly BLR&D - or the BNBRF see page 4).

Previous reports (Audit Commission and House of Commons Select Committee) had noted the small (and still reducing) use of public libraries by 14-35 year olds. The new report's aim was "to provide evidence for potential future strategies for the public library service that will result in increased usage amongst the 14-35 age group". The researchers found a "deeply entrenched negative perception" of libraries; that the majority of existing and un-modernised libraries are seen as dirty, uncared for,

with old and poor stocks, an oppressive atmosphere, etc; and that there is a baseline which libraries need to achieve if they are to attract younger users.

Interviews were held with fifteen groups from different parts of the country. Invitees were chosen without reference to whether they were library members. Users turned out to be a minority. Even they were reported as disappointed by the breadth and depth of stock and its lack of currency.

On a more optimistic note, young people had a more positive view when introduced to innovative, new or refurbished libraries.

To bring libraries to a baseline for consideration by this age group, Define found the following were needed:

- Improved stock to place a greater focus on contemporary material
- Refreshed library interiors (décor and furnishing) to be welcoming, comfortable and up to date

- Roll out or extend - and raise awareness of - up to date borrowing processes: email reservation, loan extensions, "drop boxes", IT services, etc.
- Improve the destination value of the library by attaching or combining additional services
- Allow for some variety and separation within the library (in terms of more or less noisy areas) to accommodate the range of users but also to reduce inhibitions of those with more barriers

At a conference to launch the report the Minister for Culture - a new one, David Lammy, by the time it was published - welcomed the report but made it clear that the "frustration" of another predecessor (see page 9) remained, and that his position gave him no levers with which to implement its recommendations.[†]

[†] However, it is encouraging that following publication the report received considerable attention, in the UK and internationally, and continues to be cited, notably in the Big Lottery Fund guidance notes for libraries, section 2-7.

Bolton Metropolitan Borough Libraries: What do you want? A library service for the future

This award funded Bolton Libraries' collaboration with Planning for Real to engage hard to reach communities in a bold and imaginative way in the planning of the new High Street library for one of Bolton's most deprived areas. Bolton Libraries used innovative consultation methods to find out what the community would like to see in the High Street library of the future. Five local artists used a range of different art forms and techniques to work with the local community to explore what they wanted from a modern library service. Both the process and the outcomes of this work were fascinating and helped the staff significantly in planning a library that will have a vital role in the local community.

To disseminate the results and how they were achieved, Bolton Libraries and the Laser Foundation organised a public seminar on 26 January 2006 at which a Good Practice Guide and DVD were launched and during which delegates themselves undertook some of the art activities that were used in the consultation. The project received a number of accolades and awards.

Birmingham City Council: Birchfield Library

This award funded Birmingham City Council to plan for an innovative signature building to replace the recently demolished Birchfield Library. Birchfield is a diverse inner-city community in one of Birmingham's most economically and socially disadvantaged areas. Birmingham Libraries undertook a community consultation project – with a particular focus on young people who were actively involved as project researchers.

The initial consultations and research drove forward a networking and outreach programme to access diverse and often difficult to reach community groups to collect their views and ideas to inform the design of the new library. These in their turn drove forward three further consultative activities: first, further consultation with young people; second, a heritage and archives project; and third, community consultations with architects.

The project successfully addressed the complexity of engaging a diverse community and gathering the views of people of many ages, backgrounds and skills. In doing so it tested a variety of methods for raising the profile and plans for the new library and its services. A major contribution of the project has been the lessons which have been learned about the choice of approaches appropriate to different circumstances.

NOW?

Structure Of The Public Library Service – What Now?

The Laser Foundation funded valuable research, and sponsored papers and conferences which provoked important debates on the future of the public library service. It had an unrivalled record in seeking to benefit the service both in the present, and in the future. During its lifetime it has been the only independent, and independently minded, grant giving body and its demise leaves a serious gap in the public library world which, at the moment, there is no prospect of filling.

Some of the issues brought out in its reports are already being addressed. Others have become part of the "current wisdom" of the service. Others are waiting to be taken forward. The most important of these is structure, to which David Lammy has referred.

Leadbeater pointed out (page 7) that DCMS is responsible for library policy, but it is not the funder; the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is the major funder but sets no goals; the Department for Education and Skills and the National Lottery finance various programmes but have little influence over the national network. He called the situation "poorly coordinated", which may be the understatement of the decade.

The Futures Group wrote (page 7): "The division of responsibility for libraries between national and local government is serving the public badly. A radical change in both governance and method of funding is needed".

Who now will take this debate forward?

By tradition government departments are wedded to the *status quo*. The present situation has existed for decades, and in all of that time it has been as inefficient as it is now. There seems little chance, therefore, that a wish to talk about reform - and even less the will to fight for reform - will come from the centre. In this respect the future looks bleak.

APPENDIX 1

ORGANISATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS THAT RECEIVED GRANTS

| Organisation | Title of Project | Date |
|---|---|-------------------|
| Birmingham City Libraries | A new library for Birchfield - consultation & follow up public seminar | 2007 |
| Bolton Metropolitan Public Libraries | <i>What do you want? A library service for the future</i> – consultation and follow-up public seminar | 2005 |
| Clore Duffield Foundation | Funding of Clore Fellowship | 2006-07 |
| Co-East/Linda Berube | <i>On the road again: the next e-innovations for public libraries</i> – this report was updated (also 2005) to identify gaps in provision | 2005 |
| Define Research and Insight | <i>Destination unknown: a research study of 14-35 year olds for the future development of public libraries</i> – and follow-up public seminar (commissioned by DCMS and funded by MLA and Laser Foundation) | 2006 |
| Demos/Charles Leadbeater | <i>Overdue: how to create a modern public library service</i> – and follow-up public seminar | 2003 |
| Full Disclosure Implementation Group | Contribution to a full-time project officer post | 2003-05 |
| The Futures Group (Laser Foundation initiative) | <i>Libraries: a vision. The public library service in 2015</i> | 2005 |
| Lewisham Library Service | Implementing the Disability Discrimination Act in Lewisham Library Service | 2005 |
| Libri/Tim Coates | <i>Who's in charge?</i> | 2004 |
| Loughborough University/Co-East | <i>Electronic books in public libraries; a feasibility study</i> | 2004 |
| Loughborough University/Dr James Dearnley | <i>e-serials in public libraries</i> (two reports) | 2004 updated 2006 |
| Newsplan London and South-East Implementation Committee | Restoration of the Newsplan London and South-East database on the web | 2002 |
| Price Waterhouse Coopers (PwC) | <i>Libraries impact – measuring up</i> ; and follow-up public seminar | 2005 |
| Reading Borough Libraries | Implementing the Disability Discrimination Act in Reading Borough Libraries | 2004 |
| Royal Society of Literature | Library Lecture | 2002 |
| Senate House Library, University of London | Accessing our archival and manuscript heritage (jointly with EARL residual funds) | 2004 |
| University of Reading Library | Location Register of 20th Century English Literary Manuscripts and Letters | 2004 |
| Wokingham Libraries and Information Service | Implementing the Disability Discrimination Act | 2004 |

APPENDIX 2

ORGANISATION OF THE LASER FOUNDATION

The Laser Foundation was created by the transfer of the Laser Company into a grant making trust. The foundation was a company with Articles based upon those of the original Laser. It was managed by a Board of Trustees who had experience in public and academic libraries, e-learning and literature, the commercial sector, publishing and bookselling and professional bodies related to libraries and information (see Appendix 3 for a list of the trustees).

The trustees met on a regular basis and approved all calls for funding as well as scrutinising the financial management. Trustees and patrons were closely involved in selecting areas for funding and made all final decisions on awards.

There was a company secretary who reported to the chairman, ran the company and the administration and kept the trustees informed of all aspects of the work. Throughout the period this role was filled by Frances Hendrix.

Following the setting up of the Board a search was undertaken for an organisation to run the actual grant making. After considering a number of organisations the British Library was invited to take on this role which it continued in a highly satisfactory way till March 2005.

The British Library Cooperation and Partnership Programme managed the grant making aspects of the foundation and attended meetings and produced reports. All the projects were initially sifted by the BL to ensure they met basic call criteria (see page 19).

APPENDIX 3

CHAIRMEN, TRUSTEES, PATRONS, LEGAL AND FINANCIAL ADVISORS

The Board of Trustees managed the foundation and the members were invited to become trustees because of their previous association with Laser (ex members of the Laser Board or Advisory Group), their experience, knowledge and interest in the work and value of public libraries, whether as business people, authors or working in related fields.

Chairmen

Professor Frederick Bullock (until September 2003); Professor Bernard Naylor (September 2003 – July 2005); David Whitaker, OBE (July 2005- April 2007)

Trustees

Sue Brown, lately CILIP; Barry George, Head of Libraries, Bedfordshire County Council; John Hicks, Library Consultant; Sir Michael Holroyd, CBE, Royal Society of Literature (until September 2003); Harry Keating, Society of Authors (September 2003 – October 2004); Stephanie Kenna, Manager, Regional and Library Programmes, British Library (from July 2005); Adrian Olsen, lately Head of Libraries and Lifelong Learning, Southwark Council; Emma Robinson, lately University Librarian, University of London, Senate House Library; Richard Ward, Head of Library and Information Services, Hampshire County Council

Patrons

Dr Ann Limb, lately Chief Executive Ufi (until 2005); Dr Jim Parker, OBE, Registrar of Public Lending Right

Company Secretary

Frances Hendrix
Martin House Farm
Hilltop Lane
Whittle-le-Woods
Chorley
Lancs PR6 7QR
email: frances@laserfoundation.org.uk

Legal advisors

Bates Wells & Braithwaite
2-6 Cannon Street
London EC4M 6YH

Accountants and auditors

Merchant & Co
Fourth Floor
84 Uxbridge Road
Ealing
London W13 8RA

APPENDIX 4

GRANT-MAKING POLICY

The trustees expected to approve up to three small projects and one major project each year for three years. At the end of that time it expected that the foundation's funds would have been used up. (In the event funds were used up more rapidly than had been planned due to the pension provider for former Laser staff – the London Pensions Fund Authority (LPFA) – making an unexpected call upon Laser Foundation funds. While it had given previous assurances that this would not happen, LPFA was affected by the general pensions crisis.)

For rough guidance, a small project could be awarded up to £40,000; a major project up to £200,000 (or more for an exceptional proposal).

The trustees were prepared to consider projects ranging from the theoretical to the practical, and could involve blue sky research or be relatively small quick win projects. Proposals were judged on how they fitted with the general principles for funding, and the overall priorities as seen by the trustees at the time, and not from whence they came. The foundation put out calls for bids for work in specified areas, it commissioned work, and speculative bids were encouraged at all times.

General principles for considering proposals

Eligibility

Bids for funding were considered from:

- Individual libraries or library authorities, and (exceptionally) individuals or groups of individuals working in or for the library sector
- Consortia of libraries proposing collaborative projects

General

The foundation:

- Considered proposals over the whole spectrum of library activity

- Encouraged applications for funding of original and imaginative projects
- Favoured proposals covering areas for which funding was not otherwise available
- Initially gave preference to projects proposed by ex-Laser member libraries or library authorities, or consortia including ex-Laser members

Conditions

The foundation:

- Confined awards to non-recurrent funding, including personnel
- Expected applicants to demonstrate that sources of matching or supplementary funds had been investigated
- In general, did not favour projects extending over more than two years

Use of funds

The foundation did not award funds for:

- Maintenance of equipment or property beyond the time period of the project
- Renting or buying property
- Investment purposes

All proposals shortlisted by the British Library Cooperation and Partnership Programme and the trustees were reviewed by at least three peers drawn from public libraries, academic institutions or the IT world, as appropriate. Final decisions were made by the trustees.

As well as allocating grants the foundation commissioned research where trustees agreed that there were gaps in the library community's knowledge (e.g. the Define report), in decision-makers' perception of library value (e.g. PwC's Impact report), or where it was thought appropriate to stimulate debate on the state and future of the public library service (e.g. Leadbeater, "Futures" and Coates reports).

Calls for proposals

The foundation issued two calls for proposals, in 2002 and 2004. Eighteen proposals were received in 2002, the majority from public library authorities within the old Laser region.

There were 30 proposals in 2004 and they came from throughout the UK. There was evidence of authorities working with each other, or with organisations from other sectors. Approaches were also received from academic institutions and organisations that support libraries, or library objectives. There were 27 speculative bids. These came from a wide range of organisations and a number were funded.

Some proposers were interviewed; sites were inspected where this was appropriate; and a number of proposers were asked to reconsider and resubmit.

