

Minutes from British Library Readers' Group Monday 20 March 2007 6pm, Café

Present

Heather Brooke
Sean-Michael Robinson
J Vaughan
James Obelkevich
Nimrod Ben Cnaan
Peter Clark (left early)

Apologies

Matt Salisbury, Phil Sutcliffe, J. Vaughan, Judy Jackson, Hugh Baron, Carla Lord, Pauline Halford, Michael Hoare, Charles Lewson, Graham Stewart, Carolyn Clarke, M. Wandor, R. Hayman-Joyce, Norman Moss

New Business

Meetings with management

H. Brooke gave those present an update on meetings held with the British Library management. Two meetings were held on the 14th of February and 13th of March 2007 with Phil Spence, Director of Operations and Services, and Jill Finney, Director of Strategic Marketing and Communications.

At the first meeting, H. Brooke, M. McCrum, and Wanda Wyporska told the managers about our group. We thought having an independent group of users would prove mutually beneficial for both readers and managers. The benefits to readers are fairly obvious, but managers, too, would benefit from having free access to customer feedback and opinion. Managers could test out new ideas, explain decisions and consult with the group, while we could highlight problems or concerns at the first instance before they become major issues. We re-iterated our desire to put a notice in the Readers Bulletin publicising our existence. The managers said they needed to consult with their colleagues and we agreed to meet again in a month's time. There was some email correspondence during and we then met again, with a slightly different group but the same two managers on 13th March.

This meeting was very productive with the managers agreeing to recognize the group, allow us to put a notice in the readers bulletin, provide a room for us to meet and also have access to managers on a quarterly basis to discuss issues and concerns. Mr Spence and Ms Finney gave us a document entitled 'Terms of Reference' which they wanted us to accept. It lays out the remit and purpose of the Readers Group. Our delegation looked it over and we agreed to most of the terms but with the caveat that we would present it at the next meeting for approval.

At this point, H. Brooke asked those present for their thoughts on the document. Those present were pleased with the progress with management. J. Vaughn took issue with the statement on page one that "the British Library has decided to develop a standing consultative group in which to provide on-going engagement with BL readers and remote users." as it was not the management, but readers, who

instigated the group. Those present felt the 'Background' section should be deleted as it was mostly PR guff. With this change the Terms of Reference were agreed to unanimously.

A vote was then held to elect the coordinator of the group. J. Obelkevich nominated H. Brooke who accepted. The motion was carried unanimously. It was agreed that efforts would be made to recruit a deputy and secretary. Grahame Stewart offered to help by email and H. Brooke will follow up to see what he can do. C. Clarke had been in touch to say she can no longer devote as much time to the website. R. Hayman-Joyce and Sean-Michael Robinson offered to help with the website and investigate an electronic forum so that readers could discuss issues.

H. Brooke also said *The Guardian* newspaper had been in touch to write a feature article about the group but this was held once we began negotiations with the management.

Funding Cuts

There has been no further word about possible funding cuts. The group will keep in touch with Management to monitor the situation.

Publicity

The group discussed continued efforts to hand out fliers and publicise our existence. S. Robinson, M. McCrum, R. Hayman-Joyce, H. Brooke and N. Cliff agreed to help hand out leaflets in the next few weeks. If anyone else would like to join us then please email heather@yrk.org

Concerns

Several new concerns were raised by readers along with the usual gripes of expensive photocopying and London's most expensive sandwiches.

Lighting in the café - Jim Obelkevich said he had complained several times about the poor lighting in the café. Readers agreed it was very dark and not suitable for those working in the café (an increasing number due to the overcrowded reading rooms). There should be a way to bring more light to the tables, similar to the lights along the wall.

Noise – several members continued to be annoyed by noisy staff and the one-sided way the BL dealt with noise complaints targeting only readers and ignoring the very real problem of noisy staff. There is also a rat run at the back of Social Sciences that is used by staff who make a lot of noise and disturb those readers seated next to the newspapers.

Overcrowding – Nimrod said there remains a serious problem of overcrowding in the reading rooms particularly by undergraduates who are using the space for revision rather than research. He wondered if there could be something done to create more non-research areas for these people? Also if the BL wanted to attract more readers by opening up the admissions policy, then some readers thought more space should be provided. H. Brooke believed the problem was compounded by the overall poor funding of local libraries, which put even greater pressure on the BL.

Foreign Journals – J. Obelkevich said that about four years ago the BL cancelled its foreign journal subscriptions for the London building which meant that readers now had to wait six months to get the most recent copies. This is because of an embargo placed on these journals by Boston Spa. It was speculated that the reason for the embargo was to raise revenue by forcing readers to pay for photocopies and scans of the latest journals.

Dewey Decimal System – J. Obelkevich remarked that the switch to the Dewey Decimal system meant that books and periodicals on the same subject are now split between three floors. He wondered why the BL switched to the DD system when it is shunned by the major research libraries.

Next meeting

The next meeting will be Tuesday 8th May at a time and location to be announced.