

## **Minutes from first British Library Readers' Group Monday 30 October 2006 6pm, Cotton Readers' Room**

### **Present**

Heather Brooke  
Dr Carolyn Clarke  
Mark McCrum  
Prof Peter Clark  
Raf Gelders  
Judith Hitchen  
Spencer Leonard  
Nicholas Murray  
John Simons  
Jenny Vaughan  
Nimrod Ben-Cnaan

### **Apologies**

Matt Salisbury, Phil Sutcliffe, Judy Jackson, Hugh Baron, Carla Lord, Kit Peel, Lawrence Normand

### **New Business**

Heather Brooke laid out the vision for the British Library Reader's Group as follows:

#### **Our Purpose**

"Currently there is no representation of readers in the British Library. We aim to provide this representation by organising readers and bringing their concerns to the attention of management. Currently we are an informal group though we may adopt a more formal structure in the future. However, we will always remain entirely independent of the Library, and we will represent the collected views of readers to British Library management with the aim of building a more egalitarian and democratic approach to Library policy formulation and decision making."

#### **Our Aims**

We will campaign for readers' needs in the library, bringing concerns to management attention and lobbying to make the Library a better place for readers. Once we have raised sufficient numbers and our profile, we will bring concerns to management and lobby for change.

#### **How will we achieve our goals?**

The first goal of the group must be to publicise our existence. This may be a challenge as the BL management has refused to cooperate with us so far and is not letting us post our details in the monthly Readers' Bulletin. Nevertheless, we remain optimistic for a mutually beneficial relationship between readers and management.

H. Brooke said that her email inbox is getting quite crowded and the first task needs to be to set up a website to both publicise the group and provide a facility for people learn about us and to join.

Carolyn Clarke agreed to build the website and hopefully this will be up and running in the next couple of weeks. Once the site is operational, the group discussed how best to publicise the group and came up with the following list:

### **Things to do**

- Handing out leaflets – H. Brooke, N. Murray, M. McCrum
- Signing up readers in lunch and coffee breaks – to arrange at a later date
- Each existing member to get at least five people to join the group
- Publicise to particular Library user groups:
  - Historians – Spencer
  - Students at University College London – N. Ben-Cnaan

The group also talked about the possible need in future, if the group becomes too large, to set up a committee structure with about 10 members. The website could also be extended to include a discussion forum in future, though this will require someone's time to moderate the posts.

The group then discussed:

### **Issues of concern to readers**

1. Opening Hours - several readers would like to see the library open every day at 9.30am Mondays included. (R. Gelders, M. McCrum, J. Hitchens). There was also a suggestion that the library might close later on Fridays.
2. Integrated catalogue – several readers expressed frustration with the poor usability of the catalogue and the inability to track items through user terminals. The only way to track items at present is to ask a member of staff.
3. The need for a more extensive orientation for new users or users embarking on new research topics (J. Vaughan). It was felt the current system was not useful or adequately in-depth.
4. Processing new acquisitions – P. Clark said that he has waited two years for some books to come onto the system. H. Brooke said that legal publishers are notoriously bad about depositing books and the library does not seem to chase them. What are the penalties for continued failure to deposit?
5. Cost of services – there was a good deal of discussion about the fees charged for photocopying, food and wireless internet access.
6. Photocopying charges – the entire group agreed that the current charges were implemented without any public consultation and were too expensive particularly for academics from abroad.
7. Wireless access – H. Brooke noted that the current Wi-Fi system was awarded to a private company without any public consultation or tendering announcement. The costs were excessive and system is contrary to the Library's stated aims of making information available to as wide a range of people as possible. In the US, public libraries and many local authorities provide free wi-fi access as it is cheap to run. The exact terms of the contract need to be published and a new model for Wi-Fi implemented.
8. Food – 'the costliest sandwiches in the area' said several readers.
9. Lost books – H. Brooke said there did not seem to be a working system to monitor lost, missing or mis-shelved books.

10. Noise – several readers said that while all the signs in the Library rightly warned readers against making undue noise, it was, paradoxically, often the staff who made the most noise. M. McCrum would like a sign posted in Maps alerting people there that their voices travel and are disturbing to readers in Humanities 2.
11. C Clarke wanted to know if the BL threw away books, as this had been reported as a new policy a few years ago.

### Conclusion

It was felt by those present that the Library is not as well oriented as it could be to the needs of research students, academics and others who use it. Services seem to be run on a profit-making basis and contracts and decisions are generally implemented in secret without any consultation with the readers. It was generally agreed that the 'complaint forms' provided in reception were a poor way of dealing with readers' issues, were not acted on, and were no more than cosmetic consultation.

### **Next meeting**

The group agreed to hold its next meeting on Monday November 27 at 6pm, possibly in the Cotton Readers Room.