

# Open to All? The Public Library and Social Exclusion

## Volume 3: Working Papers

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## Abstract

*Open to All?* reports the findings of an 18 month research project, “Public Library Policy and Social Exclusion”, based at Leeds Metropolitan University and conducted in partnership with the London Borough of Merton (Libraries), Sheffield Libraries, Archives and Information Services, and John Vincent, an independent consultant. Volume 3 reprints the sixteen working papers written during the course of the project, comprising titles on the following topics: theories of social exclusion and the public library; the historical legacy; public libraries and social class; literacy, social exclusion and the public library; lesbians, bisexuals, gay men and transgendered people; international perspectives on libraries and social exclusion; public libraries, children and young people and social exclusion ; user and community perceptions of the public library ; central and local government policies and social exclusion; public libraries, disability and social exclusion; women, social exclusion and the public library; struggle against racial exclusion in public libraries; political correctness; information and communication technologies, social exclusion and the public library; public libraries, older people and social exclusion.

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## Preface and Acknowledgements

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*Open to All?* is the report of the research project “Public Library Policy and Social Exclusion”. The project has been funded by the Library and Information Commission and , subsequently, Resource, the Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries, as part of its *Value and Impact of Libraries* programme. It has been based at the School of Information Management, Leeds Metropolitan University and conducted in partnership with the London Borough of Merton (Libraries), Sheffield Libraries, Archives and Information Services, and John Vincent, an independent consultant. The research was conducted between October 1998 and April 2000.

Because of the wide-ranging scope of the research, comprising working papers, case studies in the field and a survey, its findings are published in three volumes. This volume (Vol. 3) gathers together the working papers produced during the course of the project. Other volumes are organised as follows:

- Volume 1: *Overview and Conclusions* comprises an overview of the key issues and findings of the study and the final project conclusions and recommendations
- Volume 2: *Survey, Case Studies and Methods* contains the detailed empirical findings of the research.

These volumes are obtainable from: British Thesis Service, British Library Document Supply Centre, Boston Spa, Wetherby, West Yorkshire LS23 7BQ, UK.

Many people have assisted us with this study, giving generously of their time, energy and interest. In particular, we would like to acknowledge the support of Barbara Buckley at Resource, who has managed the project, and Francis Hendrix; Kevin Harris; Janet Holden; Paul Catcheside; Joe Hendry and Tim Owen who were members of the project steering group. Alistair Black, at Leeds Metropolitan University; Dave Spencer, at Sheffield Libraries, Archives and Information Services and Michael Hudson, at the DfEE library in Sheffield have also provided invaluable support and help; Luisa Hill-Baker, at Leeds Metropolitan University, has handled the project finances with skill and good humour; and Dr Mo Mowlam MP has kindly provided a foreword to *Open to All?*. We are also very appreciative of those 129 public library authorities who took the time and trouble to complete our lengthy survey: their candid and honest answers to our questions have done much, we believe, to help us build an accurate assessment of public library activity in this field. Most of all, we express our sincere thanks to those public library authorities, library staff and others who agreed to take part in our case studies and share with us in detail their experiences in attempting to develop library services which address social exclusion. Many other colleagues and contacts, too numerous to mention singly, have, of course, also contributed their ideas to the project

by commenting on drafts of working papers and contributing to conferences, workshops and seminars. We thank them all for their time, ideas and commitment.

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## Introductory Note to Volume 3

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*This volume of Open to All? reprints in full the sixteen working papers undertaken as part of the “Public Library Policy and Social Exclusion” research project. Working papers were undertaken in order to explore both the broader issues underpinning the study and the record so far of public library activity in this field. These papers aimed to:*

- *clarify the core concerns of the research*
- *provide a comprehensive review of the literature of public libraries and social exclusion*
- *stimulate discussion, debate and feedback from readers during the course of the project*

*It should be made clear that these papers were internal working documents intended as interim position papers which reported on work in progress. They were in no way meant to represent a final or agreed position for our study, or in any way represent the position of our sponsors, the Library and Information Commission or more latterly Resource. They are the work of particular members of the project team and individual authors are wholly responsible for their content. In the main, they are printed here with the same text used in the original publication, and readers should allow for this when considering their currency. A date of original publication is given for each paper.*

*In spite of this, we believe that the papers continue to highlight a wide range of themes relevant to Open to All? and that they provide an invaluable overview of the various debates about the public libraries and their relevance to social exclusion. We are, therefore, pleased to be able to make them available in a single volume. Most, we believe, will still generate discussion and critique, and authors continue to welcome feedback and constructive comment.*