

Standards for British Libraries

ANTHONY VAUGHAN

LIBRARIANS EVERYWHERE TRY to establish standards of service and performance as a means of securing recognition of the value of libraries and of library work from society in general. But they may go about this task in rather different ways. In countries like the United States, where libraries are dependent upon a multiplicity of bodies, public and private, and where there is no central agency to coordinate library development or to standardize salary scales, then it is the librarians' professional association which takes the lead in devising and publicizing appropriate standards.

In other countries, like some of those in Western Europe, most librarians may be employed by national public bodies at uniform or comparable conditions of service. Here standards are often promulgated by the central government in the form of statutes, decrees or regulations, and so the efforts of librarians are directed toward putting pressure on central government agencies to formulate standards acceptable to the profession.

In the United Kingdom the nature of library standards falls somewhere in between these two contrasting models. As Britain is not a federal country, the influence of the central government on publicly funded libraries may be direct or indirect but is always present. So professional bodies like the Library Association, 80 percent of whose members work in the public sector, spend much effort in lobbying government bodies on behalf of libraries in an attempt to influence

Anthony Vaughan is Senior Lecturer, School of Librarianship and Information Studies, Polytechnic of North London, England.

government decisions. Often the seeds sown by these efforts fall on stony ground, or take many years before showing signs of growth, or, to extend the metaphor and to apply it to recent years, the fragile seedlings wither from the frosts of an economic recession, but such methods are seen as indispensable and as important for securing recognition of adequate levels of library provision as the drawing up *in vacuo* of a document setting out standards for libraries.

Types of Standards

So in order to understand the development of standards for various kinds of British libraries, it is necessary to go beyond the publications of the Library Association or other professional bodies. More precisely, we can identify five types of documents relevant to our purpose.

First, there is the traditional type of library standard, issued by a professional body and devised by a committee, section or group of the same.

Second, there are what the Library Association calls "policy statements." Usually short, and without quantitative data, these statements are issued by professional associations as a way of staking a claim for the recognition of libraries and library services in areas where they may not be generally recognized or fully established. Such statements, if acted upon, could later be followed by a full set of quantitative standards. An example of a policy statement is one issued by the Library Association on library services to ethnic minority groups.¹ In the following account these policy statements will be mentioned only briefly and selectively.

Third, we have reports or recommendations issued by government bodies or commissions. Thus, the government department responsible for public health may advise hospital authorities to establish libraries of a certain standard, without, however, compelling them to do so. Or, the government department concerned with education in Scotland may ask a committee to examine Scottish school libraries and report back, without, however, committing itself to implement the report's recommendations. Naturally, librarians attempt to influence what is said in these documents. Sometimes they will be directly represented on these bodies; sometimes they will have no direct representation but will give evidence to them, and the report may closely reflect the evidence submitted. Thus a committee appointed to look at the teaching of English in British schools produced a 500-page report which included a chapter devoted to school libraries.² This chapter strongly supported, by detailed facts and figures, the case for good school libraries and leaned very heavily on the

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evidence submitted to it by the Library Association and the School Library Association. Even though there is no guarantee that the government will act on the recommendations of these documents, they nevertheless remain recommendations of a more or less official nature which can be cited with some effect when circumstances warrant.

Fourth, the government may impose standards directly on libraries. Usually it influences libraries indirectly through the amount of money that it allocates to their parent organization, but, at least in the case of library buildings, it is not above setting its own norms.

Fifth and last are those documents issued by accrediting or validating bodies. Though such statements have been important in the past, there is little to say about this category of document in the period since 1971.

Before embarking on a more detailed consideration of British library standards, a word needs to be said about librarians' status, salaries and conditions of service. The salaries of librarians working in the public sector are usually linked to nationally-agreed salary scales. The Library Association has consistently tried to get professional librarians onto suitable scales, for example, to have college librarians paid on faculty scales rather than administrative ones. This is clearly an important way of defending the status of librarians and, indirectly, of libraries, but such documents will not be considered further in this review.

Developments Since 1971 Affecting Library Standards

A survey of British library standards appeared in *Library Trends* in 1972,³ so this review will be largely confined to recording developments of the last decade. While the 1960s had in general been a period of expansion for all types of libraries, the 1970s saw, increasingly, cuts in public expenditure which badly affected libraries in the public sector. Sometimes, therefore, it seemed less appropriate to write new standards than to defend existing ones. Yet at the same time many of the advances in librarianship of the previous decade had come to some sort of fruition in the 1970s, and so were considered suitable for standardization. There was also an increasing interest in international standards, and the IFLA standards for public libraries, referred to elsewhere in this issue, were regarded as particularly relevant for Britain.⁴ We may also note an increasing dissatisfaction with the traditional type of library standard; in its place, it was argued, standards of performance should be developed. As this debate took place mainly among public librarians, it will be referred to in a little more detail in the next section.

PUBLIC LIBRARY STANDARDS

General Standards

Although the Library Association has a long record of support for public libraries, it has not itself recently published general standards for them. It was left to a working party appointed by the government, but composed principally of librarians, to draw up detailed standards which were published in 1962.⁵ Early in the period of the present review, the Department of Education and Science (the government department with a watching brief over public libraries) did attempt to monitor the 1962 standards to see how far they had been attained. It looked at library expenditures for the eight years 1965-73, and concluded that "a steady improvement in the achievement of standards will be noted in the tables."⁶ But more recently, some local authorities, in their enthusiasm for cutting library budgets, have allowed their libraries to fall far below the levels recommended in the 1962 document, and no action has been taken by the central government.

The government's most systematic contribution to public library standards has been on staffing.⁷ It commissioned a body called the Local Authorities Management Services and Computer Committee (generally known as LAMSAC) to investigate the numbers of staff needed to perform a variety of typical library tasks. Using work-study techniques, the investigators derived a host of formulas based ultimately on such figures as size of population served, size of stock, number of items circulated, and so on. Although the work was not intended to be a standard, it has been frequently cited by the Library Association in their guidelines and standards. The government itself, however, has made little attempt to tell cheese-paring local authorities to match their staff ratios with those recommended in the report.

Meanwhile, a group of public librarians had been approaching the whole matter from another direction. Standards, they thought, were inadequate in defining the purpose and object of the library, from which all else should flow. Accordingly, in 1971 they issued a short statement entitled "Public Library Aims and Objectives," as a basis, they said, of a nationally acceptable standard. This document was itself heavily influenced by a management technique known as corporate planning, and consisted of a hierarchy of statements beginning with one "aim," divided into four "objectives," twelve "sub-objectives," and so on. Anticipating criticism of what might be seen as a rather heavy-handed approach to the matter, the authors state: "to anyone who has not previously been concerned with corporate planning, what follows

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may look like a statement of the obvious. In fact it represents almost a year's concentrated work by the Group, who considered three different approaches before going back to their original ideas."⁸

More recently this Public Libraries Research Group (PLRG) has been deriving a kind of performance measurement tool from these objectives and has applied it to more specialized aspects of the library service. A document on children's libraries contains a useful list of objectives, but deliberately eschews the setting down of anything quantitative. For example, among the "targets" which children's librarians should aim at is one which says that they should "ensure that books and material wanted by children are available at once in $n\%$ of cases."⁹ But no value is given to n , the figure being filled in, if at all, by the local library. Statements in a similar vein dealing with public relations and adult reference services have also recently been produced by the group.¹⁰

Implicit in the approach of both the LAMSAC team and the PLRG was a critique of the traditional library standard. Traditional standards are standards of inputs: number of books, number of staff, size of buildings, for example. The PLRG believed that proper standards can be achieved only by assessing the output, or performance, of the library. Traditional standards, too, are based on the librarian's professional evaluation of what constitutes a desirable level of service. The LAMSAC study, however, had preferred to use the techniques of scientific management to obtain its results.

The way was then open for a new approach to library standards, one that would combine an emphasis on performance so strongly supported by PLRG with the systematic collection of managerial information such as was done by LAMSAC. The "public library planning process" devised by King Research in the United States¹¹ was thought to be the answer by some, and its report was used experimentally in Britain in two libraries.¹² But the sheer amount of data requiring collection (to say nothing of their interpretation) posed problems, and of course, the setting of objectives is a political, not a technical matter, and comprises statements of value, not of fact. Will this new approach replace the more traditional standard based on inputs? A lengthy discussion would be out of place in a general survey such as this, and the reader is referred to a useful recent paper by Moore.¹³

More Specialized Public Library Standards

While the debate over the means of assessing the adequacy of public library service went on, the Library Association and other bodies were establishing more specialized standards and guidelines.

In 1981 the association produced *Guidelines for Reference and Information Services to Public Libraries in England and Wales*,¹⁴ setting out the requirements, scope and organization of a reference service, and the accommodation, stock and staffing levels considered to be necessary for its successful functioning. The standards update an earlier document of 1969, but they reassert the traditional role of the reference service and of the reference librarian. They have been criticized by some public librarians for neglecting recent developments in community information, advice and referral work, professional ethics, and electronic means of communication, as well as for their heavy reliance on inputs to the detriments of outputs or standards of performance.

In the 1960s and 1970s, some British public librarians showed rather more concern for the provision of services to those most clearly subject to social and economic discrimination, or to personal misfortune—the poor, the inner-city dwellers, the ethnic minority groups, the handicapped, the sick. Guidelines on services to these categories of people were issued by the Library Association and other bodies. One more detailed than most examined community information, making a well-substantiated claim for the library to participate in this new but rapidly growing service, and setting out in detail the measures to be taken to set up a library-based community information service.¹⁵

These initiatives by public libraries were well summarized in a document entitled *The Libraries' Choice*, produced by an advisory body to the government.¹⁶ The "choice" of the title was apparently whether libraries should sit back and respond to expressed demand, or whether they should make substantial commitments to the provision of services to the powerless. In a lengthy series of recommendations, the report urged librarians to make much greater efforts to reach poor, sick or handicapped people. As the report was published by the government, it might be presumed to carry some weight. In a short preface the Department of Education and Science hoped "that the report will receive serious consideration by library authorities and that, although the report does not call for additional expenditure, its findings and suggestions will be borne in mind when authorities take decisions on the allocation of available resources."¹⁷

Though the tone was favorable, it was scarcely a ringing endorsement of the recommendations, and its tepid language contrasts oddly with the report's own concluding paragraph:

As a final point we stress the urgency attached to our recommendations. At no time in public library history has it been more essential

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for the library service to re-assess its aims and its practice. During times of economic hardship the public library service becomes more important, not less, to the community as a whole and especially to those who without some help are effectively barred from its service.¹⁸

ACADEMIC LIBRARY STANDARDS

All British full-time institutions of higher education, with one exception, are public institutions and receive all or most of their money from public funds. They have all been affected by government policies, and the latter have undergone a veritable *volte-face* in the last decade. A government document of 1970 predicted a doubling of student numbers in fourteen years,¹⁹ but soon after, the expansion slowed and institutional budgets were held steady or reduced. By 1981 it looked as if the higher education sector, which was already admitting a smaller proportion of the student age-group than almost any other industrialized country, would be forced to contract as fast as it had expanded in the 1960s.

In this increasingly inhospitable climate, academic librarians' first concern was to convince their governing bodies that their libraries were an indispensable part of the institution and so should be protected from the worst effects of the government's policy.

University Library Standards

University libraries were perhaps the first to feel the full effect of change in government policies in the shape of having standards of a most unwelcome sort thrust upon them. All but one of Britain's forty-five universities receive most of their public funds from a government-appointed body called the University Grants Committee (UGC). The UGC had long prescribed building standards for university libraries, but in 1976 a working party of the committee proposed, subject to certain exceptions, that they should withdraw material from their collections at a rate virtually equal to their acquisitions, and introduced the now-notorious (and misleading) term, the "self-renewing library."²⁰

The new standards allowed universities library space at the rate of 1.25m² per full-time equivalent (FTE) student. In addition, libraries would be granted 0.2m² per FTE student for acquisitions up to ten years ahead, and a further amount to accommodate any existing special collections of rare and valuable material. If the library found this space insufficient for its needs, then a reserve closed-access store could be built,

purchased or rented, on or off campus, large enough to hold five years' acquisitions. When that was full, the library would have to start discarding at a rate comparable to its acquisitions. The report was greeted with cries of outrage, for it directly challenged the age-old belief that it was right and proper for a university library to grow in size.

Although universities have a precise legal definition in Britain, they are remarkably heterogeneous in size and status. While Oxford and Cambridge number their library collections in millions, other university libraries have fewer than 200,000 volumes in their collections. No full set of standards has ever been published for university libraries, and it is probably this diversity which has frustrated attempts to do so. Directors of university libraries have formed their own organization, the Standing Conference of National and University Libraries (SCONUL), which circulates recommendations and norms for particular activities among its members, and tries to defend the interests of university libraries by lobbying Members of Parliament and sending memoranda to the UGC.

The only other standard about university libraries much quoted in the 1970s was the statement in the Parry Report of 1967 that universities should devote a minimum of 6 percent of their income to their libraries.²¹ Once again the sheer diversity of the institutions made this a rather unrealistic norm. Several universities regularly spent more than 6 percent on their libraries, and others considered that they had very good reasons for spending less. In 1980, SCONUL concluded that "the Conference should not now declare a policy on the norm since circumstances varied so greatly in member universities."²²

British universities have not traditionally been greatly concerned with providing courses for other than their own full-time students, but about half of them do have an "extramural" department which provides courses for adults, often in towns and cities well away from the university's own campus. These courses need library support, and in 1978 the Library Association, with its traditional interest in adult education, issued a set of standards for university extramural libraries.²³ Its recommendations are based on good existing practice, give guidance on numbers of titles and copies of books necessary for each course and on better financial arrangements for the backup libraries, and advise university librarians to let adult students taking courses for credit borrow from the main university library collections.

Polytechnic Library Standards

Polytechnics are a much less diverse group than universities. Created in the period 1969-73, the thirty-one polytechnics differ from universities in providing a greater proportion of vocational and professional courses; in accepting part-time students in large numbers; in giving less attention to research; in having, very often, less satisfactory accommodation; and in having to submit their proposed degree programs to an outside validating body called the Council for National Academic Awards. Hitherto they have been funded and controlled not by a national body, but by local authorities.

No standards specifically for polytechnics have been issued since those of 1968, which were discussed by Humphreys in the earlier review.²⁴ When published, these standards were thought to be ambitious, even unrealistic. Today they seem quite unexceptional; many polytechnic libraries have in fact gone well beyond many of the Library Association's recommendations, and only the staffing levels still seem generous.

As SCONUL did not invite polytechnic library directors to join their organization, the latter set up their own body, the Council of Polytechnic Librarians (COPOL), which acts as a pressure group for the defense of these libraries in the same way as SCONUL, though on a smaller scale. Like SCONUL, COPOL circulates privately various recommendations on a number of matters, such as building standards.

College Library Standards

Besides the universities and polytechnics, the United Kingdom possesses several hundred other colleges, nearly all run by local authorities, but differing widely in age, size, status, and types of program offered. Generally, the bookstocks do not exceed 100,000 volumes, with a correspondingly modest staff complement. One group of them, the teachers' colleges, called colleges of education, had developed as learning resource centers in quite a big way, and the Library Association issued several policy statements defining this new role for the library, with a general statement appearing in 1973.²⁵ In the last ten years most of these colleges of education have been either closed down, merged with polytechnics, or asked to broaden their program by including arts and science courses, but the tradition lives on in the successor institutions.

Faced with these and other organizational changes, the Library Association approved a comprehensive set of new guidelines in 1981.

The opening paragraphs of the new document explain the general approach:

Firstly while this document, in common with its predecessors, sets out what the Library Association believes to be desirable and necessary levels of library provision in colleges, it also includes an indication of the type and quality of service that college managements may expect of their libraries in return for these resources. Secondly the levels of provision suggested are not purely theoretical values. They describe instead actual levels of provision in some of the better institutions, and are therefore standards that are already being applied in colleges.²⁶

The document repeatedly stresses the services it believes college librarians can offer, and generally seeks to confirm the outgoing involvement with college education programs which some college librarians had managed to achieve in the preceding decade. Suggested figures are given for the size of the collection, the acquisitions budget, the number of staff, and the physical accommodation required, all based on FTE student numbers and the academic level of the courses offered. But the general emphasis is less on quantitative criteria and more on the range and quality of the services that the library can offer. The standards are also applicable to polytechnic libraries, though many of them will find that they have already exceeded the suggested stock levels and staffing ratios, while the space norms are more generous than those currently permitted by the government.

SCHOOL LIBRARY STANDARDS

The basic realities of school librarianship in Great Britain can be summarized by the following statements:

1. There are about 28,000 publicly funded schools in Britain which educate 94 percent of the school population (the remaining 6 percent being education in private establishments, some of which are confusingly known as "public" schools).
2. In the vast majority of these schools there are collections of books which can be termed, even if flatteringly so in some cases, a school library.
3. There are about 600 working school librarians with professional library qualifications.

The professional librarians are to be found in the secondary schools—about 13 percent have a qualified librarian. For the remainder, and for

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all primary schools, it is a teacher who is in charge of the library, and it is the local public library which provides a technical and bibliographical backup service. With so many teachers looking after so many school libraries, it is not surprising that they have their own organization, the School Library Association (SLA), a body quite distinct from the Library Association.

Both associations have published standards and guidelines for school libraries. The Library Association's latest document of 1977 makes its recommendations according to the size of the school and the age of the pupils. If we take as an example a secondary school of 1000 students aged eleven to eighteen, then the minimum library stock should be 14,000 items, with a staff complement of at least three—a professional librarian, a media technician and a clerical assistant.²⁷ It also gives guidelines for the school library service of the public library, but here it can recommend a staffing ratio of only three professional librarians to eighty schools.

The most recent policy statement of the School Library Association of 1980 lists the duties of the person responsible for the library at some length.²⁸ If this person is a teacher, then the teacher should be ranked as head of the department, should have appropriate clerical and technical help, and should be relieved of most or all of his/her teaching duties. ("Failure to do this is a notable, long-standing and deplorable weakness in the British educational system."²⁹)

Of the two documents, that of the Library Association is the more general and the more comprehensive, but the SLA statement is more vividly written and down-to-earth. The Library Association is in something of a quandary over the staffing of school libraries. To come out strongly in favor of professional librarians in all British schools might appear utopian and could be seen to slight the work not only of the teacher-librarians, but also of the public library's backup service. On the other hand, to suggest that the teacher-librarian system is satisfactory would be tantamount to admitting that professional librarians are not required in school libraries.

A government report on schools in Scotland did, however, come out firmly in favor of professional school librarians in all Scottish secondary schools with more than 600 pupils. The report noted that, at the time, there were only 70 school librarians in Scotland, and that the acceptance of its recommendation would mean the finding of another 350 as quickly as possible.³⁰

All parties are united, however, in their concern for falling school library standards. County education departments are slashing what remains of school library budgets, and acquisitions are often running at

a rate about one-third of the Library Association's recommendations, to judge from a recent government study.³¹ Organizations concerned with promoting the sale of books, like the National Book League, have also examined school library provision carefully, and have found declining standards almost everywhere.³²

STANDARDS FOR SPECIALIZED LIBRARIES

Although there are many special libraries in Great Britain, only a few categories have had standards issued for them. Business and industrial libraries are too diverse and, in any case, too closely tied to their parent body for general standards to have much relevance. The same can be said for the libraries of the departments and agencies of the central government, save that there is some standardization in staffing, as most of the librarians working in such libraries are civil servants.

Hospital and Health Sciences Library Standards

The country's public health services are organized by the Department of Health and Social Security of the central government and are known as the National Health Service. The service is wide-ranging and includes general and specialized hospitals, general medical practice, and community and preventive health services.

The role of libraries in the National Health Service has been set out by the Library Association in two documents—one a policy statement, the other a series of guidelines.³³ They replace an earlier set of standards issued in 1965 and revised in 1972. The guidelines stress that health service librarians, though usually based in hospitals, should see themselves as providing a service for the whole health district. Recommendations cover patients' libraries, libraries for medical and nursing staff, and domiciliary services to the patient at home. Quantitative standards are based on the size of the hospital. For example, a 600-bed hospital should have a patients' library of 5400 volumes, with about 1100 volumes added annually; a professional medical library in the same hospital should have a stock of about 5000 monographs and should subscribe to at least 150 journals; and together these libraries need at least three qualified librarians. In Britain, the public library can, and usually does, provide a backup service (as we have already seen for schools), and the figures assume that the larger resources of the public library will be available to the hospital librarians.

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The compilation of the recommendations was not an easy task. The relationship between the patients' library and the medical staff library is somewhat controversial, but the guidelines support a single administrative structure for all hospital library services, stressing, perhaps for the benefit of hospital administrators, the economies which can thereby be achieved. They also advocate, though more cautiously, the physical juxtaposition, or even integration, of patients' and staff libraries.

Prison Library Standards

The formal position of the prison library service may be summed up by quoting the first paragraph of the first official Library Association standards for prison libraries, which appeared in 1981:

The average daily population of people in custody in England and Wales approximates to 44,000. They are held in 118 prison establishments provided and maintained by the Home Office....Library facilities are provided in every establishment by arrangement with local public libraries. In all, 52 public library authorities are involved in the service. They are reimbursed by the Home Office at a nationally applied per capita rate at a level agreed with local authority associations.³⁴

The Library Association document had been preceded by a policy statement from the Home Office in 1978.³⁵ The latter had been drawn up with the advice of librarians working for the Department of Education and Science, and had been more positive and more explicit on the importance of library services than most other similar government documents.

The Library Association guidelines give minimum stock figures, and recommend the inclusion of periodicals, large-print books, materials of interest to ethnic minority groups, nonprint media, etc. Indeed, the range of stock should correspond, say the guidelines, with that obtaining in a public library and with the prisoners' interests, save that the ultimate responsibility for what goes on the shelves rests with the prison governor. Operational control of the library is in the hands of a Prison Educational Officer, while the professional librarian should be present part-time, the recommended hours ranging from a minimum of ten hours per week for a small jail up to thirty hours a week or more for a prison with over 850 inmates—the figures being taken from the LAMSAC report.

Standards for Libraries Specialized by Subject

The particular organizational and bibliographical characteristics of music, art, medical, law, etc., libraries are not often adequately dealt with by general public or academic library standards. Two British examples of more specialized, subject-based library standards are mentioned here.

In 1973 the Art Libraries Society (ARLIS) published a set of standards for the provision of art materials in public, academic, special, and national libraries, and described them as an "interim statement."³⁶ Because of the great variation in the purpose and size of such libraries, general standards of a quantitative nature were not laid down. The document stresses, however, the special requirements of art departments in libraries, and recommends a degree of administrative and budgetary autonomy for them, as well as subject qualifications in art for the professional art library staff. It details the special accommodation required for the storage and consultation of such material as portfolios, posters, slides, and so on, and the special categories of material that art libraries need to acquire, like sale catalogs and illustrations.

ARLIS as a separate professional body was founded in 1969; the same year saw the birth of the British and Irish Association of Law Librarians (BIALL). Work on standards for law libraries in the British Isles was begun in 1974 and completed in 1981.³⁷ BIALl's document is directed in part at organizations which may be unfamiliar with law libraries and their services, and in part at librarians wishing to set up or develop a law library. For the first purpose, the standards lay much stress on the importance of the library, and of the skills possessed by qualified librarians. For the second purpose, they contain much practical detail which is continued in a series of appendixes which amount to a virtual manual of law library practice.

The standards are intended to cover all types of law library, ranging from those in universities to those run by small specialist law firms. Formulas are given for the number of staff, and the titles necessary for a basic collection are listed in an appendix. Services are not neglected, either, but the documents note that "library staff are not normally qualified to give legal advice and should not do so."³⁸

CONCLUSION

In this survey of British library standards, I have passed in review various categories of documents. But just what effect have these documents had?

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At a practical level, standards continue to be of great value. For a particular governing body considering the establishment of a new library service, or for an individual librarian, many standards provide valuable practical information, and for this alone they are worth compiling.

Viewed as a symbolic justification for libraries and their services, standards have also had their effect. They serve to inform society that librarians can undertake particular activities with professional competence, and they can alert society to new roles which librarians can play. Governing bodies, even when they cannot fund new ventures, may support certain services, the importance of which has been described in policy statements or standards. For example, the document setting new directions for the British public library, entitled *The Libraries' Choice*, was followed by no direct government action; but when the chairwoman of the committee that wrote it was asked whether it had had any effect, she could reply that it had helped to convince some economy-minded town halls that library service to the powerless and the handicapped was not just a fringe activity which could be conveniently cut out to save money.³⁹

If, however, we regard standards as attempts to upgrade libraries up and down the country, it is difficult not to be pessimistic. A specific government policy and a deep economic recession have certainly resulted in declining standards. It is small comfort to most librarians that government policies for cutting public expenditure have so far explicitly excluded agencies concerned with war and with law and order, and so, perhaps for that reason, the future looks reasonably bright for prison libraries. Library standards are of no avail when libraries' controlling bodies have to cut their budgets; libraries, like all the other departments, suffer the consequences. The curious decision by the Library Association no longer to call its standards "standards," but to refer to them as "guidelines" or "recommendations" instead, seems likely to weaken rather than strengthen the force of these documents. Bodies which take little notice of "standards" are likely to take even less notice of "guidelines."

In the last few years a completely new way of establishing effective standards for libraries has been put forward. The Library Association, SCONUL, and other professional bodies have been urging the government to develop a national policy for library and information services. Such a national policy has never before existed in Britain, but supporters of the idea believe that it would result, in effect, in the state itself supporting and enforcing adequate standards for libraries. But there are dangers as well as opportunities here, and whether this national policy

could accomplish more than the publication of traditional standards only time will tell.

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