

# **Mind's Eye Evaluation report**

**Briony Train**

**Centre for Information Research  
Faculty of Computing, Information and English  
University of Central England in Birmingham  
Perry Barr  
Birmingham  
B42 2SU**

**Tel: 0121 331 6732  
Fax: 0121 331 6281  
Email: [briony.train@uce.ac.uk](mailto:briony.train@uce.ac.uk)**

**August 2001**



# Contents

	<b>Page</b>
<b>1 Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2 Context</b>	<b>2</b>
2.1 The Mind's Eye promotion	2
2.1.1 The book collections	2
2.1.2 Purchase of stock and promotional materials	2
2.1.3 The Mind's Eye website	3
2.1.4 The pilot project	3
<b>3 Methodology: pilot authorities</b>	<b>4</b>
3.1 Funding outline	5
3.2 Pilot evaluation procedure	5
3.3 Interviews with staff contacts	6
3.3.1 First interview	6
3.4 Evaluation of booksellers using the promotion	7
<b>4 Evaluation of Mind's Eye pilot authorities</b>	<b>8</b>
4.1 Physical display	8
4.1.1 Pilot authorities – physical display of Mind's Eye	8
4.1.2 Interlibrary moving	9
4.2 Promotional timescale	9
4.3 Mind's Eye stock issues	9
4.4 Mind's Eye and library membership	10
4.5 Reader response to Mind's Eye	12
4.6 Library staff: attitudinal change	13
4.6.1 The impact of staff training	14
4.6.2 Staff training evaluation feedback	15
4.7 Procedural changes	16
<b>5 Booksellers and the Mind's Eye promotion</b>	<b>18</b>
5.1 Display	18
5.2 The Mind's Eye booklist	18
5.3 Sales figures	19
5.4 Customer feedback	20
5.5 Impact on staff	20
5.6 Procedural changes	21

<b>6 Conclusions and recommendations</b>	22
6.1 Display and promotional materials	22
6.2 Mind's Eye stock issues	22
6.3 Library membership	23
6.4 Library staff	23
6.5 Use of the Internet	23
6.6 Use of qualitative and quantitative data	24
<b>Notes and references</b>	25

# 1. Introduction

This report contains the findings of the evaluation of the value and impact of the Mind's Eye project, an initiative funded by the DCMS/Wolfson Public Libraries Challenge Fund in 2000/2001 as part of its focus on reader development work in public libraries.

The evaluation was conducted by the Centre for Information Research (CIRT) at the University of Central England in Birmingham (UCE). The main aim of the evaluation was:

- to examine the impact of the Mind's Eye pilot project on library staff knowledge of and confidence in promoting non-fiction.

The CIRT team focused its research on an analysis of the project impact on five pilot public library authorities - Blackburn, Bristol, Portsmouth, Southwark and Staffordshire - although elements of the national promotion are also taken into account in this report.

## 2. Context

Mind's Eye was awarded to the Public Libraries Group of the Library Association, and reader development agency Opening the Book managed the project. Reading promotion agency Book Communications designed and supplied the display material, and library supplier Books for Students supplied the books for two non-fiction book collections, which were distributed to participating authorities. This partnership approach was enhanced by a further link with Cawdor Books who supplied a collection including Scottish titles specifically for authorities in Scotland.

The Mind's Eye project was targeted particularly at adult male readers under 50, and aimed to improve their reading and library experiences in relation to narrative non-fiction books. Anne Downes, Project Manager with Opening the Book, defined this new publishing trend as follows:

'This type of writing takes a different approach to non-fiction than the simply informational...The authors are attempting to make a contract with their readers in the way that fiction authors do – to engage the interest, seduce the intellect, shock the sensibility and demand that the reader participates as an equal in the adventure of a good read.'<sup>i</sup>

In a recent article in *The Bookseller* Rachel Van Riel, Director of Opening the Book, summarised the relevance of these books to the Mind's Eye project:

'At the heart of the Mind's Eye project is a high-impact promotion of recent narrative non-fiction. These are titles that many libraries have been underbuying, nervous of the brash covers, the deliberate assault on the serious textbook and the inherent difficulty of where to place them in the Dewey classification system. These books are seeking, and helping to create, a new readership.'<sup>ii</sup>

### 2.1 The Mind's Eye promotion

The Mind's Eye promotion consisted of two elements:

- a national promotion
- a pilot project.

The national promotion built on the success of the Branching Out promotion Open Ticket<sup>iii</sup> in offering high-quality point of lend materials, challenging book stock and support through a regional training programme and a dedicated website.

#### 2.1.1 The book collections

Mind's Eye consisted of two specially chosen non-fiction book collections:

***Reflect:***

A rational, cool collection, encouraging readers to ponder and contemplate on the thoughts presented.

**Decide:**

A collection to engage readers in impassioned argument and to question their opinions.

### **2.1.2 Purchase of stock and promotional materials**

64 individual English library authorities purchased the Mind's Eye promotion, and selected promotional materials from the following:

- starter packs
- bumper packs
- postcard packs
- mini-sticker packs
- mouse mat packs.

N.B. A bumper pack is equivalent to two starter packs, and a number of authorities purchased multiple sets of the promotion.

### **2.1.3 The Mind's Eye website**

The project website<sup>iv</sup> was launched in May 2001, and provided information concerning, for example:

- The Mind's Eye books
- Display material – making the most of it
- Finding an audience
- Training.

During the period of May and June the site received 1,961 hits, which is an average of 32 hits per day.

### **2.1.4 The pilot project**

The second strand was the pilot project involving the five library authorities in testing innovative approaches to meeting the needs of the targeted client group, for example:

- special arrangements for loan periods (*this book is complicated, can I have it for 8 weeks?*)
- pre-booked borrowing dates (*I want to take this book on holiday in October*)
- different delivery mechanisms (*I can never get to the library, can you send me the book in the post?*).

### **3. Methodology: pilot authorities**

Although any authority in the UK could purchase the *Mind's Eye* promotion, five authorities representing a range of size, geography and type of authority were chosen as a focus for evaluative work, in order to address the range of issues highlighted above.

The original authorities chosen for the pilot study were Bristol, Cumbria, Portsmouth, Thurrock and Staffordshire. However, due to administrative changes in Thurrock and Cumbria, Southwark and Blackburn joined the project at a later stage. Thus the pilot authorities became:

Blackburn, Bristol, Portsmouth, Southwark and Staffordshire.

The pilot authorities each selected a separate area of service delivery on which to concentrate their promotion of the collections. These can be summarised as follows:

#### **Blackburn**

The Central Library has a separate reference library, which can be reached without going into the lending library. It was proposed that the *Mind's Eye* collection would be available for loan in the reference library in order to encourage people who use the library mainly for information to become borrowers. This would also investigate whether users coming to the library to study or to obtain information would also be interested in borrowing books.

#### **Bristol**

Bristol Library service experimented with offering readers flexible loan periods on *Mind's Eye* titles. Importantly, the readers rather than the staff would decide the loan period. Book chains were also set up in two of the City's libraries.

#### **Portsmouth**

In Portsmouth, library staff compared the issue data for two sets of *Mind's Eye* books, one kept as a separate collection and the other set in the standard library sequence, in both the fiction and non-fiction sections. The intention was to compare the stock performance in these two areas, in order to assess the effectiveness of the promotion and alternative display methods.

#### **Southwark**

Southwark Libraries investigated the unique situation of Newington library where the collapse of the ceiling had led to a reduced service for 13 months. During that time many fiction borrowers remained loyal to the library, but numbers borrowing non-fiction books had declined. A re-opening of the library was planned with a big promotion of the *Mind's Eye* books and display materials. A targeted mailshot was also directed at borrowers who had not used the library since its service was reduced, and a widespread advertising campaign was undertaken at local underground stations, a shopping centre and Council offices nearby.

## **Staffordshire**

Staffordshire investigated how the positioning of the *Mind's Eye* display affected borrowers' response to it and also the numbers of books issued. Both Stafford and Newcastle libraries each had the promotion, and the different layouts of the libraries provided the opportunity to compare the success of the promotion in alternative settings. The promotion was also promoted as an easy way to borrow non-fiction, linked with the introduction of the county's first self-issue terminal in Stafford library.

It was envisaged that the results of the piloting of the books in these ways, which were different from traditional non-fiction classification and display, would inform future directions in this relatively uncharted area of public library use.

N.B. The impact of these alternative service delivery methods is not included in a separate section of this report, but the research team felt that it would be more informative to cite individual examples in specific contexts, in order to provide a greater overview of the value and impact of the Mind's Eye promotion.

### **3.1 Funding outline**

Each of the pilot authorities received:

- £1,000 funding for purchase of books in the Mind's Eye collection, provided this was matched by funds from the authority
- £550 to create customised materials
- 3 days consultancy (1 x staff training day, 2 others)
- £1,850 towards staff costs, to release staff. This was seen as vital both in enthusing senior management and in increasing general staff motivation).

### **3.2 Pilot evaluation procedure**

A schedule for the proposed evaluation was devised at the start of the project. As far as possible this was adhered to, but in some cases the method had to be adapted in order to accommodate unforeseen changes in the project's direction. Where possible, these changes are noted in the text below.

There were two key elements of the evaluation:

- the project impact on library users
- the project impact on library staff.

### **3.3 Interviews with staff contacts**

A total of three telephone interviews was conducted with each contact in the pilot authorities. The research schedule envisaged two being carried out, the first in January and the second in May 2001, i.e. at the start and end of the project. Delays in book supply meant that these also had to be postponed, but as a result three interviews over a three-month time span were undertaken in each authority.

#### **3.3.1 First interview**

For the first interview the research proposal suggested that the following issues should be addressed:

- expectations of project
- perceived benefits of involvement
- potential issues to address
- anticipated impact on staff of participation in project.

#### **3.3.2 Second and third interviews**

The second and third interviews investigated the following:

- reflections on the success of the project
- difficulties encountered during the project
- perceived impact on staff of project participation
- issues concerning sustainability and future development.

Although schedules were devised for each interview, the authorities were always at very different stages of the promotion, and it was therefore not possible to ask the same questions of each. After the initial interview regular contact was maintained with each pilot authority in order to monitor the local development of the project, and its immediate future.

### **3.4 Evaluation of booksellers using the promotion**

The Mind's Eye promotion was also available for use without amendment in bookshops. Although not specified in the original research schedule, the project evaluators were keen to investigate the impact of the promotion on booksellers and the book-buying public as compared with librarians and library users.

Interviews were conducted with a store from one of the large bookshop chains in Sheffield, and with an independent bookshop in Gloucestershire<sup>v</sup>, and contact was maintained with both throughout the period of the pilot project. The interviews addressed, for example, the following issues:

- The Mind's Eye book collections: potential differences in stock selection criteria in bookshops and libraries, sales figures (comparative if books previously stocked).
- Customer feedback.
- The impact of the promotion on staff knowledge of and confidence in promoting non-fiction; changes in current practice as a result of participation.
- Difficulties experienced.
- Plans for sustainability.

## 4. Evaluation of Mind's Eye pilot authorities

### 4.1 Physical display

The evaluation findings revealed that the physical display of the Mind's Eye promotion was regarded as key to its success by both the project management team and the librarians themselves.

Mind's Eye did not only comprise two specially selected book collections (*Reflect* and *Decide*) but also consisted of specific display material – dumpbins, hanging banners, posters, shelf edge strips, postcards, mousemats and book stickers. The project website provided information to all library staff installing the materials, in order to maximise their impact, and thereby to maximise the impact of the promotion itself. Suggestions included, for example:

'Hanging banners:

- hang two or three banners side by side rather than single banners scattered over a large area
- ensure that banners face the direction in which most of your readers will be travelling, e.g. directly opposite an entrance.<sup>vi</sup>

#### 4.1.1 Pilot authorities – physical display of Mind's Eye

The Mind's Eye promotional packs were supplied to each of the five pilot authorities, each of whom recognised the value of professionally produced materials:

'The number and variety of promotional materials made for an eye-catching and professional promotion.'

'Much of the success came from having a surfeit of professionally designed display material to work with.'

It is interesting to note their different approaches to using the same materials, both in terms of display and physical location:

'The display is currently in the Reference library where we have 4 display bins, 2 at either end of a free standing bay of shelving which has 8 shelves on each side. It is in a prominent position in the middle of the library and is clearly visible on entry. There appears to be a lot of interest in the display.'

'The very busy library is very cramped: we will be clearing out all other displays, but we might not be able to have the 2 dumpbins side by side. In the smaller library the dumpbins will be next to each other.'

'We are splitting the collection (we have 2 lots of *Reflect* and 2 lots of *Decide*), with half in the ordinary sequence, and half in the promotional space...it's about display versus shelving!'

'We will signpost it from the ground floor, to try to change the culture from those who always use the same areas in libraries.'

### **4.1.2 Interlibrary moving**

A further way in which the pilot authorities decided to increase the impact of Mind's Eye on their library authority was to move the promotion to new sites, not to allow it to become the 'property' of one particular library:

'The project will be split into 3 geographical areas.'

'We will carry on the promotion until September. Then we will also move it to other large libraries.'

'To the end of July the promotion will be in the reference library, then it will be moved downstairs to the lending library for 6 weeks. Then we'll move it round the libraries, to 4 other branches.'

## **4.2 Promotional timescale**

Moving Mind's Eye in this way has inevitably affected the promotional timetable within the pilot authorities. It seems to be an endorsement of the success of the promotion that each of the five authorities wanted to continue Mind's Eye beyond the actual period of funding:

'It will run for several months – at least three, maybe even six. We wouldn't normally do this, but it is something different, especially with the different user facilities.'

'Because of the Silver Jubilee of the library...all display space has been used up for that...we made a decision that Mind's Eye wouldn't be swamped: we wanted to make a visual impact. So it will run from the end of July until the autumn – we will wait until the students are back.'

'We were going to run the promotion for 6 weeks...we are pushing for 2 months.'

## **4.3 Mind's Eye stock issues**

Although this report was completed when each pilot authority was still promoting Mind's Eye, it would nonetheless be useful to consider the authorities' reactions to the issues of these non-fiction titles. After the promotion had been running for one or two weeks, comments included the following:

'My initial thoughts are that it's going well, half of the stock has gone out.'

'The stock is going very well.'

Two to three weeks later, the respondents were able to provide more detailed thoughts regarding the stock issues:

'The display went in the library at the end of May, and adult non-fiction issues were 85 for the month [June]. This is against 17 in May and 5 in April. Some of the books were borrowed by staff at the end of May before the display went up, and I would say that these make up the bulk of issues for May. The April figure is the norm...'

'Of the original 150 books all have issued at least once...The more popular titles have issued two or three times. The dumpbins are constantly being topped up. I estimate at least a thousand issues from the promotion so far.'

In the authority cited above the use of additional titles from existing stock to supplement a well-used promotion was viewed in a positive light. However, in a second authority the high rate of issues caused concern, and led to a decision not to conduct planned outreach work in order to publicise the promotion:

'The success of the promotion in the library caused problems with the original plan of going out to colleges and universities to publicise Mind's Eye. It would do only harm to promote books which were likely to be unavailable...This is a fundamental problem for libraries and it is unreasonable to expect them to spend money on books which may have a very short shelf life.'

In contrast with the above example, one authority reported that in one respect the promotion 'cuts the number of issues down': as part of its delivery of Mind's Eye, the authority had agreed to offer an extended loan period on promotional titles. One librarian commented that:

'The majority [of readers] are taking a longer loan period. We used to have a four-week loan period, but now have a three-week loan period: I think it's connected with that. As the staff issue the books, they ask the readers if they want an extension, and about 50% are asking for it.'

She added that reader comments to this alternative service delivery method have included the following:

'A much-needed extra loan period.'

'That will be useful.'

'I need more time to absorb this book.'

This service had clearly been well-used by readers, but as a longer loan period was inevitably reducing the number of book renewals, and as the computer system counts renewals as further issues, the statistics did not fully reflect the success of the promotion. Despite this, the stock was issuing very well, and overall the authority was very pleased with the outcome.

#### **4.4 Mind's Eye and library membership**

Unfortunately, it would be difficult to provide clear evidence of increased library membership as a direct consequence of the Mind's Eye promotion, as this report was completed while the promotion was ongoing. However, a number of observations can be made which would hopefully be useful to illustrate ways in which Mind's Eye has raised key issues in this area.

Firstly, one authority was using its computer system to monitor library usage by those who had stopped visiting the library during the period of refurbishment (when certain areas of the building – but not the non-fiction section – would have been closed):

We have run the report on lapsed users – people who were originally registered at [library] but who have never used the library in the closure period.'

Three months after the newly refurbished building opened, the authority planned to re-run the report,

'...to see if lapsed users will come back into using the library.'

However, one member of staff pointed out that the disadvantage of this method was that it would not include those who were visiting the library but not borrowing books, for example were perhaps using the reference section:

'In terms of borrowing we can only track the borrowers, not those who are re-entering the library.'

Secondly, a further use of the library computer system has been to attempt to monitor the performance of individual copies from the Mind's Eye promotion, in order to obtain an accurate picture of stock performance. However, although staff in all pilot authorities mentioned their intention of using the system in this way, very few data were available at the time this report was written. One librarian underlined the lack of knowledge library staff had of technical issues, which were generally regarded as the territory of specifically employed technicians:

'One difficulty has been getting the information out of our computer system: the technical staff did extract the right sort of data, but the two ICT staff have both handed in their notice. I am hoping that the saved search will re-run without their help, but I'm not so sure...'

Thirdly, one authority that had located the Mind's Eye promotion in its reference section found that although members of staff were prepared to issue promotional titles from this part of the library, they did not feel that it was their role to enrol new library members. As a result, as one librarian explained:

'Unfortunately I can't give you a figure for new members, as it appears that staff directed people downstairs [i.e. to the lending library], and no separate figures have been kept.'

Evidently, the procedures had not been established prior to the promotion by which reference librarians would have been enabled to introduce visitors to the reference section to the library service as a whole. This arguably removes the unique benefit of situating Mind's Eye in the reference library.

## 4.5 Reader response to Mind's Eye

It would now be useful to summarise the reactions of those using the Mind's Eye promotion. The readers' survey<sup>vii</sup> on the Mind's Eye website asked readers to comment on their reading habits in terms of, for example:

- Quantity of non-fiction books read per year
- Favourite non-fiction book
- Where they obtain non-fiction books
- How they select the titles they need.

The responses to this questionnaire suggested that many people read as few as 0-5 non-fiction books per year. Almost all respondents preferred a read to take them into new areas, and took recommendations from friends, or from library and bookshop promotions. However, a large number of people felt most comfortable reading books on subjects they were already interested in.

A second questionnaire<sup>viii</sup>, also available on the Mind's Eye website, asked readers to comment on the promotion itself.

A number of respondents suggested that the display materials had initially attracted them to the promotion, and described them as 'excellent', 'interesting', 'very good' and 'bright':

'Noticed [the] promotion because of eye-catching covers'

'Display caught my eye.'

Many had been previously unaware that this type of book (i.e. narrative non-fiction) was available in their library, and said that the books they had borrowed were in entirely new subjects.

### 4.5.1 Readers' response in the pilot authorities

Within the five pilot authorities, the reader responses collected prior to the writing of the report indicate that the Mind's Eye promotion has been very well received:

'It's nice to choose from this display rather than trawling through the shelves'

'Some of the books are very difficult'

'It's a fairly way-out, interesting selection.'

The staff perception of the users' response to Mind's Eye tended to be positive. One pilot authority suggested that although the promotion had been 'generally slow starting', the issues had now dramatically increased, and even that:

'One book was stolen, which shows they're in demand!'

When asked whether the response had been as she would have previously expected, a second pilot authority representative suggested that:

'The more quirky [titles] are going out.'

Two authorities made specific reference to the age group of the majority of readers of the Mind's Eye titles. One librarian felt that:

'In the main the readers are quite happy, although the borrowers are out of the target age range [i.e. young adult males]. Traditional library users are attracted by the promotion: if you promote something as a good read, people will read it.'

However, the second authority felt that it had successfully reached 'males, aged 20 upwards.' This age group had tended to include 'the normal reference library users.' Interestingly, this information could be used to challenge the assumption held by many public library staff that those who read non-fiction are also non-browsers: to use the Mind's Eye promotion a certain amount of browsing was essential, as the books were not classified in standard Dewey sequence.

Therefore, although members of this user group may originally have entered the library building in order to borrow a specific non-fiction title, their frequent borrowing of Mind's Eye titles would suggest that the promotion had to some extent satisfied a need.

There is an indication in the evaluation findings that library staff in the pilot authorities were beginning to perceive a 'cross-over' between both fiction and non-fiction readers, and felt that non-fiction readers were not necessarily non-browsers.

#### **4.6 Library staff: attitudinal change**

A key objective of the evaluation of Mind's Eye was to investigate library staff response to the promotion, and to monitor attitudinal change, as appropriate.

Pilot authority representatives noted that the initial reactions of their colleagues to the concept of Mind's Eye were not entirely positive:

'Initially the local reaction on the ground was *no thank you*.'

'At first they were not too happy...'

'The staff in Bib Services were concerned about the cost of the books.'

'They [staff in the Reference library] were slightly bemused at the decision to put it in the Ref.'

However, as the concept became a reality and library staff were more actively involved in the daily operation of Mind's Eye, opinions were undoubtedly beginning to change:

'...now that it's gone up they're quite fond of it.'

'They are quite excited.'

'The responses are becoming more positive all the time.'

In addition, the findings revealed that Mind's Eye had helped to break down certain myths previously associated with running stock promotions.

For example, representatives from two pilot authorities felt that staff had previously been reluctant to participate in promotional projects because of the amount of additional work this would create:

'The reference staff have been pleasantly surprised, I think, that it hasn't meant a lot of extra work for them...'

'It has helped to get over the myth that reader development promotions are incredibly labour intensive.'

At the same time, one authority felt that Mind's Eye had successfully illustrated to its staff the value of a team-based project:

'All staff now have an appreciation of how much work went on...It was a good one in terms of different parts of the unit pulling together.'

A third point made was that the Mind's Eye promotion had been a useful exercise in terms of raising staff morale and promoting the work of the authority:

'It has increased the number of in-house converts to reader development. There had been a feeling generally that there was too much change going on...'

In this second example, the pilot representative felt that Mind's Eye had generated much-needed publicity not only for the authority as a whole, but more specifically for a particular library that had perhaps previously felt inferior to a newer, more modern 'flagship' neighbour:

'It has helped to address the perception that [other library] is a big media darling that gets everything...for [this library], it has helped to send out a good message, where it is quite difficult to keep the morale up. There is usually publicity about [other library], but this time it's for [this library].'

#### **4.6.1 The impact of staff training**

Undoubtedly, the aspect of the Mind's Eye promotion that achieved the maximum impact on library staff was the training sessions provided by the project management team to each of the pilot authorities. These five sessions were offered in addition to the ten regional training days that formed part of the national promotion. Trainees were unanimous in their acknowledgement of their impact:

'The staff really responded to the non-fiction training.'

'Feedback from the day was really positive...it was so good to be able to spend some time discussing books!'

'[The] training day...will give staff more confidence...will hopefully increase awareness.'

'It provided the space and validation to talk about books and reading.'

'The staff were so enthused by the training day that they were falling over themselves with ideas.'

A key benefit derived from the training sessions was that of ownership. A representative in one pilot authority felt that Mind's Eye was different from other promotions in which he and his colleagues had previously been involved, in terms of training:

'We have had a regular circuit of dumpbins over the last 18 months, but the staff have just gone through the motions. They haven't really engaged with the material, because they had no training. Now we're not depending on just one or two people to do the cascading: there's a sense of ownership.'

Furthermore, library staff at all levels were able to recognise the relevance and applicability of the training sessions to their daily work:

'I was very pleased to be attending a course specifically geared to my work: I think most elements of this course will enhance my work.'

'Many of the training exercises were very adaptable. Opening the Book crystallise the issue very well, give you exercises you can do on site.'

#### **4.6.2 Staff training evaluation feedback**

Feedback was collected by the project management team from each member of staff participating in Mind's Eye training sessions. Each was required to complete a brief questionnaire, which consisted of the following seven questions:

- *(1) Are you taking back any new ideas for promoting non-fiction from the training session?*
- *(2) What did you find of most interest?*
- *(3) Has the training session increased your confidence in promoting non-fiction to users? How?*
- *(4) Which element of the course will prove most useful to you in your work?*
- *(5) Was there anything that you found unhelpful on this course?*
- *(6) Is there anything specific that you plan to do as a result of this course?*
- *(7) Is there anything else you want to learn to do as a result of attending this course?*

Perhaps the most notable point to be derived from these data is that as a direct result of their participation in the training session, almost all trainees reported an increase in their confidence to promote non-fiction stock. A small sample of responses made to question (3) by those attending sessions in one of the five pilot authorities is given below:

'Yes, by stimulating lateral thinking within areas of stock usually viewed as 'difficult' to classify formally...'

'Yes. If we display more stock, then it shows we are interested in promoting it – [it] will be easy to point it out to users.'

'To offer greater diversity in our presentation of non-fiction and other materials. With better promotional back-up we will now have a platform to do this with confidence.'

It could also be argued that a more general benefit derived from the training sessions was one of reducing feelings of alienation amongst library staff: as representatives from all levels of the organisational structure attended the sessions, involvement in the promotion was inevitably more widespread. As one member of staff commented:

'It was a great thing having the training day; because of that all staff now feel involved, and have taken ownership of the project.'

## **4.7 Procedural changes**

Following the evidence presented in previous sections, arguably one of the most significant findings of the evaluation of the Mind's Eye promotion was that there was widespread acknowledgement that the work to promote non-fiction reading would continue and be developed for future use within local authorities. It would seem that in a number of cases Mind's Eye was not perceived as merely an isolated promotion, that staff had understood the concept behind it and were prepared to integrate practices learned into future reader development projects. To illustrate this further, the following post-training comments were made by staff from a variety of levels within the organisational structure of the pilot authorities:

'The Mind's Eye promotion will prove an interesting initiative but will certainly provide us with food for thought for the future!'

'It gave me ideas about non-fiction promotion and also gave me the enthusiasm to think up promotional ideas of my own.'

'It clarified the purpose of non-fiction promotions and also the kind of activities that we should get involved with to stimulate the public's interest.'

Library staff leading the project within the five pilot authorities also reported their intention to use the Mind's Eye promotion as a starting point for future work:

'We are hoping to do more of this kind of promotion in the future – we have never promoted non-fiction in this way before.'

'I believe that continuity of approach is most important if we wish to change the public perception of libraries.'

The second authority planned to devise a promotional timetable:

'At least four promotions such as Mind's Eye spread throughout the year would make an enormous visual impact and reinforce the idea that libraries are dynamic and constantly changing to meet their readers' demands.'

A further point on this subject is that many librarians had recognised the visual impact of a single promotion, with eye-catching stock and promotional materials, and felt that this might prove more beneficial than several smaller promotions running simultaneously:

‘A member of our staff made the important point that smaller conflicting promotions can be distracting and we should be careful not to damage the effectiveness of one display by setting up another in competition.’

Pilot authorities also commented that Mind’s Eye had encouraged them to rethink not only the content but also the presentation of their stock promotions. For example, they planned procedural changes in terms of the location of their promotional activities:

‘In general terms our expectations are to extend reader development practices throughout the library, which is why our main thrust has been in focusing upon the non-fiction/reference floor of the Central library. The ideas we are using in that are a totally new approach for us...using location creatively, breaking down stereotypes...and barriers to borrowing non-fiction.’

In a second authority, in which the library installing Mind’s Eye was being refurbished during the initial stages of the project, the influence of the promotion was perhaps more significant. A member of the project management team visited the site during the refurbishment and suggested ways in which the authority might maximise the impact of future promotions, largely by having a separate promotional space.

It is impossible to state in this report whether the future plans outlined above have been developed by staff within the pilot authorities, or whether Mind’s Eye was regarded as a single project, not the first in a series of non-fiction promotions. It would be interesting to revisit the five authorities twelve months after the removal of the Mind’s Eye promotional materials from their libraries, in order to investigate whether the projected procedural – and cultural – changes had taken place.

## 5. Booksellers and the Mind's Eye promotion

### 5.1 Display

A key factor in the comparison of promotional techniques used in bookshops and libraries is that bookshops tend to display promotions for no longer than several weeks, whereas libraries, traditionally less accustomed to promoting stock in this way, may display theirs for as long as three months. It is interesting to compare the responses of a librarian and a bookseller in this respect:

'We will run the promotion for three to four months...from the end of July to the autumn.' (librarian)

'We will have the promotion in the window for 3 weeks, then an inner shop display, very visible by the door, for another week.' (bookseller)

A further point in terms of display is that booksellers are aware that a promotional display – a dumpbin, table or window display – will regularly need to be refreshed, in order to maintain the visual impact, whereas the librarian's main focus is to maximise the lending potential of the title. One librarian summarised this issue as follows:

'Displays need to be constantly topped up and tidied up, gaps and disorder do a great deal of damage by enforcing a negative image of the library...it does demand time and it is not always easy for library staff with so many conflicting demands of work to devote time to displays and promotions. This is a common problem and one that can be seen in most libraries.'

However, it was encouraging to note that a librarian in the same local authority later acknowledged that the library staff had begun to refresh displays in the same way as the booksellers:

'There is a push with staff re the filling up of displays: they're doing it daily as with any stock – the dumpbins are full inside the library, which is a cultural change.'

### 5.2 The Mind's Eye booklist

The booksellers' initial reaction to the Mind's Eye stock list was not entirely positive:

'I initially thought that there were a lot of books we didn't go for, that they were not really relevant any more.'

'I was rather nervous when I examined the official Mind's Eye booklist because a number of the books were familiar...It seemed unwise to me to try to sell books which had already had their time in the spotlight.'

These comments underline the fact that booksellers select stock according to the most recent trends and publications, whereas for librarians, titles are frequently regarded as 'contemporary' or 'current' for longer. As the independent bookseller summarised:

'I would have difficulty catching interest with books that had been out for a while as potential purchases would be likely to have them already. So my main focus is on finding new ways to promote the latest books being published. Especially for those which seem to be very interesting but hard to classify because they are narrative non-fiction.'

However, both booksellers were impressed by the thematic structure and concept of the Mind's Eye promotion, so decided to adapt the stock list for their own purpose<sup>ix</sup>:

'I went for a mix of the standard as safe, then old favourites and then the newer ones.'

'I set about compiling my own list of 'Mind's Eye' books published in the last nine months and used the parameters you sent<sup>x</sup> to group the books in the same categories. To that I added some of the newer books from the original list.'

Similarly, the librarians in the pilot authorities also felt that the Mind's Eye promotion could be enhanced by the addition of existing stock in the area of narrative non-fiction, although this was done during the promotion, in order to meet an unexpected demand:

'...after one week it became necessary to top up the collection with similar books from off the shelves...we had to call in stock from other libraries to meet the demand.'

### **5.3 Sales figures**

Just as the Mind's Eye books were issuing well in the five pilot authorities, the two bookshops reported strong sales for the titles they were promoting. In the chain bookshop, promotions were frequent but tended to offer a price reduction with, for example, three books sold at the price of the cheapest two. However, the bookseller reported that:

'Overall...most titles did increase their sales during the promotion...The sales generated from the promotion, considering that there was no price promotion, were very good, and I think as a result sales will possibly be improved in the future.'

For the independent bookseller, the increase in sales was more noticeable, and far exceeded expectations:

'In total we sold 76 books from our list. This was very exciting as my expectations were much lower. Usually I am very pleased to sell 6 to 10 books over a two-week promotion in the window.'

She also felt that the sales increase was directly linked to her methods of displaying the stock and promotional materials:

'The final week is interesting [sales were higher than in weeks 2-3]: I had combined the displays into one window for the final week and it seemed to give the promotion a new lease of life...'

## 5.4 Customer feedback

The response of customers in both bookshops to the Mind's Eye promotion was extremely positive. Comments booksellers had recorded include the following:

'I have never seen such an interesting collection of books.'

'At last you're stocking the books I read about.'

Booksellers also noticed that customers were spending a considerable amount of time browsing, which they would not normally expect to see with non-fiction books. The manager of the independent bookshop suggested that a major reason for the widespread appeal of the promotion was that it helped people to make a more informed purchase:

'There's no such thing as reluctant readers, just people who don't know how to choose books...how do you enable [people] to make selections?...it's about reducing the choice, therefore drawing people in, you can develop their interest further.'

The manager had conducted a brief survey of fifty customers, and the results are listed below:

*'Is this the type of book you would normally read?'*

Yes: 28      No: 22.

*'Why did you choose this book?'*

Cover: 2	Recommended: 6
Subject: 37	Promotion: 28
Author: 1	Appropriate to recipient: 5
Review: 9	Attention caught by face-out display: 10'

N.B. Some people cited more than one reason for making their purchase.

This brief survey indicated that although many people chose a narrative non-fiction title because of the subject matter, the promotion itself was almost equally important to potential customers. The significance of the display methods should also not be ignored.

## 5.5 Impact on staff

The main advantage of delivering the Mind's Eye promotion to staff in the chain bookshop was that it provided a rare opportunity to assume the ownership of a project: the bookselling industry is becoming increasingly competitive, and Head Offices are reducing the level of independence of each store. As one bookseller stated:

'Head Office rules are becoming more strict. Everyone is interested in doing something that wasn't from Head Office.'

For staff in the independent bookshop, the advantage was quite different:

'...it did help us all to be able to recommend particular books on the basis of how they were written. *A good story* is a major selling point with most customers...this promotion did show that the narrative style of non-fiction is a much better seller [than 'traditional' non-fiction]. I will bear this in mind for future purchases.'

## 5.6 Procedural changes

This leads to a consideration of procedural changes that may have taken place in bookshops as a result of participation in the Mind's Eye promotion. Booksellers in the chain bookshop recognised that stock promotions did not necessarily succeed only when supported by a price promotion. They therefore planned to devise further thematic displays, not necessarily in the 'front-of-house' space generally allocated to promotions, but in other sections of the shop, such as the academic floor.

In the independent bookshop, staff planned to increase the amount of face-out stock display and multiple copies of the same title, in order to enhance sales:

'I saw for myself the differences it makes to have face-out display and noticeable quantities of each title. As a small shop I have tended to buy single copies to enable me to hold the maximum range of stock.'

As the manager summarised:

'It has been absolutely phenomenal, and it has really quite turned around my perception of how to sell this type of book.'

## **6. Conclusions and recommendations**

The first conclusion to be drawn is that Mind's Eye was undoubtedly a successful promotion. Many library authorities purchased the 'Reflect' and 'Decide' books and promotional materials, and reported high issues and positive reactions from both readers and staff. Within the pilot authorities that agreed to participate in the pilot project, conclusions were no less positive, and a number of procedural changes (in terms of stock promotion) had either occurred or were planned for the future. As previously mentioned, each of the authorities agreed to sustain Mind's Eye beyond the original funding period, which is further evidence of the positive reaction of library staff.

Given the evidence cited in sections 4 and 5, it would be reasonable to suggest that both library staff and customers were beginning to recognise that non-fiction can be promoted using the methods of reader development. Furthermore, the evaluative findings seem to challenge the assumption that people who read non-fiction are non-browsers, that they enter a library building in order to find a specific title.

### **6.1 Display and promotional materials**

Library staff recognised that a major factor in the success of the promotion was the distribution of professionally designed display materials. The regional training days and the project website both provided guidance to librarians in maximising the visual impact of the displays. However, in order to maintain this impact they must be regularly refreshed and updated, both in terms of the promotional materials and the books themselves.

It is acknowledged that library staff have many conflicting demands on their time, but a simple recommendation to librarians would be to nominate one person to spend five minutes at the beginning of each morning and afternoon ensuring the display is at its best. In this area, it would be helpful to adopt the standards regarded as essential in the commercial sector.

### **6.2 Mind's Eye stock issues**

Mind's Eye titles issued well, although it was not possible to collect overall figures for the purposes of this report, which was completed as the promotion was ongoing. One pilot authority was concerned that the stock was issuing too well, and that the library service was finding it difficult to meet the readers' demand. A simple recommendation would be to regard this as evidence of the success of the promotion, and to be prepared to supplement Mind's Eye titles with additional narrative non-fiction titles from other libraries within the authority.

It would also be helpful if individual copies were tagged at the acquisitions stage in order to know exactly how well promotional titles have performed. The software currently available in all library authorities has the capacity to tag books in this way, but the findings of this evaluation suggest that this capacity is not being fully

exploited. A suggestion is to conduct adequate forward planning, in order that the technical services and bibliographic services staff are asked in advance to prepare the computer system accordingly. In this way, frontline staff should later be able to obtain the data they require, quickly and easily.

### **6.3 Library membership**

The library computer system can also be used to calculate the number of newly enrolled library members in a given period. For the Mind's Eye promotion, it would have been extremely useful to record the number of people who had been encouraged to join the library specifically to borrow Mind's Eye (and similar) titles. For future promotions located in particular sections of the library, it is recommended that library staff work with the technical support staff to ensure that the computer system is capable of recording such data.

### **6.4 Library staff**

Librarians responded positively to the Mind's Eye promotion, and in many cases had developed a sense of ownership through a widespread involvement in the project. The evaluation of the regional staff training sessions illustrated that training can be used as a means of involving staff at all levels, thereby reducing feelings of alienation. It is recommended that future training sessions include more representation from libraries within the authority and from staff at all levels of the organisational structure.

A second way to involve more staff and thereby to increase enjoyment and ownership of a promotion would be to ensure that all promotions – both stock and point of lend materials – are rotated to a wide range of libraries within the authority.

### **6.5 Use of the Internet**

Although one authority had planned to use the Mind's Eye website and its own local government site to promote a postal delivery service of selected promotional titles, this had not been a successful element of the promotion, and public response had been limited. Staff in the authority suggested that this was due in part to poor communication between the relevant website staff and to poor links between the two sites listed above.

However, it could also be argued that the authority focused too much on the installation of Mind's Eye, and due to time limitations may have sacrificed the focus on marketing the promotion, of which the Internet could have been an integral part. A recommendation to avoid this would be to have a team of both technical and frontline staff that met regularly in order to allocate specific tasks and responsibilities in terms of developing the promotional aspect of the library pages on the local government website.

A second means of using the Internet to support future library promotions would be to create a series of links from the project website to a number of recommended sites, perhaps including:

- Chat rooms
- Discussion lists
- Reader development tools e.g. Book Forager<sup>xi</sup>
- Other reader development project websites e.g. Branching Out.<sup>xii</sup>

In this way, there would be interaction between the reader, the book and other readers. For a further non-fiction promotion it could also be a valuable way to bridge the gap between the reference library and the lending library, by introducing non-fiction readers to reader development.

## **6.6 Use of qualitative and quantitative data**

There were many examples of staff and reader responses to the Mind's Eye promotion that had been collected relatively easily during the period of the project, for example:

- Staff training evaluation forms
- Reader response forms
- Anecdotal evidence from each.

The positive examples (of which there were many) could be used in order to justify the potential funding bodies the value and impact of professionally devised book collections and promotional materials.

In addition, these qualitative data could be used in combination with issue figures and new membership figures in order to support library authorities in reviewing service provision and performance, including the Best Value inspection process.

The Mind's Eye promotion could be regarded as a template for the straightforward collection of both qualitative and quantitative data to be used as ongoing evidence to promote the service provided by each authority.

Further library promotions using similar professionally produced materials could also help to enhance the public perception of the library service. Mind's Eye clearly had a significant impact on both customers and library staff, and has conveyed to many the idea that libraries are dynamic and responsive to readers' needs. If it is not viewed as an isolated project, but has instead helped to permanently change the way library stock is promoted, then cultural change will occur.

A final recommendation (previously stated in Section 4.7) would be to contact the five pilot authorities twelve months after they had finished promoting the Mind's Eye collection within their library service, in order to investigate to what extent this cultural change had taken place.

---

## Notes and references

<sup>i</sup> Downes, A. (2001), 'Making non-fiction seductive', *The Library Association Record*, Vol. 103 No. 3, pp.160-61. See Appendix F for full text version.

<sup>ii</sup> Van Riel, R. (2001), 'An eyeful for the curious', *The Bookseller*, 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2001, pp. 30-31. See Appendix F for full text version.

<sup>iii</sup> The Open Ticket project website: <http://www.branching-out.net/ticket/>

<sup>iv</sup> The Mind's Eye project website: <http://www.readersonline-europa.com/mindseye.htm>

<sup>v</sup> Photographs of the Phoenix Bookshop in Appendix E.

<sup>vi</sup> *Display material – making the most of it*: <http://www.readersonline-europa.com/mindseye/materials.htm>

<sup>vii</sup> Reading survey: <http://www.readersonline-europa.com/mindseye/questionnaire.asp>

<sup>viii</sup> Mind's Eye readers survey: [http://www.readersonline-europa.com/mindseye/audience\\_action.htm#minds](http://www.readersonline-europa.com/mindseye/audience_action.htm#minds)

<sup>ix</sup> See Appendices C and D for booksellers' Mind's Eye stock lists

<sup>x</sup> Definition of *Reflect* and *Decide* books from the Mind's Eye website: <http://www.readersonline-europa.com/mindseye/books.htm>

<sup>xi</sup> The Book Forager website: <http://www.readersonline-europa.com/forager/index.htm>

<sup>xii</sup> The Branching Out project website: <http://www.branching-out.net>

## Acknowledgements

The author acknowledges the valuable contribution to this report of her colleague Stella Thebridge, Research Fellow at UCE.