Censorship challenges to books in Scottish public libraries

Kelly Taylor
Anderson Strathern Solicitors, UK

David McMenemy
University of Strathclyde, UK

Abstract

Censorship challenges to books in UK public libraries have received renewed attention recently. This study sought to establish the incidence of censorship challenges to books in Scottish public libraries in the years 2005–2009 and the actions taken in response to these challenges. It was found that eight local authorities in Scotland had received formal censorship challenges to books, with a total of 15 challenges throughout the country. The most common action taken in response to these challenges was for the book to be kept in stock in its original position with the rationale for this explained to the complainer, with the second most common action being taken to move the title to another section of the library. Two books were removed from the library in response to a censorship challenge. The largest numbers of challenges were made against books on the basis of sexual material.

Keywords

Censorship, collection development, intellectual freedom, public libraries, Scotland

Introduction

Censorship in libraries has always been a topic of concern: 'the relationship between librarians and censorship is, and has been, a troubled one' (Oppenheim and Smith, 2004: 159). While there have been several studies in the USA, there has been little recent research into the phenomenon in the UK. With headlines in recent years over libraries stocking supposedly extremist material (Brandon and Murray, 2007), and the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA, 2008) publishing guidelines for librarians to use when managing controversial material, there is a need for research to discover the extent of censorship in UK public libraries.

The aim of this study was to ascertain the incidence of challenges to books in Scottish public libraries, and to discover what actions have been taken in response to these challenges. The specific objectives of the paper were:

- to determine how many public libraries in Scotland have received challenges to books, using the American Library Association definition;
- to determine how many challenges these libraries have received;
- to determine which public library authorities received the most challenges to books;
- to establish the most common reasons for challenges to books in these libraries;
- to establish the actions taken by libraries in response to challenges, and the frequency of these.

Literature review

The principle of intellectual freedom in libraries has been emphasised throughout the years in statements from professional organisations (CILIP, 2005), by those who develop statement of values and principles for the library profession (Gorman, 2000), and by research such as that performed by Curry which involved interviews with public library directors in the UK and Canada, all of whom agreed that 'the public library has an important role to play in maintaining intellectual freedom' (Curry, 1997: 30).

Corresponding author:
David McMenemy, Department of Computer and Information Sciences, University of Strathclyde, Livingstone Tower, Richmond Street, Glasgow, G1 1XH, UK.
Email: d.mcmenemy@strath.ac.uk

There are, however, debates over the status of intellectual freedom and censorship in the library. Oppenheim and Smith delineate the two main areas of debate in this field: first of all, should censorship exist at all, and second (if it is accepted that it should exist in some form) 'what should be censored, and in what way should it be applied' (Oppenheim and Smith, 2004: 160). Marco promotes the model of the librarian as a gatekeeper to information, stating that censorship is 'in itself neither right nor wrong; it is a legal action performed in the interest of the greater good' (Marco, 1995: 15). These debates mean that censorship in the public library has always been a topic of concern (Thompson, 1975). Most recently, this has been over the stocking of what has been described as extremist material in libraries (Brandon and Murray, 2007; McMenemy, 2008).

This study will focus on censorship challenges to books in Scottish public libraries. The American Library Association (ALA) defines a challenge to a book as a 'formal, written complaint, filed with a library or school requesting that materials be removed from the library because of content or inappropriateness' (ALA, 2009b). Guidance on intellectual freedom and censorship from the UK professional body, the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP), states that in the case of challenges to books on the shelves of libraries:

> Access should not be restricted on any grounds except that of the law. If publicly available material has not incurred legal penalties then it should not be excluded on moral, political, religious, racial or gender grounds, to satisfy the demands of sectional interest. (CILIP, 2005)

Despite the devolved nature of the Scottish branch of CILIP, this remains the professional guidance that relates to Scottish librarians, as all members adhere to this ethical code.

History of censorship in public libraries

In public libraries censorship is 'as old as the public library movement itself', and control over material has always been exercised (Thompson, 1975: 1). In the first half of the 20th century, the public library was concerned with the morals of its readers (Berwick Sayers, 2007; Thompson, 1975); the founders of the public library system envisaged it as an 'access point for high quality reading material and not low brow fiction' and stocked the library accordingly (McMenemy, 2009: 62).

Information that is censored generally falls into sociopolitical, sexual and religious categories (Malley, 1990), with the focus of censorship and what is considered controversial changing according to the prevailing climate and worries of the day. Malley illustrates this by summing up the second half of the 20th century: during World War II seditious literature became the focus; in the 1950s, amid anti-communism, left-wing literature was under threat; and in the 1960s there was a worry that rising permissiveness would cause libraries to go too far with 'indecent' and 'obscene' books. The 1970s and 1980s brought increasing multiculturalism which 'made us conscious of the damage of racist and religiously intolerant literature' (Malley, 1990: 19). Alongside this and into the 1990s, splits along political lines became much more common. However, after a heyday of censorship literature in the 1970s there is little literature past this, as noted: 'it is at the mid-70s that literature about the history of censorship in libraries appears to stop, but censorship in libraries continued' (Oppenheim and Smith, 2004: 161).

Current issues

Since the beginning of the 21st century and, more specifically, the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York on 11 September 2001, there has been a rising fear of Islamic terrorism in the public psyche and corresponding calls for censorship and control of 'terrorist' publications (Brandon and Murray, 2007). The Museums, Archives and Libraries Council (MLA) has issued guidance for libraries to refer to when dealing with controversial material of this nature (MLA, 2008), which in itself provoked controversy in certain sections of the press in regards to the placing of copies of the Bible on the top shelf alongside the Koran (Cockcroft, 2009; Doughty, 2009).

There is a perception that there has been a shift in the popular view of what is acceptable: while official guidance, both from the MLA and professional organisations (CILIP, 2005; MLA, 2008), is that as long as material is available legally it should have a place in the library's collection, recent literature has highlighted concerns regarding librarians following this particular advice. In 2007 McMenemy questioned whether the results of Hauptman's groundbreaking 1975 study, where 13 reference librarians in San Francisco were asked if they would provide information on how to make a bomb, would be repeated if it was conducted today: in Hauptman's study all the librarians did provide the information, subscribing to the view that legally available information should be freely provided (Hauptman, 1976; McMenemy, 2007). However, when this question was also posed by Moody, who in 2004 conducted a survey of the purchasing decisions of Australian librarians regarding various hypothetical book titles on controversial topics, it was found that the books containing instructions for pursuing illegal activities (i.e. bomb and drug making) were least likely to be selected, and were rejected by 68% of respondents. While it was made clear in the survey that the books were available legally, the comments in the study indicated that the illegality and possible contravention of government regulations were the reasons for deciding not to purchase (Moody, 2004).

Likewise, in 1997 Curry interviewed public library directors and discovered that when it came to the question of whether 'material on the growing or manufacture of narcotic or hallucinatory drugs is appropriate for a public library collection', the response was fairly evenly split: 57% for and 43% against (Curry, 1997: 96–97). Those directors who agreed with the provision of the material cited the library's mission of provision of information, while those against provision of the material cited protecting individuals from harm, protecting the social fabric, and keeping the library out of trouble with the local community and law, reasons which reflected those given by the respondents in Moody's survey.

Racial and religious hatred

Related to the debate over the provision of extremist material is the issue of racist material, and racial and religious hatred. There are two schools of thought on this: that the material is offensive and must be removed; or that it should be kept but classified as racist and offered alongside opposing viewpoints: this would allow borrowers to draw their own conclusions regarding the material (McMenemy, 2008). Oppenheim discusses this, stating that in cases when controversial material covering topics such as race hatred are under consideration to be removed from libraries:

> in consideration of the feelings of certain communities, e.g., Jewish, Black or Asian. However, there is the alternative opinion that if such material is to be included in any library, it should be the library of the targeted group and the material should be classified, for example, as 'racist'. (Oppenheim and Smith, 2004: 162)

In parallel to this there are rising concerns on the impact of organised 'Religious Right' groups, most notably in schools in the USA. Books have been challenged by these groups on grounds ranging from witchcraft to sexual content (Packard, 1999; Rosen, 2005). There has also been a campaign by Christian fundamentalists to have 'intelligent design' (ID) textbooks stocked in school libraries alongside evolution texts. These groups have been reported trying to influence school library collections by donating 'science' textbooks which are in fact propaganda for ID, and have then accused school librarians who refuse to stock these of censoring (O'Sullivan and O'Sullivan, 2007). O'Sullivan and O'Sullivan describe a situation where a gift of ID textbooks was made to a school library, and the librarians were then accused of censorship after declining the gift. The librarians had investigated the books upon receipt, following their collection development policy and selection criteria, and found several negative reviews in respected science journals. In the same vein, a recent *New Scientist* article 'How to spot a hidden religious agenda' claimed that the loss of court battles by creationists in the US has meant that creationists are turning to a different strategy, to heavily veil references to ID in science books: 'religion in science's clothing', and gave tips on how to spot a book that purports to be scientific but is actually pushing a religious agenda (Gefter, 2009).

Responses to challenges

The ALA's Office of Intellectual Freedom defines a challenge as 'a formal, written complaint, filed with a library or school requesting that materials be removed from the library because of content or inappropriateness' (ALA, 2009b). In the case of a challenge to books, the spectrum of responses ranges from not taking any action and leaving the book in place (in practice this is generally taken alongside explaining the reasons for keeping the text and/or the library's collection development policy to the reader); reclassifying the book to a different section of the library; moving the book to restricted storage; and removing the book from stock completely (Curry, 2001).

Guidance to librarians from professional associations in cases of censorship challenges generally state that laws define what is permissible in each case, and as long as material is legally published and a balanced collection is maintained, material should be kept in the collection (CILIP, 2005). However, this is not always as clear cut as the guidance may make it seem. In the legal sense, the law does not always keep pace with society and may lag behind shared values (Malley, 1990), and in addition legislation may also race away from what is considered permissible (Oppenheim and Smith, 2004). In an ethical sense, competing pressures affect the librarian: librarians' ethical responsibilities are well documented (Gorman, 2000), but these will often contradict those of the employer. The librarian must also reconcile their own personal beliefs and those of society at large with actions taken (Malley, 1990; McMenemy, 2007).

Types of challenges

Jones describes the terms frequently used in censorship as *questioning*, *objections and complaints*. Questioning is 'inquiring about the reasons for material being or not being in the library's collection', and is not in itself an attempt to censor. In contrast to this, *objections* and *complaints* include the opinion that the library's selection decisions were wrong. Jones states that these may be formal or informal, and can include comments made to staff when returning a book or written comments left in books, in addition to formal written complaints (Jones, 1983: 130). Similarly, Harer and Harris classified complaints into 'benign complaints' (when complaints were made and then withdrawn, or informal complaints were made but no action was taken); 'non-consensus complaints' (complaint was made but denied, then further action threatened); 'consensus complaints' (the authority acts upon the complaint); and

'radical complaints' (direct action is taken: i.e. the book is removed or destroyed by the complainer) (Harer and Harris, 1994: 27–28).

Jones elaborated on the issue of direct action by noting that in addition to libraries removing the item in response to a complaint, censorship can be achieved by the complainer removing material from the library directly, by removing or altering parts of books, or adding written comments or illustrations. This is distinguished from vandalism by the intention to 'modify or influence others' experience of the works because of dislike for or disagreement with their contents' (Jones, 1983: 131), and can be an additional cause of censorship.

Actions taken after challenges

While the standard guidance to librarians dealing with censorship challenges is that as long as material is legally available it should be kept in stock, it has been noted that in a practical setting the issue may not always seem so clear cut, for example when it comes to obscene or 'terrorist' publications (Oppenheim and Smith, 2004), and many different actions are taken in response to a request to remove a book (Packard, 1999). The MLA recently published guidance to assist libraries when dealing with the management of controversial material, including case studies to assist with responding to requests to remove books from the shelves, and it suggested that there was an increased demand for guidance from libraries regarding these situations (MLA, 2008).

Curry grouped the actions that can be taken actions in response to censorship challenges as follows:

1. relocating material within the library or the library system (e.g. moving to a branch library);
2. discarding material, particularly that which is in paperback format;
3. locating sensitive material in a reserve or restricted section immediately after purchase;
4. gathering positive reviews in anticipation of a challenge;
5. encouraging staff to offer verbal cautions to patrons;
6. labelling the material or its catalogue record (Curry, 1997: 138).

In Curry's 1997 research, in-depth interviews were conducted with 30 Canadian and 30 British library directors. When discussing their responses to censorship challenges, 90% mentioned that they would explain the library selection policy, and 70% said they would explain the philosophy of intellectual freedom. When the subject of moving books was raised, 62% of British directors and 40% of Canadians would sometimes relocate books (Curry, 1997).

Community pressures can also play a part in the response, especially in small communities where librarians can be expected to act *in loco parentis* (Curry, 2001; Schrader, 1995: 42). This can cause conflict between the professional principles of intellectual freedom and the expectations placed on the librarian by the community they are a part of. As Curry states, this is also difficult on a practical level due to different members of the community having different ideas about the responsibility of acting *in loco parentis*:

> To some, it means protecting children and young adults from challenging and difficult ideas. But to most librarians, that responsibility includes introducing young people to those ideas through books that reveal the complexity of [the] world. (Curry, 2001: 32)

Marco states that responses to objections by community members to materials in the library collection are 'entirely a matter of professional judgement, having really nothing to do with censorship', and justifies this by saying that:

> Objections to certain acquisitions are a signal to review how well the collection development policy is formulated and executed. Such objections ought to be taken seriously, and indeed ought to be a source of satisfaction to librarians... Individuals and groups expressing their concerns should resonate with the nature of the library profession, which is also concerned with the society and potential harm to it. (Marco, 1995: 19)

However, the general consensus within most literature is that, although the library serves the community and community feeling must be taken into account, community pressure itself should not be enough to result in a book being withdrawn or moved: the librarian must make the ultimate decision with reference to the legality of the book, backed up by the library's collection development and stock selection policies (CILIP, 2005; MLA, 2008).

Moving/reclassifying material

In a Canadian-wide study of censorship in public libraries, Schrader (1995) found that after an item had been challenged 13% of items were relocated, reclassified, labelled, or restricted by age or grade level. This response seems to be especially common in children's books. Jenkinson's (1986) study found librarians moving potentially controversial books from regular collection to restricted 'teachers' collections'. Similarly, in 2001 Curry performed a quantitative analysis of the placement of controversial children's fiction books in public libraries in British Columbia in Canada. It was found that around 15% of the copies of controversial young adult titles had been placed in adult fiction areas, and noted that it appeared that books containing

sexual material were more likely to be moved. Curry found in interviews with library directors that relocating material 'to a different if equally accessible location' was the most frequently mentioned action in response to a challenge to a book. Of British directors who had received pressure to withdraw material, 62% had done this at some point. This can include moving items from the children's section to the teen section, from teen to adult, or from the main fiction section to the reference section, in addition to changing the classification of the title or moving it to another library branch. Moving the item to a library with a different 'profile' – younger and more tolerant readers, or a different racial or ethnic origin – were both given as examples in this practice (Curry, 1997: 139).

Labelling

In Curry's survey of library directors in 1997, most (70%) British directors disagreed with the practice of labelling books, a view shared by professional organisations such as the ALA (Curry, 1997). Librarians that agreed with this action considered it to be a way of warning readers who might be easily offended by certain types of material that they might not consider the book suitable. However, those who were against the practice cited worries that it was a slippery slope towards further censorship (Curry, 2001).

Guidance by professional associations

Guidance by the UK's Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) states that:

> Access [to information] should not be restricted on any grounds except that of the law. If publicly available material has not incurred legal penalties then it should not be excluded on moral, religious, racial or gender grounds, to satisfy the demands of sectional interest. (CILIP, 2005)

Oppenheim notes that 'policies advocate the ideal: the sanctity of intellectual freedom', and goes on to say that 'the ALA seems far more forthright than its UK counterpart; the dominance of literature from the US on the subject reflects this proportion of concern' (Oppenheim and Smith, 2004: 168). Curry found that both British and Canadian library directors overwhelmingly agreed that their library associations played an active role in intellectual freedom; however the majority of British directors wanted the then Library Association to play a more active role in intellectual freedom defending and promotion (Curry, 1997: 190). The reasons for the ALA being considered more forthright with regards to defending intellectual freedom can partly be traced back to the increased profile of censorship issues in the United States – for example, Jones' history of censorship

outlines the large number of court battles that have been fought in America over books being removed from libraries, whereas the similar history for the UK is tiny by comparison (Jones, 1983). In addition to this, the ALA has an Office of Intellectual Freedom which coordinates reporting by its members whenever books are challenged – this culminates in the annual Banned Books Week, which aims to raise the media profile of censorship challenges to books.

Competing pressures on librarians: Divided loyalties

In cases of censorship the onus is on the individual librarian to act ethically and thus the decision will be made combined with their personal values and competing pressures. The pressures the individual librarian faces cannot be underestimated: these can come from society, from the librarian's employer, their professional obligations, and their own views and beliefs. It has been observed that: 'librarians have been as irrational and discriminatory as other censors and at times for the same uncomfortable reason: personal taste, as well as submitting to the practice of censorship due to pressure from external bodies' (Oppenheim and Smith, 2004: 159).

Oppenheim and Smith argue that while the principles of intellectual freedom mean that information professionals normally agree that they should provide access to information regardless of their personal points of view, difficulty arises 'in the obligation of the librarian to the communities, customers and governing bodies that they serve and are funded by' (Oppenheim and Smith, 2004: 159).

Librarians in public libraries are employed by the local authority, potentially adding political considerations to the pressures already faced. In 1990 Malley stated that censorship was divided along political lines in a way it had not been in the past:

> the probability is that political control does determine what may or may not be censored or, conversely, stocked in a public library...whereas in the past local authorities would censor in isolation and in response to local pressure, the tendency now may be to follow 'the party line'. (Malley, 1990: 2).

A good example of this was the News International ban. This occurred in 1986, when several local authorities in the UK banned publications by the News International group, including *The Times*, the *Sunday Times*, *The Sun* and the *News of the World* (Malley, 1990) as a gesture of solidarity with the unions in an industrial dispute. This was possibly the first case in the United Kingdom where organised action was taken to censor publications, and was especially unusual because the reasons for the censorship were the actions taken by News International rather than the content of the publications themselves (Malley, 1990). In this particular case the Library Association stated that:

it is manifestly not right that councillors should allow their personal opinions on a political or industrial matter to stand in the way of right of access of the public to all publications which can reasonably be provided ... the imposition of these bans constitutes a major breach of the traditional principle that public libraries should be a neutral and non-partisan service. (Malley, 1990: 6**).**

Self-censorship

In addition to challenges to books from members of the community the library serves, there is the additional issue of 'self-censorship'. This takes place during book selection and involves the librarian choosing not to purchase potentially controversial titles (Asheim, 1953; Curry, 1994; Fiske, 1968; Moody, 2005; Oppenheim and Smith, 2004).

The phenomenon was first brought fully under the spotlight by Fiske's ground-breaking work in 1959. The study of public and school librarians in California found that even though they were strong supporters of intellectual freedom, they shied away from purchasing controversial titles, and instead were highly selective. In this case, a low number of complaints regarding books in the collection was attributed to librarians ensuring the collection contained a lack of controversial material, and keeping restricted access collections of the material that was controversial, in order to avoid complaints (Fiske, 1968: 81). Fiske concluded that librarians themselves were most likely to censor their collections. This finding – that librarians will profess high beliefs in intellectual freedom, while actual willingness to censor varies widely, had also been reported in studies by Busha (1972) and McNicol (2006). Likewise, Cole's (2000) study which explored the influence of librarians, elected members and library users' attitudes on stock management practice, found that while most agreed that stock management should be conducted in accordance with intellectual freedom, views were inconsistent when the matter was delved into further.

The difference between selection and censorship is hard to delineate. Hannabuss and Allard (2001) consider selection to simply be a more socially acceptable form of censorship. However, selection is necessary in a library: no library has an unlimited budget or space, and so all libraries must make stock selection decisions. Moody (2004) notes that it can be easy to self-censor under the guise of considering reasons such as 'literary quality', or lack of funds or no demand for the item. Asheim (1953) when considering this suggests that selection is a positive action which judges the book as a whole, while censorship is negative and purposely seeks out 'vulnerable characteristics'.

Importance of collection development and stock selection policies

There is a general consensus in the literature that collection development policies help protect against self-censorship and the worry that selection can lead to a slippery slope into censorship, in addition to the interference and political influence of elected officials in local authority organisations (Curry, 1997: 121). Oppenheim states that 'A better way to protect against censorship is the use of a collection management policy' (Oppenheim and Smith, 2004: 164), and Jones (1983: 132) recommends having a good selection policy and written selection procedures as a vital defence against censorship which will assist both the staff in selecting materials, and the public in understanding 'the purpose of the library's collection and the role played by selection decisions in developing the collection'. It can also protect against the 'personal bias or even personal whim' which Harer and Harris (1994: 26) state that selection may be based on.

Part of a collection development policy should also include ensuring that there is a balance of 'information, opinion and belief in all topics represented in the collection, including topics of known or anticipated controversy' (Jones, 1983: 132). Moody's (2004) study found that a quarter of respondents suggested that a balance of views on controversial topics is important, although it also found inconsistencies in the application of this. This would suggest that balance in collections is viewed a little less favourably by practising librarians than in the literature.

McMenemy also addressed the issue of a well-balanced collection, in the context of the *Hate on the State* report (Murray and Brandon, 2007) which accused libraries of stocking Islamic extremist material by authors who had been convicted of incidents relating to incitement. McMenemy noted that it is common to find *Mein Kampf* on the shelves of public libraries, and that libraries must provide a wide range of views, exposing such beliefs to public scrutiny while providing alternative viewpoints. It was also suggested that 'in making such writings illegal or not purchasing them because they attract controversy we do not rid ourselves of the thoughts, we merely drive them out of sight, a far more dangerous situation for society' (McMenemy, 2008: 343).

Approaches to studying censorship

Censorship can be approached from an ethical, legal, or collection management perspective (Curry, 1994; Moody, 2004). In addition to the ALA annual 'Banned Books' report, which relies on self-reporting from libraries of challenges to books, studies on censorship in public libraries have taken the approach of interviewing librarians about

challenges to books and their actions in response to this (Curry, 1997); surveying the collection management of a particularly controversial book as it was published and surveying libraries to discover their responses to this (Curry, 1994); surveying librarians with regards to their decisions regarding hypothetical collection management scenarios with controversial books (Moody, 2004); and quantitative analysis of the placement of controversial children's books in public libraries (Curry, 2001). Most studies have been quantitative, using questionnaires as a way to gather data. These have the benefits of being able to reach a large community, get data from a large sample, and of being low cost and anonymous (Pickard, 2007). However the response group will be necessarily self-selecting, meaning data might be skewed. The *Freedom of Information Act (Scotland)* brings the powers to request recorded information from Scottish public bodies (Evans and Dunion, 2007). This has the potential to provide more complete results, though it is as yet mostly untested as a research tool.

Methodology

The aim of this paper is to ascertain the incidence of challenges to books in Scottish public libraries, and to discover which actions have been taken in response to these challenges. While the first part of this lends itself to a quantitative study, investigating the actions taken may be best served by taking a more qualitative approach. A quantitative approach could involve looking at the numbers of challenges to books, categorising the actions taken in response to these and comparing the results from many different libraries. A qualitative approach could include looking in depth at challenges to books in a few libraries: investigating the reasons for both the challenges themselves and the actions taken in response to these challenges, and how the librarians making the decision felt about the challenges and their actions in response to them. These could be combined into a post-positivist mind-set where the quantitative data is collected and given more depth by inclusion of discussion with librarians regarding their feelings on the issue of censorship, why they took the actions they did, and how they felt about these actions.

Given the time limits of this particular study and the fact that little research has been done on this issue in Scotland, it was decided that most value could be gained by a quantitative study to give an overall picture of the state of censorship and challenges to books in Scotland's public libraries at the present time. A survey was chosen for the research question in this study because it provided information that could be generalised to the entire research population. It was also chosen to use a descriptive survey, to discover the current incidence of censorship requests and what actions have been taken in response to this, rather than an explanatory survey, which could have been undertaken to investigate the variables involved in this process.

The data collection techniques chosen for the survey were Freedom of Information requests. This had the benefit of the local authority being obliged to provide the information under the legal terms of the Act. Pickard warns against this method, stating that it 'trivialises the entire underlying ethos of the Act' (Pickard, 2007: 185), and also puts the respondent on the defensive: 'they will be tempted to give as little information as possible within the requirements of the Act' (Pickard, 2007: 185). The benefits of an increased response rate must be weighed against the risks of turning the sample population against the research. It could be argued that if a quantitative approach is taken the cooperation beyond supply of the requested information is not needed; that libraries and local authorities will be used to receiving such requests; and that the research is in the public interest: the state of censorship in Scottish public libraries is an important and as yet unanswered question.

For a quantitative approach to the research topic, a survey using either a questionnaire or a mixture of questionnaires and interviews would be a good approach to give an overview of the current incidence of censorship in Scottish public libraries. It also has the benefits of being low cost, anonymous, and allowing respondents to answer in their own time. However, the success of this approach is dependent on a high response rate and this particular research topic, given the subject matter and the probable need by respondents to look up information on censorship incidents, which would require a degree of time and effort, would be particularly vulnerable to non-response. The use of interviews would alleviate some of these concerns but lose the appeal of a broad-based survey. The use of Freedom of Information requests enabled a broad based survey with a probable higher return rate.

Freedom of Information requests

The first phase of data collection consisted of surveying the current incidence of censorship in Scottish public libraries by sending out Freedom of Information requests to the 32 public library authorities in Scotland. The Freedom of Information requests aimed to collect data on the numbers of challenges to books, the titles of the books challenged, the reason for challenge and the action that was taken in response, if any.

The template letter sent with the requests was taken from the Information Commissioner Scotland's sample Freedom of Information request (Evans and Dunion, 2007), and as the requests would not be administered in person care was taken to ensure the questions were as easy to understand as possible. The research question was broken down into four parts and the word 'censorship' was avoided to avoid bias: libraries were instead asked if they had

received complaints against books on the basis of 'content or inappropriateness'. This wording was chosen because it mirrored the ALA's definition of censorship (Long, 2006). The period of five years was chosen to ensure data collected would be current, but also to collect enough results for a full analysis. It was also considered to be unlikely that libraries would have records going back further, due to data protection legislation.

Rather than taking a representative sample of the research population, the relatively small size of the Scottish public library population meant that it was feasible to sample the entire population. The websites of all 32 local authorities were searched and Freedom of Information requests were submitted according to their instructions (17 local authorities asked for the information to be submitted via email, and 15 by submitting an online form).

Results and analysis

Response rates

Out of the 32 local authorities in Scotland to which the Freedom of Information request was sent, 29 provided the information requested. This was a response rate of 91% of all Scottish local authorities. Of the three which did not reply, one local authority refused to provide the information requested, first stating that to do so would cost more than £600 and therefore be outside the remit of the *Freedom of Information Act*, and when this was queried stating that they did not hold the information requested. The remaining two local authorities did not respond in the 20 working days specified in the legislation.

Of the local authorities which did return a result, one complaint which was returned in response to the FOI requests was not included in the final analysis. The complaint stated that the library stocked too many children's books containing American spelling and grammar. The library's response to this was to note the comments, but not take any action, and as this did not refer to a specific title it was not included in the analysis.

Number of local authorities which have received complaints

Over the 29 local authorities which responded to the Freedom of Information request, 8 had received complaints made against books on the grounds of content or inappropriateness in the years 2004–2009; this represents one-quarter of all Scottish public library authorities. The total number of complaints across all local authorities was 15.

Number of complaints received by each local authority

Of the 32 local authorities in Scotland, 21 had not received any complaints against library books on the basis of content

Table 1. Number of complaints received by each local authority.

Numbers of complaints received by each local authority	
Complaints	Number of local authorities
0	21
1	6
2	0
3	0
4	1
5	1
No results	3

or inappropriateness in the previous five years. This was by far the largest category. The second largest category was that of the local authorities which received one complaint: 6 libraries. After this there was a fairly large jump: no local authorities had received two or three complaints, and two further local authorities had received four and five complaints respectively (Table 1).

Complaints regarding fiction vs. non-fiction

In total there were 8 complaints against fiction books, of which 2 were against books aimed at adults; 4 against books aimed at children; and 2 against books in the teenage/young adult category. There were 7 complaints made against non-fiction books, of which 4 were made against adult titles and 3 against children's titles. The classification of this posed some problems: while some non-fiction titles, such as *Revolting Recipes* by Roald Dahl and *Mummy Never Told Me* by Babette Cole were clearly aimed at children, and some such as *Planned Parenting* were aimed at adults, titles such as *The Guinness Book of Records* – generally considered to be aimed at children but also used by adults – were harder to categorise. For these the library catalogue for the relevant authority was searched and the title was categorised according to the library's classification of the book.

Table 2 shows that slightly more complaints were made against fiction than non-fiction titles (8 complaints were made against fiction titles compared to 7 against non-fiction titles).

Complaints on the basis of age

Six complaints were made against books in the children's section of the library: *Revolting Recipes* and *The Vicar of Nibbleswick*, both by Roald Dahl; *Mummy Never Told Me* and *Mummy Laid an Egg*, both by Babette Cole; *Adventures of the Dish and the Spoon* by Mini Grey; *Outbreak* by Chris Ryan; and *More and More Rabbits* by Nicolas Allan. There were also two complaints made against young adult/teen books on the basis of being inappropriate for the age group: these were against *It's Ok, I'm Wearing Really Big Knickers* by Louise Rennison and *My Life as a Bitch* by Melvin

Table 2. Complaints made against fiction vs. non-fiction titles, by age group (*n*=15).

Complaints made against fiction vs. non-fiction titles, by age group	
Category	Number of complaints
Non-fiction adult	4
Fiction adult	2
Fiction child	4
Non-fiction child	2
Fiction teen	3

Burgess. In total 10 complaints were made against books on the basis of age: this accounted for two-thirds of the total.

Reasons for complaints

The ALA classifies complaints into four categories:

- **Cultural** (to include Anti-Ethnic/Insensitivity/ Racism/Sexism/Inaccurate)
- **Sexual** (Homosexuality/Nudity/Sex Education/ Sexually Explicit/Unsuited to Age Group)
- **Values** (Anti-Family/Offensive Language/Political Viewpoint/Religious Viewpoint)
- **Social issues** (Abortion/Drugs/Occult/Satanism/ Suicide/Violence) (ALA, 2009a).

The complaints were classified according to this; however, problems arose relating to the brevity of information on some complaint cards. Using the information given and the ALA classification, 3 of the 15 complaints were stated to be for sexual reasons (the adult fiction title *The Man Who Walks* by Alan Warner; and two children's books by Babette Cole: *Mummy Never Told Me*, and *Mummy Laid an Egg,* both of which deal with sex education for the under-5s). There were two complaints in the values category, both for inappropriate language (*It's Ok, I'm Wearing Really Big Knickers* by Louise Harrison and *The Vicar of Nibbleswick* by Roald Dahl), and one complaint each in the categories of cultural, and social issues (*India Today* for not reflecting modern India; and *Sweetmeat* by Luke Sutherland for being 'appalling, tasteless and violent').

This left 8 complaints unclassified, more than half of the total number. In three cases this was due to the complaint not fitting into a defined category: in one (*The Guide to Training Your Own Dog* by Matthew Van Kyrk) the information on dog training was considered inaccurate by the complainer, and in two more cases the imagery in the book was considered 'disgusting' for children (regarding *The Guinness Book of Records* – the complainer believed that pictures of the longest fingernails ever were too gruesome for children – and *Revolting Recipes* by Roald Dahl).

In the five cases left, four involve children or young adults books: in two cases the content of young adult titles was considered unsuitable for children (based on the titles – *My Life as a Bitch* by Melvin Burgess and *Outbreak* by Chris Ryan – a guess could be made at sexual or violent reasons underlying the unsuitability, but there is no information to support this, while two titles were considered 'inappropriate'. One of these, *More and More Rabbits* by Nicolas Allan, is a children's book which was complained about on the basis of 'content and storyline'. The information on the back of this book states that:

> Every time Mr. and Mrs. Tail go to bed at night, they end up with three more babies. They love each one but nine is enough! So they try a new bed and kick out the cat, but it's only when they sleep apart on the floor that bunnies stop popping up all over the place!

It may be tempting to assume from this that the nature of the complaint against the book is sexual; however, in the absence of further information it must be left as unclassified. The book *Adventures of the Dish and the Spoon* by Mini Grey led to a complaint of 'humour inappropriate for under-5s'. The final title was the adult non-fiction title *Planned Parenthood* – again, the complaint simply read inappropriate and it is unknown what form this inappropriateness took.

In light of the difficulties in classifying using the ALA's categories, the complaints were also categorised in a more inductive, ground-up way (Table 3). From this it can be seen that most complaints were received regarding sexual material in the collection (three complaints), matched by the complaint that 'content and storyline' were unsuitable for children (three complaints), which in the cases of *More and More Rabbits* by Nicolas Allan and *Lady: My Life as a Bitch* by Melvin Burgess, probably referred to strong sexual themes in the titles. Following this are complaints over 'disgusting' books and books with vulgar language, with two complaints each, while the final two categories had one complaint each.

Authors challenged

While no books were challenged more than once, two authors received complaints regarding more than one book. Babette Cole received two challenges in separate local authorities: both of her books complained about dealt with sex education for young children. The book *Mommy Laid an Egg* was also number 77 on the American Library Association's most challenged books of 1990–1999 (ALA, 2009b). Roald Dahl also received two complaints, both in the same local authority, for *Revolting Recipes and The Vicar of Nibbleswick.*

Table 3. Complaints by type.

Type of complaint	Number of complaints
Sexual material	3
Content and storyline unsuitable for children	3
'Disgusting'	2
Vulgar language	2
Violence	1
Cultural	1
Humour inappropriate for age group	1
Factually inaccurate	1
'Inappropriate'	1

Table 4. Responses to complaints.

Response to complaint	Number of cases
Book kept in stock	8
Book moved to another part/ section of library	3
Book labelled	2
Book removed from stock	2
Total	15

Library's responses to complaints

The responses by libraries to the complaints are summarised in **Table 4**. They can be broken down into cases where the title complained about was kept in stock; cases where it was moved to another part of the library; cases where it was labelled in some way to inform readers it could be considered controversial; and cases where the book was removed from stock.

Books kept in stock

Of the 15 total books challenged in Scotland in the period 2004–2009, eight of the titles were retained in stock in the relevant library with no changes being made to their status. When a challenge is made against a book, guidance from CILIP, the ALA and the MLA is in consensus that books which are legally available should be kept in stock. Ideally these will have been purchased according to the library's stock selection policy, providing something which the library can refer to when explaining the decision both to purchase the book in the first place, and to keep the book after the challenge, to the complainer (CILIP, 2005; MLA, 2008).

In six of the eight cases in which the book was kept, the library stated that their justification for keeping the book and/or the library's stock selection policy were explained to the person making the complaint. It is possible that this was also done in the remaining two cases and the libraries just did not include this information on their FOI response:

more detailed or extensive questions in the FOI request may have helped provide fuller information, as would have following up with the libraries that responded to ask more questions.

Books moved

In three cases the library moved the offending book to another section of the library, with two of these cases occurring in the same local authority. In one case the title *Outbreak* by Chris Ryan was moved from the children's section to the teenage section; in another the title *My Life as a Bitch* by Melvin Burgess was moved from the teenage to the adult section. The reason for both complaints was given as 'content unsuitable for children'. Melvin Burgess is a controversial author and his title received its fair share of attention on its release for its sexual content amongst other things (Tucker, 2001). *Outbreak* is an adventure book. The third book complained about was *Mummy Never Told Me* by Babette Cole, a picture book dealing with sex education aimed at the under-5s, which was moved from the kinder boxes in the library to the early non-fiction section after a parent complained.

Books labelled

Two books that had been complained about were kept in stock, but 'future borrowers were advised of concerns raised'. These books were *Adventures of the Dish and the Spoon* by Mini Grey, in which the complainer felt that the humour was inappropriate for under-5s, and *Mummy Laid an Egg* by Babette Cole, which was felt to be an inappropriate way to explain reproduction to under-5s. These complaints were both received in the same local authority. It is unknown what form advising borrowers of concern took – if it was verbally as the book was borrowed or if it took the form of the book being labelled in some way.

Books removed from stock

Two complaints resulted in the book being removed from stock. In one the complaint was that the title, *India Today* from 1994, was out of date and did not reflect modern India. In the second case, a complaint was made against the title *Sweetmeat* by Luke Sutherland after it was claimed to be 'appalling, tasteless and violent'. The local authority stated that on inspection the physical condition of the book was found to be poor and it was removed from stock in 2007, after being purchased in 2003. There is no information on the date of the censorship challenge and the date of removal to tell if the book was removed from stock immediately after the complaint, and there is also no information on what form the poor physical condition took – for example if the book was vandalised in an attempt to precipitate its removal. Regardless, the book does not appear

to have been replaced: the library does not currently list the book in its online catalogue. Consequently, this case was treated as the book being removed in response to a censorship complaint.

While the removal of *Sweetmeat* would appear to be difficult to defend, the circumstances surrounding the removal of *India Today* are harder to gain an insight into. Most collection management strategies will include a policy on weeding, and the removal of out-of-date or inaccurate material. If upon consultation the book was indeed inaccurate then removal may be justified as long as the collection management and stock selection strategies were closely followed: this information is unavailable.

Discussion

There are 32 local authorities in Scotland, serving a population of 5.5 million people and responsible for an estimated 550 public libraries. Figures suggest that approximately 22% of the Scottish population are active library users (around one million people), that over 60% of the population use library services regularly, and that there are 28.5 million visits to libraries in Scotland per year (Hasson, 2008). Given these library usage statistics a total of 15 formal challenges to books in the period 2004–2009, with an average of three challenges per year, would seem to be a much lower rate than expected.

Previous studies have suggested that rates of challenges to books would be lower in the UK than those in North America. The ALA's Banned Books Week collects details of censorship challenges for libraries across America, covering public and school libraries. For the five years 2004–2008 it has recorded 2499 challenges, an average of 500 per year; however only 25% of these challenges were recorded in public libraries, working out as approximately 125 challenges per year (ALA, 2009a). Given the size of America's population – estimated to be 297 million for these years by the US Census Bureau (2003), compared to the 5.5 million population of Scotland, the ratio of challenges to books in Scottish public libraries compared to American can be given as 9:4. However when the ALA's estimate, backed up by survey research, that the actual rate of challenges to books is 4–5 times higher than the reported rate (Long, 2006) is taken into consideration, a conservative estimate of this will bring the total rate of challenges in American public libraries to 500 per year, which with the FOI responses to Scottish public library challenges would result in a ratio of Scottish: American public library challenges of 9:16.

A Canadian study by Schrader found 687 challenges over three years in Canadian public libraries. This was extrapolated to the entire population to find approximately 380 challenges per year in Canadian public libraries. At the time (1985–1987) Canada's population was approximately 26.5 million. With the differences in population between Canada and Scotland adjusted for, this still results in a rate of challenges in Canadian libraries of approximately 2.5 times that of challenges in Scottish libraries. This tallies with Curry's (1997) interviews with British and Canadian library directors, during which it was found that pressure to withdraw library material had been experienced by all but one director, and that 'most British directors spoke of receipt of 5–10 requests for withdrawal per year', while Canadian library directors reported double this number (Curry, 1997: 133).

While in general these results accord with what would be expected, possible experimental reasons for the discrepancies must also be taken into account. The FOI requests only looked at formal complaints: it is possible that the focus in the FOI requests on formal, written complaints – partly because it was decided that this information would be likely to be recorded and thus retrieved with a FOI request, and partly because of the ALA's definition of a challenge as a formal, written complaint – resulted in under-reporting of challenges. Verbal complaints, incidental comments and direct censorship by readers removing material will not be included in the results and are therefore outside the scope of this study.

Reasons for challenges

Most complaints received regarded sexually orientated material and material aimed at children/young adults with sexual themes. This concurs with other studies (ALA, 2009a; Curry, 2001; Harer and Harris, 1994; Schrader, 1995). Following this were complaints against books which were 'disgusting', and then titles with vulgar language. Similarly, Curry found that profanity was the second most common reason for complaints against young adult books in Canada (Curry, 2001).

Harer and Harris' survey of censorship in America in the 1980s noted several cases where the official reason stated 'appeared to cloak a content-based reason for the complaint' (Harer and Harris, 1994: 40). This would also appear to be the case in this study for the title *More and More Rabbits* by Nicholas Allan. The book was complained about on the basis of content and storyline, which given the actual content of the book – a pair of rabbits discovering that the only way for them to be able to go to bed at night and not have any more children is to sleep apart on the floor – would seem to mean that the sexual content of the book was what was actually referred to.

A notable difference between studies from North America and the current study was that no books in Scotland were challenged on the grounds of witchcraft or religion. Most studies from North America have found these reasons to be one of the top reasons cited for challenges to books: for instance, in 2001 Curry found that religion/witchcraft was the third most common reason for older children/young

adult books to be challenged, after sexual activity and profanity. In 1995 British directors spoke of a rise in complaints about occult material (Curry, 1997: 135), however this does not seem to be reflected in this study. Similarly, complaints on religious grounds seem to be less prominent than previous studies in North America.

Given that this study was prompted by a rise in the profile of libraries stocking 'extremist' material and increased complaints regarding this, it is also notable that no results received in Scotland had been made on these grounds, or against this type of material. It is known that complaints have been made against this type of material in England (Brandon and Murray, 2007; MLA, 2008), and it is perhaps surprising that this has not been repeated in Scotland. Again, a survey of library holdings and placement of this type of material may be called for to discover if the material is there to be complained against.

Responses to challenges

The overall results for responses to complaints in this study showed that two of the 15 challenges succeeded, with the book being removed from library stock. Just over half of challenges (eight) were unsuccessful, with the book remaining in stock at the level for which it was intended. The remaining five cases resulted in the book remaining in stock, but either being moved to a different part of the library or with warnings being given regarding its content.

Books kept in stock

The generally accepted 'correct' response to a censorship challenge is that as long as the book is legally available in the country, it should be kept in stock and not removed due to local pressure or sectional interest (CILIP, 2005). Out of the 15 censorship challenges, in eight of the cases the library responded to the censorship challenge by keeping the book in stock and explaining the reasons for this decision to the borrowers. Including those books which were moved or labelled, 13 of the books were kept in library stock.

While these results are reassuring and compare favourably to studies such the decade-long study by Harer and Harris (1994: 84) which found that almost half of censorship challenges resulted in the book being withdrawn, it still means that in almost half of all censorship cases an action other than the recommended action of keeping the book is taken. Schrader's (1995) study found that the book was kept in stock with no changes made in 72% of cases; so Scottish libraries may have some way to go with regards to intellectual freedom issues.

Moving books

The FOI results showed that in one-fifth of the cases a title was moved to another section of the library in response to a censorship challenge. This represented three cases, all of them child or young adult titles. As Oppenheim indicates, what do to in censorship challenges may seem very straightforward on paper but in real life situations becomes increasingly murky (Oppenheim and Smith, 2004). On paper, the moving of a title from the children's to teenage section or teenage to adult in response to a complaint could be considered to be censorship and bowing to outside pressure. In the specifics of one of the cases, however, the title moved from the children's to the teenage collection (*Outbreak* by Chris Ryan), is recommended for the age group 12+ by its publisher, posing the question of whether it was incorrectly classified into the children's section in the first place.

Moving a book in response to a complaint does not automatically mean that censorship has taken place. The placement of books within a library's collection is based on judgement and as such can be subject to human error: if a complaint is investigated and it is found that the book would be better suited in another place, then moving it is not censorship. The MLA guidelines give examples of situations in which moving a book would be in the best interest, though these have drawn criticism themselves (Cockcroft, 2009; Doughty, 2009; MLA, 2008).

The practice of moving books has hit headlines in the USA in recent years, with a *New York Times* article highlighting that Brooklyn Public Library has moved the title *Tintin in the Congo* to a restricted section after complaints were received regarding racist material in the book. After being considered by a panel, it was decided that the book should be moved to a restricted access section of historical children's literature, viewed by appointment only (Cowan, 2009). The newspaper article went on to say that NY Public libraries have received almost two dozen written objections since 2005, but the Tintin title was the only item to have been moved. It emphasised the difficulties faced by librarians when dealing with angry patrons, and in making decisions regarding the placement of controversial items, concluding with the advice that active listening to the complainer, and explaining library policy, is often enough to defuse most challenges before they become formal complaints (Cowan, 2009).

Warnings provided regarding content

Provision of warnings regarding the controversial content of a particular title can take the form of a verbal warning given to readers as they check out a book, or of warning labels being placed on the book. In two cases from the FOI results, both regarding children's books in the same local authority, the book complained about was retained in stock but with 'future borrowers advised of concerns'. The method used for this was not elaborated on, for example if it consisted of verbal warnings or stickers placed on the book.

This issue also tends to divide librarians, between those who believe it is a sensible method of advising borrowers

of concerns and those who believe that it is a slippery slope to a 'restricted section' and further censorship (Curry, 1997). The manner in which the warning is performed is also important. Curry separates giving a verbal warning and labelling books as different actions in response to censorship, with different implications (Curry, 1997). With regards to the two children's books referred to in the FOI requests, it could also be argued that the library was acting to fill in any gaps in the completeness of the information provided on the book cover to enable parents to make an informed decision. This can be compared to the case regarding the book *More and More Rabbits* by Nicholas Allen, where the complainant challenged the book on the basis of content and inappropriateness, but the library concerned decided that the information on the back of the book provided parents with enough to judge the suitability of the content for their child. Allowing parents to judge the suitability of a book for their child is normally encouraged by intellectual freedom campaigners, rather than the library making the decision and ultimately censoring books. However, opponents of labelling claim that it is not required, that it amounts to creating a 'restricted section', and that the act can lead to a slippery slope, ultimately ending in more concrete forms of censorship and professional organisations, in particular the ALA, oppose the practice (Curry, 1997).

Removing books

Two books in this study were removed in response to the complaint. One title was removed on the basis of factual inaccuracy, with another title being nominally removed due to its poor physical condition. The first book may have been inaccurate – it is impossible to know from the information given if this was a case of weeding or bowing to pressure. The second title, which was removed due to its condition, was only four years old; this case was treated as a case of censorship, partly because Curry's study found that the justification for removing books was often that the book was out-dated or worn and would be discarded soon anyway (Curry, 1997: 140); and partly because according to the local authority's OPAC the book has not been replaced, and as such was removed in response to a challenge. Regardless, while the actual rate of books being removed in response to a challenge is fairly low, any amount of censorship is too much and this should be tackled.

Differences between results in UK and USA

Studies generally indicate that there is a greater awareness of intellectual freedom issues in North America compared to the UK, and accordingly more emphasis and support in this are by professional organisations. The ALA's Office of Intellectual Freedom organises reporting of challenges by its members, culminating in the annual Banned Books Week (Long, 2006) and, as has been stated, is generally higher profile:

> The ALA is generally far more active in this area than CILIP. The ALA has undoubtedly always been more audible, visible and active in its handling of censorship issues than CILIP. Since the establishment of the Intellectual Freedom Committee, the issues of censorship and intellectual freedom have become an important focus for the organisation. (Oppenheim and Smith, 2004: 168**)**

There is also a much more extensive history of censorship challenges being taken through the courts in the USA (Jones, 1983; Rosen, 2005).

While the broad categories for reasons for complaints between this study and those from the USA were similar and sexual material topped both lists, as might be expected the authors were different: for example none of the authors in the ALA's list of top 10 authors challenged by year (ALA, 2009b) for the years this study covered were challenged in Scotland. Following on from this, another notable difference is that there were no complaints on the basis of witchcraft, the occult or religion: three categories which are reliably in the top five reasons for complaints in American challenges (ALA, 2009b; Curry, 2001; Harer and Harris, 1994: 72; Rosen, 2005).

At the beginning of the paper we noted that the emphasis on campaigning against the censorship of books had a much higher profile in the USA due to the work of the ALA and its Banned Books Week, and this is replicated in the dearth of research and investigation devoted to the topic in the UK. Despite librarians in both countries adhering to ethical codes that put intellectual freedom at the core of their professional duty to society, this dearth of writing on the topic in the UK suggests that the notion of intellectual freedom may be a worthy hook to hang a professional ethos on, but it is not replicated in professional musings.

This leads us to consider whether the observations of Fiske cited earlier (1968: 81) that a reason for lack of challenges to materials in libraries can be that the libraries contain little to provoke controversy. The question needs to be asked if librarians are self-censoring to the extent that their collections are designed to not promote controversial thoughts or ideas. Linked to this, the vast expansion of supplier selection, where suppliers and not librarians are increasingly becoming selectors of material for libraries based on general stock schemas, runs the risk of any professional adherence to intellectual freedom being lost in contractual obligation. Would a private sector supplier reliant on business from public libraries, dare to promote materials for collections that might lead to controversy for the client?

Conclusion

The study found that there were 15 censorship challenges in Scottish public libraries in the past five years: an average of three challenges to books per year. The responses to

these challenges are mostly encouraging: just over half (eight titles) of the books were kept in stock, with the reasons for this decision being explained to the complainers. A further two books were kept in stock, but with future borrowers advised of the concerns previously raised regarding the book. Three books were moved to another section of the library. While this is generally frowned upon, one of these titles, which was moved from the children's to the teen section, should possibly have been in the teen section all along, based on the 12+ age range suggested by the publisher. Finally, two books were removed from stock in response to the complaint. While in one case the removal may have been justified, although without knowing more details of the case it is impossible to say, the removal of *Sweetmeat* by Luke Sutherland cannot be justified. The reason given for the removal of the book was its poor physical condition. It is unknown if the poor physical condition was due to direct action by a borrower defacing or damaging the book, but as the title has not been replaced it can be considered that in that circumstance the censorship challenge was successful.

The most common reason for complaints against books was that of sexual material, followed by complaints that the content and storyline were unsuitable; values-based complaints; and complaints based on social and cultural issues.

The study was aimed at gaining a broad picture of the current state of censorship challenges in Scotland, an indication of the numbers of these and the responses to them. More research needs to be done to fully understand the phenomenon, however, with the picture across the UK worthy of deeper analysis, and the cultural changes in the way public library services are now procuring material, with an increasing reliance on private sector suppliers, opening up potential areas of concern. The authors would suggest that UK professionals and academics need to be more proactive in examining issues of censorship within the libraries serving the country.

Funding

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Author biographies

Kelly Taylor is the Information Officer in the Knowledge Management team at Andersen Strathern Solicitors in Edinburgh. She was a participant in the University of Oxford's graduate trainee scheme before obtaining her MSc in Information and Library Studies at the University of Strathclyde.

David McMenemy is the Course Director for MSc in Information and Library Studies at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow. He has published widely on the topics of public libraries and ethics, including being co-author of the *Handbook of Ethical Practice* (2006) and author of *The Public Library* (Facet).