CHAPTER – 4

BRITISH COUNCIL LIBRARIES

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4.0 Introduction

The British Council was established in 1934 as a voluntary organisation. The Royal Charter granted in 1940 to the British Council defined its purposes as promoting a wider knowledge of the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland and of the English language abroad, developing closer cultural relations with other countries for the purpose of benefiting the British Commonwealth of Nations, and holding and dealing with money provided by Parliament or by gift in aid of these objects. The terms of the Charter the Council fulfils through its Representatives abroad, who are to a large extent responsible for the choice of activity in their country, and wholly responsible for its execution and for establishing contacts there, with staff in London headquarters acting as intermediaries in the United Kingdom\(^{(1)}\). The following are the strategic objectives of the Council:

(i) To build appreciation of the UK's creativity and scientific innovation among people overseas, and to strengthen their engagement with the diversity of UK culture;

(ii) To increase international recognition of the range and quality of learning opportunities from the UK, to promote the learning of English, and to strengthen educational co-operation between the UK and other countries;
(iii) To enhance awareness of the UK’s democratic values and processes, and to work in partnership with other countries to strengthen good governance and human rights (2).

The Council is financed by government grants but is akin to the BBC in having a high degree of operational autonomy (1). Other sources of funding are: fees and income from services and contract and agency receipts.

The aim of the Council is the long term one of promoting cultural exchange and understanding between Britain and other nations. It has stayed out of political and commercial arena, and official government agencies have been assigned the role of dealing with these matters. As a result, over the years, the Council has been able to establish its reputation as a reliable, politically disinterested, cultural organisation.

A Board of Trustees of 17 people directs the affairs of the Council. Currently the Council is operating in 111 countries. Although the Council is almost entirely supported from public funds, it is administratively independent of the government. This is its main difference from the similar organisations of other countries.

The libraries of the British Council form only a part of its work though they are most visible. Overseas, its most important task is the encouragement of English language and teaching and British studies.
generally in co-operation with the educational authorities of the
countries concerned and with special emphasis on assistance to local
teachers of English\(^{(4)}\). Acting as agent of overseas authorities, it recruits
teachers in Britain for short term contract service in universities and
schools abroad. In most of the countries wherein the Council operates, it
maintains cultural centres and libraries of British books and periodicals.
In addition, it organises an outward flow from Britain of advisory visits
and lecture tours by specialists in many fields and sponsors music,
theatre and ballet tours by leading artists and companies in many parts
of the world. It arranges many travelling exhibitions of books and fine
arts and is often responsible for the British sections in international
exhibitions such as Frankfurt Book Fair and the Venice Biennale.

The Council also arranges for people with similar interests to
have opportunities to meet and discuss common problems. This
involves the sending abroad of British experts for lecture tours and
consultations, performances by British musical and drama groups and
exhibition of paintings and sculptures. Besides, the inward operations is
much larger wherein thousands of people annually visit Britain for
study, observation, and consultation. The majority of these visits are
financed by agencies other than the Council, for example,
Commonwealth Scholarships, Charles Wallace Trust, Inlak Foundation,
United Nations etc. The Council makes appointments for them, plans
suitable programs, and helps them to make the most profitable use of the time available in the UK. The Council also helps the many thousands of overseas students enrolled in British universities and other educational institutions. In fact, for the past 15 years, the Council has been actively promoting British educational institutions and their courses.

The Council maintains 229 libraries abroad ranging in size from small reference collections to more comprehensive collections of 50,000 volumes and more. The following table gives a profile of the British Council activities during 2000-2001.

Table 2: Profile of British Council activities globally 2000-2001

| Worked in 229 towns and cities in 111 countries | Managed or supported some 3,000 arts events globally |
| Administered 700,000 professional and academic examinations | Issued nearly 8 million books and videos to 3,500,000 British Council library members |
| Dealt with almost 2 million enquiries in the libraries and information centres. Libraries had 5.5 million visitors | Earned revenue of £ 170 million from clients and customers worldwide |
| Organised more than 1,500 science events in over 60 countries | Helped 13,000 young people take part in exchange projects |
| Supported over 4,000 trainers and trainees for vocational projects across Europe | Employed more than 1,900 teachers in 138 teaching centres overseas who taught almost 1.2 million class hours |


4.1 Early history

In the early years of the Council’s existence, its activities were mainly concentrated on the two types of organisations known as British
Institutes and Anglophil Societies. A British Institute was to be a centre of British studies, arranging classes and lectures, a library, arrangements for showing films, exhibitions, paintings, photographs, and reading room, reception centre for British lecturers etc. The British Institutes were directly under the Council control whereas the Anglophil Societies were run in association with the friends of Britain. The Council encouraged the formation of such societies through local initiative, but refrained from trying to create them where such initiative was lacking. The Anglophil Societies were autonomous bodies, usually aided by the Council by the securement of teaching staff and by materials to support non-teaching activities such as libraries, music programmes, and exhibitions. Although these Anglophil Societies owed much of their bookstock to gifts from the Council, their libraries were not Council libraries whereas those of the British Institutes were Council libraries. The British Institutes were located more in the Europe and the Middle East. Nazi occupation had forced the Institutes to close in most of the European countries and they reopened after the World War. The support of the Council to the Anglophil Societies diminished gradually once the Council embarked on the building up of its own libraries from 1945. The objective was the provision of a library service (in the field of interest to the Council) for a much wider public than could be reached through Anglophil Societies.
End of the Second World War had brought an immense increase in the demand for English books. This was due to many causes. Europe was shut off from English books for six or more years during which time progress had virtually come to a standstill.

The Council had appreciated, from its first beginnings in 1934, the unique contribution which books and periodicals, librarians and libraries would make to its work throughout the world. It believed that political, social and economic progress is dependent on educational progress, which in turn relies on an adequate supply of books and developed library services.

Before the war the book related work was on a small scale, as the budget limited operations. During the war, however, it developed rapidly, and in nothing more notably than in the use of the printed word, for which a group of specialist departments was created in London to supply and assist the Council's representatives overseas and its work among allies and refugees in that country. With the close of hostilities in Europe and the Far East, the book starved countries of Europe and the great vacuum of China were suddenly opened to the printed word, and one of the major routes by which this knowledge reached the peoples of the world was the British Council.

During the war, the British Council was compelled to take an interest in the commercial distribution of books abroad. War made it
impossible for the normal trade to take place, and the British Council had a machinery in existence outside the belligerent countries. Council established in 1942, a non profit making Company under the title Book Export Scheme Ltd. The Company did not intend to sell books itself, and it was only in 1945 that a special scheme for sending books to certain European countries was undertaken. However, the ultimate aim was to return to normal trade channels as soon as the war was over. The Company took over on credit a quantity of selected books from the UK wholesalers and sent these overseas to local booksellers for sale at a retail price. The bookseller was given six months time to pay for the stock and was allowed at the end of the period to hand over to the Council office any of the stock unsold. The bookseller paid the Council, who transmitted to the wholesaler the agreed price of the books.

The Company was wound up in 1947, when conditions had become more normal. In 5 years period of the existence of the Company, it sold books worth £459,000 which was actually at a loss of about 2%.

4.2 BC’s post war policy regarding libraries

4.2.1 Launching the British Council libraries

Following the war, the Council decided that there shall be a main British Council library in each capital in Europe and the middle East,
and smaller Council libraries in the important provincial towns. By this the Council could provide:

(i) A reference section which professional men and students can use for consultation on the subjects in which they were interested;

(ii) A lending service which, in addition to spreading a general knowledge of Britain and the British way of life, enabled to borrow books on their own subjects, either professional or amateur;

(iii) Bibliographical assistance, so that the student could either find out for himself, or else refer to the librarians, who can transfer the request to London for expert advice whenever necessary;

(iv) A service of periodicals covering all tastes and subjects, by which up-to-date information is always available to the user of the library;

(v) Supporting displays for the local Council activities of lectures, film shows, exhibitions etc;

(vi) An example of British librarianship in practice, and a model of adaptation to local needs. E.g., in Prague, where there was no medical library, a central medical library serving local needs was started; whereas in Vienna, where there was a need for good
technical library, the Council library gave a priority for technical books.

The new policies was partly influenced by the decision to work, in many European countries, neither through Anglophil Societies nor through British Institutes, but to establish full fledged Council offices. This in turn influenced the library development in lands where the British Institute or the Anglophil Society had always been characteristic.

In the immediate post war years an economic factor coupled with cost effectiveness made the new policy inevitable. Liberated Europe, and liberated Asia in due course, clamoured for British books on every conceivable subject. Their libraries either had lost much of their existing stocks or at the best had no English books for several years. Foreign scholars were hungry for British culture. The Council decided that instead of dispersing its books through a number of foreign libraries, where they would almost certainly be inaccessible to readers in other cities and users, it should concentrate on building up adequate and rounded collections on its own premises, making them available through open access to those who could visit the library and by postal loans, by branch libraries in the provinces, by block loans to foreign libraries, and by individual inter library lending, to other libraries.
The idea was that the foreign scholar who uses the British Council library may or may not find in it just the books he needs for special line of research, but he will surely find in it an opportunity for reading ‘around’ his subject and perhaps for reading on subjects quite outside his narrow speciality and thus for cultural achievement. The case for the Council library was thus linked to the oneness of human knowledge and to the humanity of all scholarship.

According to J D A Barnicot, Director, Books Department of the British Council in 1951, “The British Council is charged with ‘long term education in English language, British arts and science, and British institutions. Libraries are par excellence long-term instruments of education. Not only do they support almost every other educational or artistic or scientific activity undertaken by the Council, they also represent the continuity of cultural intercourse. When the voice of the lecturer is hushed and the orchestra is mute and the itinerant masterpiece is taken from the wall and repacked in its crate and the film is removed from the projector and the eminent plastic surgeon’s demonstration is over, the books on their shelves and the periodicals on their racks and the librarian at the reference desk abide”(5).

The importance the Council attaches to the libraries and books is exemplified by the fact that in 1964-65 one seventh of the total Council budget was set aside for the provision of books and periodicals,
for running expenses of the British Council libraries and of home based departments concerned with the printed word and for the subvention of public libraries overseas (6).

The immense variety of the work of the Council and the geographical spread of its activities has considerable effect on the character and functions of its library organisation.

4.2.2 Membership fee

In principle, the Council had been in favour of free library, but the budget cuts year after year, forced the libraries in many countries to charge subscriptions.

4.2.3 Bookstock

It is necessary in this context to define the subject scope of the Council bookstock. As early as in 1942 it was laid down that the Council would carry on educational work on a large scale and the libraries would support the education programmes of the Council apart from its other programmes. The libraries would contain (i) books on cultural subjects (ii) books on general subjects and (iii) specialist books for specialist readers. Council has a good stock of 'general' subjects category to confine its attention to the 'long term education of groups'. 'Cultural subjects' were defined as 'English language, British drama, fine arts, literature and music'; in those five fields the Council has
unrestricted responsibility for all media and for all types of publicity. 'General subjects' were simply which were neither 'cultural' nor 'political'; and 'political subjects', excluded altogether from the Council's sphere and therefore from its books-work, were defined as the 'current policies and actions of H M Government and of other governments'. Thus Council libraries may contain all but 'political' books and the definition of 'political books' is narrow (7).

Thus the subject scope of the Council library is, very wide and the only explicitly excluded class is the 'political' book, narrowly defined. Also on purely practical grounds it was found necessary to exclude multiple copies of text-books for students who could buy them themselves. Also partly for reasons of economy, and partly because of the implicit restriction of the Council's mission to subjects falling within the general concept of 'British arts and sciences and British institutions', another class of work is included only exceptionally and, so to speak, peripherally: books relating to only non-British countries and their literature, culture, and institutions, and translations from foreign literatures. Here, again, there are some exceptions. Works or translations which themselves have outstanding literary merit or may be regarded as monuments of British scholarship are exceptions to the general rule. 'Trashy fiction' is too subjective term to warrant formal exclusion; indeed, fiction of all types may well be one of the best
channels to an understanding of the British way of life; but in actual
selection preference is given to more serious novels, and requests for
popular fictions are often queried. Works of non British authors,
wheresoever published, are admitted if they deal fairly and usefully with
some aspect of British civilization or English literature or are
indispensable reference works. The language of the text is immaterial
provided it is intelligible to a respectable proportion of the library's
users. These exclusions and distinctions underline the fact that the
Council libraries, though very general in their scope and open to the
general public, are not a little replica of the British public libraries
planted in alien soil.

Thus, the profile of a typical British Council library has not
changed for the past fifty years – in its technical arrangements it derives
from the British public library; in the level of scholarship at which it
aims it is not far from university standards; but it essentially is a special
library, not by virtue of its catering to foreign specialists, but by virtue
of its special end. The typical Council library thus has certain sections
that may be deemed obligatory, and others which are more or less
optional. It gives high place to works on the English language and on
the teaching thereof, and to English literature of all periods, including,
above all, a judicious selection of significant contemporary work in
poetry, prose, or drama, including also, fiction with 'both 'standard' and
modern. It naturally must provide an adequate representation of all those fields which fall into the framework so conveniently labelled ‘British civilization and institutions’. It will also contain a number of really great and relatively recent works of British scholarship irrespective of their subject matter. It will contain, a limited number of works on the country where it is situated. Beyond this, its ‘balance’ will be upset optionally in one direction or the other according to local demands and the significance of British contributions to a particular field and their relevance to the local culturoscientific situation. There is generally no attempt to build up comprehensive collections of highly specialised publications required by the research worker in any Council library as these are normally best placed in the institution in which he works. During the pre-war period, the Council libraries attempted to buy a huge stock of books relating to science, medicine and technology since the Council was responsible for the propagation abroad of the British contributions in these areas. Even during the post war period, limited stock of medical collections were made available up to the practitioner’s level.

4.2.4 BLDSC Services

The proliferation of scientific literature has led to increased emphasis being placed on library services. As an example of this, the
Council made known overseas the existence of the BLDSC photocopying and international loan service. The Council libraries in most of the countries used to keep stock of the BLDSC coupons for purchase by foreign scholars, on repayment basis.

4.2.5 Books and Periodicals presentations

Book presentation was one of the first programmes of the Council and it started way back in 1935 itself. In addition to founding its own libraries overseas, the Council made large presentations of books to universities, training colleges, etc during the war and for a year or two afterwards. These were of great value in securing the representation of British scholarship and science, especially in foreign universities where they had been little represented before, and in helping to make good the war time losses of libraries in liberated Europe.

As early as 1935 the Publishers’ Association (UK) recognised the importance of books in Council’s work by granting special trade terms for books bought ‘for free presentation to libraries abroad’. In addition to making available the periodicals in the libraries, the Council made presentations of periodicals to organisations which for one reason or other were unable to subscribe on their own account. Such subscriptions were made on behalf of recipient institutions for a limited periods but the institutions were stimulated to subscribe on their own account after
the presentation period and many institutions continued the subscriptions from their own budget.

After 1945 the emphasis of Council was changed from the presentation of books and periodicals to the organisation of its own libraries.

4.2.6 Council’s role in books promotion

A nation's best books interpret its way of life, they spread overseas its ideas and methods, and finally, in Sir Stanley Unwin's words, "trade follows the book". Council libraries provide information about British books, provide bibliographic information and also provide tailor made bibliographies. The Books Department in the headquarters used to provide all back up help to the overseas libraries in this. Also the libraries maintain good liaison with the local book trade in matters concerning the trade of British books.

Council’s monthly guide, British Book News which was brought for nearly 40 years since 1945, provided an expert guide to book selection and its value was recognised all over the world, particularly in libraries and universities. It included the only select, classified, and annotated book list covering all fields of knowledge which was being published in the UK.
Council had a Review Department, which arranged for getting books, periodicals and music sheets reviewed by journals and radio stations overseas.

4.2.7 Book exhibitions

Book exhibitions have been an essential feature of the British Council libraries since the very beginning. The exhibitions are specially assembled to suit the country in which they are being shown and are often timed to coincide with national or international conferences of scientists, medical men or other specialists. Till recently, some 180 separate book and periodical exhibitions involving 75000 books were being compiled in London annually. As each exhibition was being shown on average six different places, over a thousand displays were mounted each year. To give a flavour of the early exhibitions, a few are listed below:

- British Books, 1480-1940
- University textbooks from Britain
- Medical and Scientific Books
- Exhibition of periodicals
- Children's books from Britain

Their main purpose was to stimulate demand but in addition to selling books they often act as a pointer to the library. The stands at the Frankfurt and Warsaw Book Fairs, for instance, attracted numerous
bibliographical enquiries which served to bring the enquirer into contact with a Council librarian. Furthermore such exhibitions, after their closure, were sometimes presented ‘en bloc’ to one of the Council libraries.

Exhibitions have secured thousands of interested readers and also buyers. It was hoped that commerce will follow books: that doctors for example, will order medical equipment after reading the British medical books, that British architects will be invited to prepare designs by readers who have seen reproductions and examples of their work in books etc.

From 1947, the Council was bestowed with the complete responsibility for all exhibitions of British books in all international trade fairs. Those at the trade fairs included 2000-3000 volumes as a complete cross section of contemporary publishing.

For Book Exhibitions, the Council worked closely with the Publishers Association (UK) who provided some £ 100000 worth of books free for exhibition purposes annually. This book promotional side of the Council activity was very much a part of a Council Librarian’s daily round. Mounting exhibitions and dealing with the enquiries brought him into touch with a wider public and also increased his knowledge on the local book trade.
4.2.8 Periodicals in libraries

Periodicals played an increasingly important part in Council’s work overseas. In all the BC libraries there are a cross section of British periodicals literature and, thereof, of British life itself; newspapers to inform on current events, the weekly organs of opinion to demonstrate what Britain was thinking; and all the wealth of monthlies and quarterlies to appeal to specialists in every field. In the late 1940s, there used to be over 1500 UK periodicals the libraries put together used to subscribe. Even more than books, the periodicals reflected the thought and outlook of their day, while to the scientific worker, they were the essential channel through which alone he could keep in touch with other workers and abreast of current developments. The choice of periodicals for Council libraries was equally important, especially in scientific subjects.

Wherever the library services were fully developed and British periodicals easily available, the periodical holdings of the Council libraries were small and general in character. Elsewhere a wider cross section of British periodical literature, including specialist journals, was aimed at.
4.2.9 Public libraries development

In the 1940s, Council did pioneering work in the establishment of public libraries in the British colonies in Africa. In the West Indies, by an Act of Jamaican Legislature, the Council set up a joint action between Jamaican Government and the Council. The Council established a few libraries the expenses of which were borne jointly by the Council and the Jamaican government and at the end of ten years the libraries would become the property of the Jamaican government. In Nigeria, Council established the Lagos Public Library as a joint venture between the Council and Lagos Town Council.

Council set up travelling libraries in the Gold Coast, in Nigeria while in Gambia and Sierra Leone the Council set up book box schemes. Book Centres and reading rooms were also started in Nigeria throughout the country which eventually laid the ground for a public library service covering the whole country.

In Nigeria the Council organised the Lagos Public Library as a model for other urban communities and trained its staff. It handed over the library to the Lagos Municipality which assumed the managerial responsibility.

In Gold Coast, the Council librarian helped to draw a Library Scheme which came to effect in 1950; the newly formed Gold Coast Library Board took over from the Council its stock of books, most of its
library staff, including the librarian, and the Aglionby Library at Accra, with no break in continuity.

In many of the smaller colonies the British Council has assisted with gifts of books which helped the local libraries to keep going; in others the Council's own libraries were the only libraries offering any kind of public service.

The net result of all these schemes was that many colonies became book and library conscious in a very short period. In all these public library ventures the motive had been to help the colonies to help themselves. The ultimate aim was always to transfer a going library concern to the colony itself. From 1948, the tempo of transfer was sensibly accelerated; for in that year the so-called Definition – Document, laying down the scope of the Council's work in the colonies stated that it was not the business of the Council to establish or maintain general public libraries in the colonies and that its existing commitments in that respect should as speedily as possible be handed over to indigenous colonial authorities (8).

The Council stopped managing public libraries in the colonies for many reasons. The first reason was that it did not wish to do something to the official view should be done by the colony itself. Secondly, it was one of clientele; the Council library without necessarily becoming a subscription library closed to the general public, was primarily to cater
for persons who were members of the Council centre and thus must have as one of its chief purposes the support of all the other cultural manifestations which took place in or through the Council centre. Thirdly the distinction was inevitably tied to a progressive differentiation in book selection. A general public library, whether in colonies or in any other non-totalitarian environment, had to maintain bookstock of too general in nature whereas the Council must subserve the 'projection of the British way of life and the promotion of closer relations in cultural matters between Britain and the people of the colonies'.

Therefore whereas till 1948 the British Council was an agency for establishing public libraries in the Colonies, gradually it became a special library linked to the generality of cultural purposes for which the Council was employed. At the same time, the Council started its own libraries in various countries.

However, the Council was assigned a new role by the UK Government in the area of public library direction since 1960 to develop indigenous library services in countries of the Commonwealth. In June 1959 the UK Government announced its intention to assist through the British Council in the development of library systems in a number of colonial territories. Very soon, with the rapid move of colonial territories to independence, this became a scheme to assist all
developing countries of the Commonwealth. The basis of this scheme was that the Council would provide capital aid in the form of grants for buildings, furniture and equipment, initial bookstock and mobile library vehicles together with expert advice and training facilities. During 1960s, about £ 500000 was spent on this programme and the major achievements have been the creation of national public library services in Sierra Leone, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Malawi, Botswana and Swaziland. Carl White, in the chapter on “Acceleration of library development in developing countries” in Advances in Librarianship says “The British Council was directly responsible for the creation of national public library services in virtually every black colony in Africa as well as in many of the Caribbean islands”. For this, Carl White described the Council’s work as “an act of statesmanship which sought permanently to enrich the life of the people”(9).

4.2.10 Showcasing British librarianship

One of the objectives the Council had got was to showcase the exemplary librarianship for which Britain was known for. To all overseas librarians and those interested in libraries, Council showed not only the high professional standards maintained by the UK public libraries, but also the vital contributions made by British public libraries to the democratic way of life and to the well being of the community.
In all the countries they operate, the British Council libraries were frequently acknowledged as the best and the comparatively small band of librarians had a world-wide influence out of all proportion to their number.

4.3.11 Professional approach

In order to provide library services of highest professional standards, wherever possible, a professional librarian was appointed, since it was aware that the value of any library to a community depends as much upon the librarian's skill and enterprise as upon the books themselves. The Books department which serviced the library system, was directed and largely staffed by professional librarians and it worked closely with the Library Association. It was agreed that the Council should undertake the training of foreign librarians in British methods.

The Council firmly believed that without sufficient professional direction it was impossible to achieve adequate standards of service in every library.

The Department of Books, Exhibitions and Periodicals in London had got 90 staff in 1965 out of which 27 were professional staff.

The Council librarians overseas organised local training courses, seminars and conferences and in some cases experts from Britain were brought to take part in major events.
To quote Carl White again on the exemplary professionalism of Council Librarians, "In brief, he is for the host country a resident regional library adviser and - prudently - senior expert for other agencies of H M Government to consult before riding off with library aid in different directions", or as a grateful reader put it in more picturesque language, the Council library "is full of cloth bound everythingness" and the Council librarian is "he on whose shoulders the entire skeleton of the British Council revolves"(10).

4.2.12 Coordination of library work and policy formulation at headquarters

The Council headquarters at London had a Books Department which was established in 1943 with the aim the choice of books for presentations, and to service the Council's libraries abroad and to act as a link with other overseas libraries.

Books for all the libraries overseas were selected by the concerned librarians but the supplies were made by the Books Department at London which had made arrangements with library suppliers of UK and also airfreight arrangements for speedy delivery to the libraries overseas. Similarly periodicals were supplied by the Periodicals Department, direct from the publishers of UK.
The Books Department also advised on all placing of overseas students in full time courses, on the organisation of training attachments and on the programmes for visiting librarians from overseas.

The Books Department has changed names several times and the latest name (as of 2002) is: Information Services Management Department.

4.2.13 Home Library and other special libraries, London headquarters

BC used to maintain a Home Library in London of about 20000 non-scientific books, with particular attention to reference books and bibliographic material. The Home Library had the five fold functions:

(i) Conducting bibliographical work for Books Department and Council libraries overseas; (ii) Co-ordinating the Council’s libraries in the United Kingdom, including the little collections maintained in the area offices of the Council; (iii) Offering library services to visitors and students from abroad who for one reason or other could not conveniently use other London libraries; (iv) Acting as a channel for loans through National Central Library (merged with The British Library in 1973); (v) Acting as a general reference and lending library for Council staff in the United Kingdom. The Home Library used to get requests for bibliographies from scholars, libraries and institutions from
all over the world. The Home Library had a reference section which had specimen copies of over 6000 UK periodicals.

Also there were small special libraries at the headquarters such as Science Library, the Medical library, the Fine Arts Library, Drama Library, Language Teaching Library, Speech Record Library and the Music Library. Each of these libraries used to be in constant contact with specialist institutions outside the Council. They supplied reading lists and information to libraries overseas on request.

The Medical Library acquired with few exceptions all new medical books, pamphlets and periodicals. It used to distribute an annotated monthly list of new medical books and informed guidance as to their relative suitability to the Council libraries in different countries. Also it dealt with enquiries which came in from Council offices abroad, and these related to anything in the field of medicine and social welfare. The medical library maintained detailed indexes of British medical literature, personalities, and drugs. Many visitors approached the Medical library for advice regarding courses available in various British medical institutions. Besides, on their return to their countries these visitors needed medical literature or copies of Acts and Statutory Instruments of Britain. The Medical library used to fulfil these requests. The Science Library used to distribute the *Scibib* series of mimeographed bibliographies on specific topics. Also the Science
Library was responsible for the universities section of the annual, *Scientific Research in British Universities and Colleges*. One of the services performed through the Medical and Science libraries was the procurement of offprints or photocopies of specialist articles, at the rate of over 2000 a year.

The Language Teaching Library serviced both the Council's English Language Teaching Centre and Centre for Information on the Teaching of English as a Foreign or Second Language set up by the UK Government.

Factual inquiries and requests for bibliographies used to pour into the Council's headquarters library from all quarters without respite and they were dealt with as far as possible in small special libraries within the Council or referred to other appropriate bodies.

Besides the five special libraries already named, the Council at home had many specialist departments whose services were always at the command of its overseas libraries; the Council's Legal Department dealt with inquiries from abroad on English law and offered bibliographical advice in the field of Law. The Periodicals Department dealt with a large number of bibliographical inquiries in periodical literature in the 'general' subjects.
4.2.14 Professional visits and interaction

Visits of many foreign librarians and publishers to UK were organised by the Council. Also many librarians were brought to the UNESCO Summer School organised by the Council in Edinburgh. Besides, the export of British librarianship has inevitably formed part of the work of the Council. Among the many eminent British librarians who have visited other countries were: Dr Chandler, Sir Frank Francis, F M Gardner, Dr K W Humphreys, W J Murison, Dr J H P Pafford, B I Palmer, J Pearson, Professor W L Saunders, W A Taylor, Dr D J Urquhart, Brian Lang, Anthony Thompson and A J Wells.

4.2.15 Publications

Council used to bring out various publications. They were:


Britain Today: Monthly illustrated periodical dealing with Arts and the cultural activities.

British Medical Bulletin: Periodical. This was designed to make recent British medical research known abroad. Three numbers appeared every year and each was devoted to a branch of medical science to which the UK had made a major contribution.


English Language Teaching: Periodical.

British Medical Booklist: Periodical. This publication made new medical literature known abroad, and included new government publications, circulars, and memoranda, the reports of research organisations and voluntary societies, besides books, pamphlets and periodicals.

English Teaching Abstracts: brought out by English Teaching Information Centre.

Writers and their Work: A series of over 200 booklets relating to British authors with bibliographies appended.


Books for the Commonwealth: quarterly list with short notes.

Scientific and Learned Societies of Great Britain.

Scientific Research in British universities and colleges.

Council did not publish books, but issued several series of illustrated brochures and pamphlets. Medicine in Britain was a pamphlet and it gave an account of the organisation of medicine in Britain, including medical education, research and the National Health Service.

But Council helped many foreign publishers to bring out translations of British classics such as Jane Eyre, Robinson Crusoe etc.
These works were short. The costs were borne by the foreign publishers, but the quality control was done by the Council. E.g. in Persia and China the Council helped local publishers to bring out translations of Stevenson, Wells, Bertrand Russell and E M Forster.

4.2.16 Recent developments

Some of the major changes the Council has witnessed during the past one decade are listed below:

(i) There has been a sharp focus on the younger audience as target for all Council services. This includes the age group 20-35 years. Most of the Council programmes are being drawn in order to attract this age group to the Council’s activities;

(ii) Promotion of UK education, universities and courses has become a priority area. Council works closely with UK universities and also student recruitment agencies in various countries;

(iii) Council has started conducting the various UK examinations such as IELTS, BEC, CIMA, ACCA, CIM, PLAB etc. Council promotes these examinations too;

(iv) Book promotion work and related programmes have got reduced in all countries;

(v) The contract with BLDSC to function as its agency for the sale of photocopy coupons has ended in 2000. The Council libraries no more stock the BLDSC coupons or sell them in any country;
(vi) Most of the publications have either been stopped or outsourced;
(vii) Book presentations to institutions have stopped unless the provision of book support is a part of a particular sectoral project;
(viii) Increasing use of technology for communication and application of web enabled services in libraries. The Council recognises the opportunities that the new technology offers to millions of people in a way that would never have been possible with fixed site libraries;
(ix) Review of offline services and use of printed materials in libraries in every country. The Council recognises that the new role for the British Council libraries is the crossroad between the virtual and the physical. Council will pilot new types of libraries called as Knowledge and Learning Centres which will integrate four facilities: Virtual Learning Zones, Videoconferencing Zone, Cybercafe and Offline zones – which refers to traditional printed materials;
(x) Revenue earning has to be given due importance in every activity and this is necessary to keep the activities sustainable;
(xi) Increasing activities in partnership with other organisations at various levels. In other words, instead of undertaking projects single handed, Council looks for partners for sharing both the costs and tasks for various projects;
4.3 British Council Libraries in India

The first move to set up a library in India was made in 1947, the year in which Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru issued a formal invitation to the Council to work there (11).

Council considered the various options of serving the customers of India which is a vast country. One of the options was to open a ‘very large’ headquarters library for India to service a book box scheme in which books would be sent on loan to the various institutions of the country and also to other regional libraries of the Council which would be of one tenth size of the India headquarters library. But the Council abandoned this idea since India was far too large to be organised on a central and branch library system. This, was also the view of Dr S R Ranganathan, the doyen of Indian librarianship, who visited Britain as a guest of the Council in 1949 and who thought that three or four fair sized libraries would make more sense than a big central one with a few small branches (12).

Stock was assembled in London for a ‘main library’ and in 1948, the year in which the Council established itself in temporary premises in
New Delhi, this was sent off to India. There were no suitable premises, therefore, the books were kept in store. The lack of suitable accommodation in Delhi forced the Council to move the books from Delhi to Agra. In February 1950, a library was opened in Agra, run by two locally engaged assistants. The same year saw the opening of libraries in Calcutta and Madras.

In 1950 a decision was taken about how to serve the large number of book lovers of India. A ‘Radical Book Distribution Scheme’ was also to be implemented which would supplement the establishment of central and regional libraries. The library at Agra was to serve as centre of book boxes, postal loans and any other means of getting books to universities. Also the Agra library was to act as a reserve collection for the libraries at Madras and Calcutta which had smaller premises at that time. Subject catalogues were prepared and sent to selected colleges and universities who made a selection of 100 books, which were sent to them by rail or bookpost, on six months loan. But the scheme was not destined to last for long. Perhaps it was too successful for its own good: at one time as much as forty percent of the stock of the Central library was out on bulk loan and thus unavailable to individuals. By the end of 1952 it had been agreed that in place of book-box scheme there would be a system of postal loans, through approved libraries to their individual members. Seeing the demand for university
and college textbooks, the Council started a Textbook Centre in Delhi in the early 1960s. The Textbook Centre was in fact established at the suggestion of the Indian Minister who was then responsible for co-ordinating overseas information. The Centre was built up in consultation with the Indian universities and over 150 institutions were able to draw a stock of over 69000 books by means of subject lists which were circulated to them (13).

The objective was to loan multiple copies of textbooks on long term to universities and colleges which then lent them in turn to their own students. Council found it difficult to continue the textbook loan scheme due to the following reasons: (i) The textbooks were not properly circulated by the recipient institutions (ii) The textbooks were fast becoming obsolete by British standards (iii) Textbooks got worn out quickly (iv) They became expensive. Considering these, the Council in India had to wind up the textbook loan scheme in 1969. Instead it then started promoting the ELBS (Educational Low Priced Books Scheme) which was meant for students in developing countries to buy books at affordable cost. The Council librarians were involved in advising on the titles for inclusion, as well as later on in promoting and publicising the list.

The connection between Council libraries and the educational system in India has been especially strong. Apart from its main concern
with the teaching of English, the Council has increasingly become involved in other educational work, particularly Science Education and in curriculum reform (14). All this influences the direction of library activities and in 1960s the Council in India experimented with two more schemes: creation of special collections to back up the work of science education officers and English language teachers and setting up of library services to schools. The last category embraces the regular presentation of books to the libraries of secondary schools. Both schemes had to be discontinued for want of resources.

The demand for library service in India had always been beyond what Council could offer. To quote the then Chairman of the British Council in 1959, “In India, the lack of adequate library services, coupled with the eager demand for knowledge which is one of the outward signs of the new national spirit in this country, has provided us with a ready made clientele. Had the Council the means and were it proper for us to do so, we could expand our library services in the Indian subcontinent tenfold and still not be able to satisfy the demand” (15).

Giving his impressions of the libraries following his library tour in the Indian subcontinent, Mr R A Flood, the then Deputy Director, Books Department, London says, “In brief, the main conclusions arrived at were that there is a book hunger in these countries which
present facilities cannot satisfy, the effective progress of education will depend on adequate supplies of books (and progress in education is vital to political, social and economic progress), and there is a desperate need for the provision of library services. In these circumstances the British Council libraries are making a most valuable contribution not only in terms of cultural relations but in providing an essential service to students, scientists, technicians, doctors, teachers and administrators. This is a most effective continuous form of technical aid and one which, in the long run, will bring greater benefit to the receiving country and more goodwill towards Britain than many a much publicised gift or money or equipment"\(^{(16)}\).

Between 1959 and 1963 the bookstock in India quadrupled, while issues increased almost fivefold, accounting for over a third of the Council's lending worldwide. By 1965, seven branch libraries had been added to the four regional libraries. Bombay had become the busiest library in the world, with Madras and Calcutta not far behind. Postal and corporate loans had been systematically built up and by 1966, it was claimed that India accounted for not less than 45.8% percent of global issues.

The support of the government and the professionals was of much significance in the success of the BC libraries in India. It had the blessings of both Dr S R Ranganathan, the doyen of Indian librarianship
and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister. When the Delhi library was formally opened in 1956 by the Vice President, in attendance had been Pandit Nehru himself.

The ever raising demand for library services, waiting lists for memberships was met by raising the fees\(^{(17)}\) as a deterrent - something which also had the desirable side-effect of increasing the revenue. In Bombay in the 1950s and 1960s the undergraduates were excluded from taking memberships since the stock was insufficient. The establishment of the fourteen British Council libraries in India is as follows:

Table No. 2: Establishment of the British Council libraries/ British Libraries in India

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regional Libraries</th>
<th>Year of establishment</th>
<th>British Libraries</th>
<th>Year of establishment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chennai</td>
<td>1950</td>
<td>Bangalore</td>
<td>1960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calcutta</td>
<td>1950</td>
<td>Patna</td>
<td>1960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bombay</td>
<td>1953</td>
<td>Pune</td>
<td>1960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delhi</td>
<td>1956</td>
<td>Lucknow</td>
<td>1961</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ranchi</td>
<td>1962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Trivandrum</td>
<td>1964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bhopal</td>
<td>1965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ahmedabad</td>
<td>1979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hyderabad</td>
<td>1979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Chandigarh</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The Ranchi library was closed in 1995 and both the Lucknow and Patna libraries were closed in 2001.
The four Regional libraries are the ones managed directly by the British Council offices whereas the British Libraries are jointly managed by the Council and the Indian Council for Cultural Relations.

Recent two decades have witnessed major changes in India too in tune with the Council libraries in other countries. Increasing demand for library services on the one hand and spiralling costs and constant budget cuts on the other have forced the libraries to review the policies. As a result, the general and recreational materials have been gradually replaced by subject books. Each library has identified focus subjects taking into view the needs of local users. However, the following subjects are more represented in every library in India: IT, English Language and Literature, Management and Fiction. Besides, all new and trendy subjects are well represented. New media such as audio and video cassettes were incorporated in the libraries realising their educational potential. In order to deliver information to people who are not able to visit the libraries, proactive information service was introduced by which selected documents are mailed to key contacts and decision makers all over the country. A bimonthly publication, *Current Perspectives* was launched in 1995 and it contains summaries of a few articles selected from British periodicals and the recipient can ask for the full copies from the British Council libraries.
There has been increasing interest in UK education and large number of students from India wish to go to UK for higher studies every year. British Council/British Libraries in India have introduced full fledged educational information service wherein counselling is offered on courses, procedures, scholarships etc for higher education in UK.

Besides, the libraries provide information on various British examinations conducted in India such as Business English Certificate (BEC), IELTS, ACCA, CIM, PLAB etc. Library staff have been actively promoting the UK educational courses and professional examinations.

In the new economic climate of the nineties the enquiries relating to UK companies and UK’s corporate and industrial policies have been growing. All the libraries have strengthened the information sources in these areas. Exclusive Business Information Centres have been set up in Pune, Ahmedabad, Hyderabad, Bhopal, and Chandigarh libraries with support from British High Commission offices.

Responding to the needs of the children for quality reading materials, children’s libraries were launched in the following libraries: Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Pune, Ahmedabad, and Thiruvananthapuram. These children’s libraries have small collections and are meant for the children of library members.
The extension activities organised by the libraries include lectures, seminars, workshops and roundtables. For many of such programmes, resource persons from UK were bought in and they enriched the discussions and for the remaining ones, local experts served as resource persons. One of the important activities of the libraries is the work with NGOs involved in development work. In order to promote this activity, a new initiative, Indev was launched in March 1999. Indev serves as a forum for NGOs, facilitates their networking through its website, provides them training in information handling and hosts their websites.

Most of the libraries got a facelift during the past two decades. They got new furniture, service points were rearranged, interiors were refurbished. They look now more airy, spacious and bright. The libraries have been quick to integrate the new technology. All the libraries have got automated. Computerisation has enabled in speeding up customers' transactions apart from running the housekeeping operations efficiently. All the libraries have been connected by Internet, high speed email and Intranet. Cyber centres have been provided in all the libraries for the use of customers.

Membership of the libraries was free of charge to begin with but, when the membership grew phenomenally, a fee was charged. The demand for library services continues to grow and in Chandigarh there
is a sort of "pegging of memberships" even now. This is to ensure that the existing members are served adequately before enrolling new members.

Today the eleven libraries of India is the British Council's most prestigious libraries with more visitors, more members and more books issued than in any other country. There are nearly 78,000 individual and institutional members. Every year over 2,00,000 enquiries are answered; over 2.6 million books are loaned and over 15000 people visit the libraries every day. About 40,000 books are added to the libraries every year.

The efficiency of library operations of this magnitude depends largely on the quality of staff, both at the service points and the managerial level. In order to develop competency among the staff, in house training has become an ongoing programme. Senior staff are trained in Basic Management Skills, Human Resource Management, Performance Management and Management of Change. Staff at the service points are trained in Information Skills, Customer Care, Quality Improvement and Information Technology.

The British Council libraries seldom work in a static situation. Changes have been constant. Books and printed materials dominated the Council libraries during the past five decades. Today the electronic media and the web technology has provided enormous potential and the
electronic resources compliment the printed material. The Council Libraries recognise the opportunities the web has provided and it enables them to reach a much larger customer base spread all over the country. The Knowledge and Learning Centre (KLC) was launched in Delhi in January 2002 and it provides the following facilities: Online learning courses from UK institutions, Videoconferencing, Self Access English Zone, Education Zone and Offline facilities. Once the pilot project succeeds, more libraries will be converted to KLCs.

4.4 Global policy: working close to the customer

From the very beginning, the libraries are known for delivering services of highest professional standards and in most of the countries they are exemplary. The use of the libraries is open to everyone but the borrowing facilities are available only to the members.

There has been a customer focus in all the libraries all these years. Since the very beginning, the corporate management of the libraries were committed to the optimum use of libraries and they believed that customers will not visit the libraries unless the services are completely oriented towards them. The libraries in the network aim to be always ‘a bit ahead of others’ by being customer oriented, focused, and proactive and these libraries have witnessed a very successful story.
everywhere. The following are some of their features which make them distinctive.

(i) The libraries have a clear policy regarding the types of materials to be stocked and the services to be rendered and this policy is decided on the basis of who the target customer is. Till late 1970s the target customer used to be generalist reader. At that time the major portion of stock of the libraries used to consist of general interest subjects such as Fiction, Biographies, Travel, Health, Philosophy, Literature, History, Arts and Hobbies. There used to be a children’s section too. Libraries used to organise exhibitions and also provide support to other events in Arts and Culture conducted at the Council. The customer focus shifted towards professionals in the early 1980s. In order to meet the requirements of this customer group, the library services were re-oriented. Book stock was quickly built up on professional subjects such as Computers, Management, Medicine, Architecture, Law, Engineering etc. Good number of periodicals aimed at various professions were added to the subscription lists of libraries. Educational and training videos which were needed by the various professionals were added to the libraries. Libraries were provided with photocopiers. The extension activities were
more of lectures and academic programmes which attracted the professionals more. Since the late 1990s there has been a further change in the customer focus. Now it is the young professionals and the students of colleges and universities. All the library services are being re-oriented in order to attract this group.

(ii) Interiors are well designed and attractive, providing a congenial atmosphere for reading. The reading halls are bright and comfortable. The layout of the libraries and helpful guides to the shelves, bay and sections make it easy for members to find their way around. The shape and dimensions of furniture suited to each other, colour scheme, carpet, height of shelves, etc were all decided not only to make them function better, create an excellent ambience, but also to convey an important message – to project a very positive image of Britain. In the beginning, most of the furniture for the libraries used to come from Britain since the furniture design in the host countries did not match the British design. The convenience of the library user is taken into view while designing any physical facility for the library. The library is kept tidy and clean continuously. Other physical facilities are drinking water, toilets, etc.
Stock and information materials: The libraries provide a much varied kind of stock and information materials to suit the different kinds of needs – academic, professional, recreational and hobby interests of customers. In other words, there is a wide range of reading materials – books on almost all subjects, periodicals, videos and so on. Recently being added are the CD ROMs and DVDs. The selection of the entire stock is done by the librarians but a lot of effort goes behind selecting any item. The staff share their experience regularly regarding subjects in heavy demand, book suggestions are regularly analysed. The automated system is regularly used in order to ascertain the subjects popular with the customers, titles heavily used, titles underused etc. The stock is kept trim by regularly removing the mutilated/defaced books which are a sort of irritancy to the customers. Also the outdated titles, superseded editions, etc are regularly removed in order to ensure that only sound copies and upto date information materials are available for the customers. Customers prefer books with original jackets or cover, since they look attractive and also informative. Keeping this in view, books are rarely bound in the libraries. In order to reinforce the books and also to make them attractive, all books are layered with protective films or plastic jackets.
Quality service: The libraries make continuous effort to deliver services at a service level which exceeds what the customer expects. Whether it is while attending to the customer at the service points, or while designing a brochure for the library, or while sending an email reply, the aim has always been to maintain a high quality of service level. In order to ensure consistency in service quality, the libraries have developed standards for various services such as telephonic manners, staff dress code, cleanliness, etc. The stationery design has to be as per the corporate design style. The staff of the libraries regularly undergo training in delivery of quality service. The libraries have developed a 'Quality service standards for British Council libraries'. It is a sort of customer care charter; it tells the customer what level of service can be expected at the British Council libraries.

Customer care: In the British Council set up, all library users are called as 'customers'. This makes it obligatory for the staff to treat the library users with respect and also develop the attitude 'putting the customer first'. Customer service to a large extent depends on the type of attitude the staff develop, and this again depends on the policies and commitment from the top
management. For the Council libraries, customer is the most important person and this concept is reinforced regularly by meetings, training programmes, notices etc. Council firmly believes that to survive in this highly competitive world, customer care is the cornerstone. Every staff member undergoes a full fledged customer care training almost every year. Staff are trained in interaction with the customers, handling of difficult customers, quality service, importance of complaints, economics of repeated customers, how to make the customers visit repeatedly etc.

(vi) Staff skills development: Customer service, though is mainly dependent on the systems, procedures and staff attitude, it is also dependent on the competency of the staff. The honing of staff skills is a continuous process at the Council. Training programmes are undertaken in IT, library automation, information searching skills, customer care, quality service etc. Senior staff also undergo management training regularly. They are trained in performance management, motivation, staff management, financial management etc. One of the interesting things in the Council libraries is that all the staff are multiple skilled; they are comfortable in performing any library task
should the need arise. This is ensured by job rotation and staff training, team work. The multiple skilling of staff ensures that customers are not affected when a staff member is not available, his/her duties are effectively performed by the substitute. All new staff are put on induction training which orients them to the work culture of the Council, code of practice, etc in addition to providing them information about various sectoral activities of the Council. The induction training makes the new staff member confident in discharging the duties.

(vii) Staff empowerment: Efficiency in customer service calls for empowerment of staff at various levels. While adequate financial and policy making powers are bestowed with the senior staff, junior staff also have been given the powers to take decisions regarding customer service matters. Staff are encouraged to use their discretion in customer care matters so that the customer does not have to run from pillar to post for getting things done. Even when wrong decisions are taken, the concerned staff member is not penalised, but is corrected. This policy enables them to develop their competency apart from removing unnecessary bureaucratic layers which come in the way of customer service.
The libraries from the very beginning, have been capturing a lot of management information and these are utilised for evaluating the customer service and also to improve the quality of service. The automated system Libsys (In India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka) has been substantially customised in order to capture various kinds of management information and also deliver them in a usable format. Some specific examples of management information are:

- Memberships enrolled daily, monthly and cumulative;
- Revenue collected – daily, monthly and cumulative;
- Memberships enrolled – category wise;
- Issues – books, periodicals, videos etc; daily and cumulative;
- Books on shelf vs books on loan;
- Transactions – hourly transactions;
- Reservations attended daily and cumulative;
- Defaulters – monthwise;
- Titles in demand; titles slow moving;
- Books added subject wise;
- Who is borrowing what; books borrowed by a particular category of membership;
- Usage of books from a particular section – who is borrowing from a section;
- Books weeded out subject wise;
- Subject wise loan statistics;
- Budget spending subject wise.

The above statistics are interpreted in order to understand customer requirement, library habits or to come up with better customer packages.

(ix) The book acquisition policy of the library has been drafted keeping in view two objectives: (a) to make available the best of British reading materials (b) to provide materials which meet the customer needs. Thus the acquisition policy on the one hand, projects Britain, and on the other hand, satisfies the interests of the customers. The libraries make efforts to provide reading materials to customers which are indeed distinctive. This is ensured by getting the latest titles from UK, so that they are able to provide the titles which have not yet reached the local market. Every title is weighed thoroughly before the order is placed. It passes through minimum four screening stages before finally being ordered. Quality is ensured by scanning through various book lists, book reviews and bibliographies. To avoid being influenced by local booksellers, the libraries do not encourage books purchase on approval basis.
Efficiency in housekeeping operations: Staff time is released for customer service to the maximum extent by various methods: (a) automation of all routine operations (b) outsourcing of various jobs (c) removing jobs which do not add value (d) reducing paper work, bureaucracy. (e) simplifying procedures. Examples of improved housekeeping operations are: downloading catalogue entries from the website; generating book orders directly from the CD ROMs, contracting of photocopying etc.

Keeping in touch with customers: This is done very consciously in all Council libraries. Both junior and senior staff look for opportunities to interact with the customers. All libraries regularly organise 'Meet the Members' sessions periodically wherein members from different categories are invited for a meeting at the library. Besides, libraries conduct a questionnaire 'User survey' every year. There are suggestion registers in every library which is systematically gone through and replied to by the Library Managers. There are other methods also, such as 'floor walking' which means senior staff members walking in the library with a purpose – of interacting with library members. Apart from all these, every staff member makes effort to listen to
the customer carefully every time – this gives valuable insight into the requirements of the customer.

(xii) Membership fee – market oriented: The library membership fee is fixed on the basis of paying capacity and feelings of the customer and not on the actual cost of delivery of service. Every year, the membership fee is reviewed and it continues to remain subsidised since the Indian customer cannot afford to pay high membership fee though the cost of delivery of library service is high. Similarly the fixing of charges for other services, fines etc are done after due consideration to the customer sensitivity and not purely from the revenue point of view.

(xiii) Systems and procedures: Customer service can be improved or marred by the systems and procedures. In British Council libraries the procedures have been deliberately kept simple so that staff time is saved on the one hand and customer is kept happy on the other. To cite an example, till recently, the members were asked to drop the fine in a box kept at the counter, and even the receipts were not cut. Similarly most of the library services can be availed without filling in forms and sheets, signing on documents etc. The thumb rule is ‘remove all procedures which do not add value to customer service’ and this has worked well.
To sum up, the British Council libraries make efforts to be highly customer oriented. The feelings and reactions of the customer are taken into view while making any move. Many times even formal meeting with the customers are arranged in order to obtain their views. For example, in case the library hours are to be changed, a sort of random questionnaire survey is undertaken.

The Council is a dynamic organisation, very sensitive and quickly responding to the external environment. Making use of the opportunities provided by Internet which is the most favourite media for its main target ie the younger generation, the Council libraries will make quick changes in the service delivery in the new millennium. The aim is to reach a much larger number of customers in the most efficient way. The following two quotes reflect the Council’s new marketing policy in the future:

'The demand for library services has been increasing, as have the expectations of customers in a knowledge based economy. The task of providing a quality library service in the true sense of the term is indeed challenging. The British Council libraries in India continually strive to integrate changes in technology and in reading and viewing trends to serve customers better and quicker.'(18)
‘The British Council’s libraries have been pivotal in establishing the organisation’s reputation worldwide. We are committed to maintaining this presence. At the same time we do have to recognise the opportunities that new technology offers to reach millions of people in a way that would never have been possible with fixed site libraries (19).'}
References


6. Ibid.


10. Ibid.


13. Ibid.


Plate 1: Special cover released by the Postal Department on the occasion of the 50th year of the British Council Libraries in India in February 1999

Plate 2: Prime Minister Tony Blair of Britain meeting the children library members at Delhi on 7 January 2002