Chapter 6: Potential for a women’s library in Wales

6.1 Introduction
Any developments in the library and archive sectors in Wales need to be considered in the light of changes occurring in England, Ireland and Scotland in order to place the potential for a women’s library in Wales in a wider context. It is therefore relevant to note the establishment of CyMAL (Museums Archives and Libraries Wales) in April 2004 as a policy division of the National Assembly for Wales with responsibility for the promotion and enhancement of these three sectors in Wales. CyMAL was founded following similar developments in England and Scotland (the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council [ML]) in 2000 in England, and the Scottish Library and Information Council [SLIC] in 1991). CyMAL has grant-giving powers and the ability to facilitate profile-raising campaigns, thus their development programmes could be influential in any decision on a women’s library or archive in Wales.

Chapters 4 and 5 presented and analysed the findings of the research into women’s libraries. In this chapter the specific situation of Wales will be analysed in terms of the potential for a women’s library in Wales. It will consider the various options for Wales and discuss each in terms of practicalities and possibilities, as well as draw in the key issues that have occurred throughout this thesis such as: identities, structures, professional and financial issues.

Having analysed the findings there appear to be three possible options for Wales. These are to:

- Recognise the important role of women’s libraries, and to acknowledge the gap in provision of information services for women in Wales, in comparison to the rest of the British Isles, and to seek to remedy this by creating a physical women’s library/archive, and being open to the public on a regular basis;
• Acknowledge the existence of the current key players in women’s information services in Wales and seek to strengthen their positions and possibly broaden their scope, but not create a physical library or archive;
• Acknowledge that women’s information and archives are important areas, but seek to improve the availability of relevant information in public libraries, and the collections of women’s archives in local record offices rather than creating or enhancing ‘separatist’ organisations.

6.2 Current situation in Wales
Although there is no women’s library or archive in Wales, there are similarities between Wales and England, Ireland and Scotland. In Wales there are currently two main organisations working in the field of women’s archives: Archif Menywod Cymru/Women’s Archive of Wales (AMC/WAW) and Women in Jazz. Both are relatively new organisations, being founded in 1998 and 1986 respectively.

In terms of their collection scope, AMC/WAW seek to encourage the donation of a wide variety of material from both individual women and women’s organisations in Wales, as was outlined in the description of the organisation (see Chapter 3, section 3.10). They do not have a physical building for housing the material as the documents and objects are placed under their name at public local record offices and the National Library of Wales. Whilst they are not working towards creating their own archive *in situ*, they have a number of projects they would like to undertake such as a mapping exercise across Wales which would list any relevant resources and collections pertaining to women. They are an independent body and currently receive no grant funding other than one-off project-specific grants.

Women in Jazz, in contrast, have a highly specialised collection which is currently housed in offices rented from a local council. They were recently awarded a two year grant for a full-time development officer, and the rent and utilities are paid by the local council. The physical conditions for the collection are not ideal because they have a number of specialist items that need particular archival care e.g. gowns
worn by jazz performers, old jazz instruments, score music, books, photographs and records.

A third organisation is also relevant to the discussion. Whilst Swansea Women’s Centre does not have the archival strength of the other two organisations, it houses a small resource collection and works towards women’s training, development and empowerment in a range of contexts. It is regionally-restricted in focus and impact, but co-ordinates with various women’s groups in the Swansea and south Wales region. In terms of its approach it is similar to Glasgow Women’s Library, but on a much smaller scale.

In addition to these key archive groups, there are various specialist women’s groups in Wales, a selection of which is listed in Appendix 6. At present there is no formal network for all these various groups, although many of them do liaise and contact each other, sharing newsletters, supporting events, etc where their spheres of influence overlap.

6.3 Identities – what model or models exist in Wales?
All three of the relevant women’s libraries/archives/resource centres in Wales can be placed within my tri-model categorisation of the women’s libraries in the British Isles, that is:

- archive-based research institutions
- socially-orientated community-based resource centres
- virtual archive collections

The AMC/WAW approach is quite similar to that of the Women’s History Project in Ireland, but they have not been able to attract funding to conduct a similar mapping of repositories in Wales. Aims of both organisations are similar e.g. not working towards a physical repository for the material, and a desire to increase awareness about women’s archives and women’s history. Whilst AMC/WAW fit into the model of ‘virtual’ archives/libraries, they are not as well developed as their counterparts in Ireland.
Indeed, it is possible to see that AMC/WAW could be considered as creating their own model in their distributed approach. By ensuring that material relating to women’s lives in Wales is deposited in recognised formal county archives or the National Library of Wales, they are able to ensure that the documents and archives are looked after in a professional manner, catalogued properly and access to them is guaranteed across Wales. In Ireland, the material remains in the original repositories, with potentially varying levels of access and appropriate preservation methods. AMC/WAW are working towards developing a similar approach for museum objects as they have for archive material e.g. for banners, textiles.

Women in Jazz matches the archive/research model, although it has a range of socially-orientated elements such as supporting contemporary female jazz artists. It is also a more highly specialised collection than any of the other archives visited in England or Scotland. It should be noted that there are some other specialist women’s libraries in the British Isles, but, as was outlined in Chapter 3, specialist libraries were included in Wales on account of there being no other relevant institutions, whereas in the British Isles there were sufficient other institutions to visit without investigating the more specialist libraries e.g. women’s health libraries.

The social or contemporary needs model can be seen in Swansea Women’s Centre, although their resource collection does not compare in terms of scope and extensiveness to that of Glasgow Women’s Library or the former Feminist Library. Whilst they work with women in the community offering a range of services and training sessions, they have a much smaller archive collection and research base. As with AMC/WAW, they could be considered to be less developed than other similar organisations in the UK that operate within the social-contemporary needs model.

Wales, therefore, has a virtual women’s library (to a degree), a specialist women’s archive collection, and a regionally-focused resource centre. But, using my tri-model classification developed from the situation in the British Isles we can see that there is a gap in terms of a general women’s library, which houses its own collection of archives and resources, and provides access to the public and may or may not be
connected to a larger organisation such as a university. Pertinent questions arise from identifying this gap that are crucial to the focus of this investigation. Does this gap matter? Should it be filled? And if so, by what? This issue is the crux of the thesis and is the focus for this chapter’s discussion.

In order to consider whether there is potential for a generic ‘women’s library’ it is important to remember that the analysis from the research in the British Isles found few women’s libraries that had a wholly ‘general’ approach. They all specialise to some extent – in their approach, style or collection focus. Consequently, there is no single model that can be directly replicated in Wales. It is also questionable how successful a ‘general’ women’s library could be, given for example, the findings from the women’s information needs literature which suggest that women from a variety of different backgrounds do not tend to seek information from formal sources such as libraries (see Chapter 2, section 2.4.6). Furthermore, the future for some of the women’s libraries is insecure and unknown. During the period of research the Feminist Library closed, and the Feminist Archive (South) was contemplating a move into a local university. Yet whilst these two institutions face uncertain futures, the Women’s Library was able to attract a £4.2million HLF grant and has had a subsequent increase in its profile and usage.

Despite these varying degrees of existence, Wales could be considered to be well-placed to develop its current provision for women’s archives and libraries, given that the three key organisations broadly cover the three main types of women’s libraries i.e. archive-based, social-contemporary needs, and virtual mapping. The existence of these structures creates the situation whereby there is potential for all three sectors to develop and enhance their provision, although this is inevitably dependent upon economic, social and political conditions. Given the existing structures in Wales it is possible to identify three options for the future. Each option has disadvantages and advantages which call for further exploration.
Option 1 – Create a physical women’s library and archive

Creating a single physical women’s library or archive to serve all of Wales is not an actively pursued aim of any of the three key women’s information organisations investigated. That it not to say that the idea of a women’s space isn’t appealing – many of those interviewed saw such a building as a ‘dream’, but they were also able to recognise the practical problems of creating such an institution.

 [...] if there were a lot of us together, the Women’s Archive, and us, and, you know, perhaps some university women’s resources, if we got together, and plonked ourselves in the middle of Wales somewhere, so everybody’s got easier access to us. [...] Because what we’ve got here needs to be, in public display, something like [...] the Dylan Thomas exhibition where it’s there and it’s up, and it’s permanent and anybody can go in and look round and all the rest of it.

Well, my grand vision would obviously be a building, somewhere on the maritime quarter [...] Now then, if we could be part of that, even if it’s in somebody else’s building, because we, the thing is with this, although we’re eternally grateful to the city for looking after us, we can’t have public access up here, with the stairs. And, you know, everything is on top of us. If there was somebody sitting here researching we can’t do any work...

HH: Yes, an office would be a perfectly feasible thing, if you get the funding for it of course. But, to think of getting a building to hold the archive would be millions, and we’re unlikely to get, or even want, that at the present time.

JJ: I don't think we do actually. I mean, if, if, now, they've been talking for a long time about getting a women's building in Swansea for example, and I think at one stage that was floated and would we want a space in there. Well actually a space in there would actually be quite handy, but, just, literally an office space.

I still think there should be a women's, building, or space or whatever. If it starts off as just a database to start with, fair enough, at least it shows where everything is.

These quotes highlight several issues - from resources, public access, joint ventures as well emphasising the notion that women working together in a women’s space is an attractive idea to many women’s organisations. Increased networking and joint profile-raising are outcomes of being located together, and given the significant number of women’s organisations in Wales (see Appendix 6) bringing related organisations together in one building may well be beneficial.
6.4.1 Funding

Despite the desirability of a women’s building on theoretical grounds, the prime factor influencing this option is funding. All the other women’s libraries struggle continuously with funding issues, and lack of money to pay the rent has resulted in the closure of the Feminist Library in London. Even staff at the Women’s Library admit that they are always fundraising and will always rely upon donations, grants and the financial input of the university. Thus, any proposals for a physical women’s library in Wales would have to account for considerable revenue income, from a variety of sources.

Many of the existing women’s libraries receive some funding from their local city or county councils, so the location of a physical building has ramifications for local government. Whilst some local councils may currently fund women’s organisations such as Welsh Women’s Aid by providing them with offices or a council-owned building for a refuge, it is unlikely that any local council in Wales would wish to take on the financial responsibility of a women’s library building that doesn’t have such immediately obvious need (or local relevance) as a women’s refuge. In addition to council funding, most of the women’s libraries also attract some grant money, and so other organisations would be required for financial contributions towards a women’s library in Wales.

In Wales, libraries and archives are funded directly and indirectly by the National Assembly for Wales (NAW), therefore this organisation could be a key donor. For example, in 2005-2006 the National Library of Wales received nearly £11 million in grant-in-aid funding from the NAW (National Assembly for Wales, n. d. -b, n. p.); CyMAL (mentioned previously) receives a budget of £3 million pa. The National Assembly for Wales also financially supports other non-governmental bodies in the information sector such as the Welsh Books Council and the Arts Council of Wales, both of which may have some interest in a new library or archive venture. Whilst grants are an important source of income, they are rarely long-term, and can be
difficult to obtain unless the project addresses specific concerns that each body is keen to address e.g. social inclusion, life-long learning.

As has been acknowledged in both Chapters 4 and 5, applying for funding can be time-consuming and difficult. Furthermore, given the current situation there is no single organisation that would be able to start the process of seeking substantial funding for a nation-wide women’s library/centre. Whilst AMC/WAW is national in terms of its outlook, all the Committee members are volunteers, and distributed across Wales. Women in Jazz is a very specific collection and has just won funding for two years to develop its own archives, and Swansea Women’s Centre does not have the personnel or the national-outlook to develop an application for an all-Wales women’s library.

The financial situation also governs issues such as staffing, stock, computers, utilities, equipment and marketing, thus sufficient funds would be needed to ensure a professional service was provided. Taking all these issues into account, it can be seen that the financial situation is critical when considering the potential for women’s library in Wales. Assuming that an appropriate amount of money could be sourced, over a long-term period, other issues would also need careful consideration.

6.4.2 Collections and stock
The collections on which a women’s library would be based are highly relevant in any consideration of the potential for a women’s library in Wales. As has been seen in the analysis of the findings from outside Wales, the collections of women’s libraries vary depending upon the identity (model) and role of the institution. Thus, the Feminist Archive (South) has very time-specific criteria for stock, collecting material that relates to the second wave of feminism which they date to be c.1960-c.2000. The Women’s Library, in comparison, has a much broader time-span, but due to its history and origins, the strengths of its archival collections are in suffrage material along with other collections from significant women or societies. There is less emphasis on information about current women’s needs e.g. local crèches. This is because the identity of the institution necessarily influences its collection, and
those that are primarily archives for research and preservation tend not to focus on social/contemporary needs. Glasgow Women’s Library and the former Feminist Library are examples whereby information (and other) needs of local individual women are more likely to be met, and whilst they may also possess valuable archive collections (especially in the case of the Feminist Library), there is greater emphasis on current information provision - that is, they are more akin to public libraries than archive services.

As a consequence of these issues, if a physical women’s library or archive institution was to be established in Wales its identity would need to be considered. If it were to be an archive, then it would need to contain a significant amount of useful material in order to attract customers (researchers), and to attract funding. One staff member at an existing women’s library highlighted this issue of collections:

[If] you knew there were six major women’s, Welsh women’s organisations with nowhere to house their collections, I wouldn’t start trying to [set up a women’s library]...

In order for it to be a comprehensive archive, it would be essential that material was not only donated by existing women’s groups and organisations (e.g. Merched y Wawr, Welsh Women’s Aid), but that material currently located in existing archives and libraries be re-located into the women’s archive. A definitive archive on women in Wales would, for example, possibly need to include copies of the Welsh-language women’s magazines from the 1850s and 1880s (some of which are currently housed in the National Library of Wales), as well as the first ever printed book in Welsh written by a woman (Telyn Egryn, 1850, by Elin Evans, reprinted by Honno in 1998, the original manuscript of which is in the National Library of Wales), along with papers of significant Welsh women.

For a number of reasons, it is highly unlikely that any institution would be willing to donate or relocate such material\(^1\). For example, the National Library of Wales has

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\(^1\) The international case of the Parthenon Marbles (also known as the Elgin marbles) is a pertinent example here. The British Museum acquired these after they were removed from the Acropolis in Greece in 1801 by Lord Elgin, the British Ambassador to Greece. The 176-yard frieze was sculpted in the fifth century but only some of it has survived. Roughly half the remaining pieces are in Greece and half in Britain. Greece has asked for the return of the sculptures so that the sculptures can be reunited in one collection. The British Museum refuses on the grounds that they would not be
the most extensive collection of material about Wales. Whilst they might agree to
make microfilm or digital copies of relevant material (a process that would also need
funding), they would probably be unwilling to donate material to another library or
archive. In addition, material already in libraries and local record office archives in
Wales is likely to be held in appropriate conditions. There could be uncertainty as to
the professionalism of a new women’s library, especially if funding was insecure.
This is one reason why AMC/WAW have sought to place material in established
institutions in Wales as they know that the material will be kept in appropriate
conditions with guaranteed public access.

This latter point is relevant because the Feminist Archive (South) is reliant upon
volunteers and is only open one afternoon a week. This does not facilitate in-depth
use of the collection, particularly by long-distance researchers. If a physical
women’s archive were to be established in Wales, it would be most beneficial if
opening hours were as extensive as possible. This would inevitably be dependent
upon finances and personnel circumstances.

If a physical women’s building was to be more aligned with a library rather than an
archive, there would be different collection and stock issues. Those that seek (or
sought) to serve contemporary women’s needs e.g. Glasgow Women’s Library, the
Women’s Resource Centre and the Feminist Library, may wish to operate like a
public library and have a lending collection. Glasgow lends its fiction material, but
the other two libraries do not lend their material. If the material cannot be borrowed,
it may mean some women are not able to use the resources, and this may detract
from its use.

The material also needs to be up-to-date if the library is seeking to meet
contemporary needs. Thus the Women’s Resource Centre tends not to rely upon
donations of material as it needs to buy the most recent version of directories for
example, to ensure it is not providing inaccurate information. In addition, the

preserved well enough in Greece, and that public access to them is provided at the British Museum.
material needs to cover a wide range of issues e.g. childcare, education, employment, financial, health, hobbies, legal etc. Whilst established women’s libraries know who their clientele are, they also admit that there is no typical customer:

So there really isn’t a typical library user at all, they’re so varied, they come from all walks of life.

So our users are a mixture.

Consequently, the women’s library in Wales would need to undertake a large scale user-needs survey to establish what type of material women might wish to use (as well as conducting a survey to find out if there is a need for such an institution at the outset).

Assuming that women would use the library for seeking information on a wide range of issues, creating a relevant, up-to-date, extensive and useful collection of material from nothing would by financially difficult and logistically complex. What resources (i.e. books, journals) would be chosen? On what basis? How long would it take to create a viable library resource that would attract customers? Who would pay for the purchase of the material at the outset? Would there be a book budget? Would the material be for loan or reference only? In addition, if the focus of the institution was as a library, would it seek to acquire any archive collections, or would it be purely for social/contemporary needs? If it acquired archives, would they be able to be adequately looked after? The collections, whether archive or library-orientated would also need to be managed professionally – an issue which is discussed in the following section.

6.4.3 Professional issues

Women’s libraries across the British Isles exhibit varying degrees of professionalism. Some, like the Women’s History Project have sought from the outset to maintain a professional approach, and their development was in contrast to an alternative proposal for a women’s resource centre in Dublin that some felt would not be professional and would endanger precious archives. Professional issues cover

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2 It may also be relevant to note that many of the other women’s libraries in the British Isles arose out of particular social or cultural movements of their time: it may be difficult to replicate similar conditions that would stimulate similar motivation.
matters such as staff qualifications, pay and pay scales, computer catalogues, stock checks, classification schemes, storage conditions, accessibility and adherence to common library or archive standards.

As was discussed in both Chapters 4 and 5, few of the women’s libraries or archives employ professionally qualified librarians and archivists. Some have made a concerted effort to employ only those with the relevant qualifications (as with the Women’s History Project in Ireland) in order to create a professional image. Some of the other women’s libraries however, rely upon volunteer staff and do not require that the women have professional qualifications. Within Wales, some of the women on the AMC/WAW committee have either library or archive backgrounds and/or qualifications, whilst some are academics. Others may fit neither of these categories but are interested in women’s history. Likewise, the Women in Jazz archive is run by an enthusiast who, whilst not possessing library or archive qualifications, has had a long personal interest in women’s issues and has a Masters qualification in women’s studies. In all three institutions visited in Wales, the input of volunteers with the necessary qualifications is often achieved for short-term projects e.g. cataloguing projects. However, some of the women’s libraries outside of Wales noted that the lack of staff with the specific professional qualifications was sometimes to the detriment of the resource (see quotes in Section 4.8 of Chapter 4). Consequently, if a women’s library or archive were to be established in Wales, it would be important to consider the internal and external impacts of employing (or not employing) professionally qualified staff.

Linked to this issue of qualifications is the matter of pay and pay scales. Some of the women’s libraries in the British Isles are run purely by volunteers e.g. Feminist Archive (South), former Feminist Library, whilst others rely on some paid staff and some volunteers e.g. Glasgow Women’s Library. The main advantage of not employing paid staff is that money is saved – and the women’s libraries frequently have very little money to spend. However, relying upon volunteers can lead to patchy service and there is no compulsion on volunteers to turn up on time, carry out the work satisfactorily etc. Despite this, volunteers at women’s libraries tend to be
dedicated to the purpose of the work and frequently commit a significant amount of
time and energy towards the organisation. Where workers are paid, the salary may
not be commensurate with similar work in traditional libraries or archives:

...we moved from being completely voluntary workers to having,
although low-paid, part-time workers ..., in 1994 we had three part-
time very very low-paid workers.

These issues would need to be considered if a physical library was established in
Wales. How many staff would be needed? Would they all be paid? If so, on what
scale? Would there be any volunteers working for the library? Would staff be
required to have relevant professional qualifications?

One final question to consider regarding staff issues is whether men would be
allowed to be members of staff or volunteers. Currently none of the three women’s
archives/resource centres in Wales employ men, although there are male trustees of
Women in Jazz. The decision perhaps rests on the type of institution that would be
created, and if it was seeking to identify itself specifically as a separate women’s
space, for the benefit of women, then it may prefer not to employ men. However, it
would need to seek exemption from the Sexual Discrimination Act in order to only
appoint women – a position Welsh Women’s Aid adopts due to the nature of its
work.

In addition to there being few professional qualified librarians and archivists in the
women’s libraries, there are also few accurate computer catalogues of the stock. The
two may be related as a professionally qualified librarian or archivist might
appreciate the importance of such a catalogue more than, say, an ex-social worker.
For Wales, if there was to be a physical women’s library or archive, in order for it to
be used extensively and to its maximum potential, a computer catalogue would be
essential. Researchers would be more likely to use the resource if they could consult
the computer catalogue in advance to ascertain if the relevant material is available.
Related to the issue of a computer catalogue is the need for regular stock checks. It
is frustrating for researchers to discover that the material they were expecting to find
in the library or archive is missing. Some of the women’s libraries outside of Wales
admitted to not carrying out frequent stock checks. Both a computer catalogue and
regular stock checks would enhance the professional image of the library or archive and would be essential procedures.

In addition to these matters, suitable storage facilities would be needed for the material, particularly if the institution was to be constructed primarily as an archive. Certain items require specific temperatures, light conditions, humidity levels etc, and these factors would need to be taken into account before accepting material, and when designing a physical space or looking for suitable properties. As was noted in Chapter 4, women’s archives can include a range of ephemeral material such as banners, badges, posters, etc, all of which are quite unusual items for preservation:

Because there’s, you know, a photography collection, the record collection, the oral history collection that I was trying to build up. You know, there’s a lot of formats here, you know? It’s not just books.

This suggests the importance of employing qualified personnel who would be trained in the preservation and conservation of a range of material.

As has already been noted, the value of a physical women’s library or archive is that it would create a single location for the collating of women’s archives and resources. To capitalise on the potential of the resources it should be as accessible as possible in terms of opening hours/days, as well as physical access e.g. access for wheelchairs. Such a library or archive would preferably be open 5 days a week (including Saturday, so perhaps closed one weekday as at the Women’s Library), with possible evening opening hours. The table below shows the opening times of the other women’s libraries. Public libraries across the British Isles are responding to demands for longer opening hours, including weekends and evenings (see the Public Library Standards for England formulated in 2001 by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, and the Welsh Public Library Standards facilitated by CyMAL). It would be unfortunate if a physical women’s library had restrictive opening hours that did not facilitate easy access to the resources that it contained.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Library/Archive</th>
<th>Opening hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Archif Menywod Cymru/Women’s Archive of Wales (AMC/WAW)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminist Archive (South)</td>
<td>Wednesday afternoons from 2.00pm to 4.30pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminist Library (in 2003-04)</td>
<td>Formerly: five days a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glasgow Women’s Library</td>
<td>Tuesday, Wednesday &amp; Friday 1.00-6.00pm, Thursday 1.00-9.00pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swansea Women’s Centre</td>
<td>Mon/Wed/Fri: 10am - 4pm appointments, Tue/Thur: 10am - 1pm drop-in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in Jazz</td>
<td>By appointment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s History Project (Ireland)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Library</td>
<td>Tuesday to Friday, 9.30am to 5.00pm, Thursday until 8.00pm, Saturday 10.00am to 4.00pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Resource Centre</td>
<td>By appointment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Opening hours of the women’s libraries

In summary, in order for a new women’s library or archive to attract researchers, customers, funding and a national profile, the institution needs to adhere to professional library or archive standards such as those promoted by Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) and the National Archives Standard for Record Repositories developed in 2004 by The National Archives.

6.4.4 Management & strategy
If a new physical women’s library or archive were to be created, its management and structure would be important considerations. As we have seen from the analysis of such institutions outside Wales, there are various options.

Some women’s libraries or archives are independent institutions, not attached to other organisations such as a university. However, these independent libraries and archives tend to be those most likely to struggle with funding, and sometimes pay less attention to the professional issues outlined above. The advantages of being independent are that there is direct influence over the direction of the institution, freedom to develop certain services, choice over projects and tasks etc. Consequently, the institutions that have a stronger feminist agenda tend to be
independent. In comparison, being attached to a university or some other educational or cultural body can bring prestige, raise the library/archive’s profile, and also provide a degree of backup should the library or archive run into difficulties but the governing body may also intervene in matters. In essence, the decision is whether to integrate or to maintain a separatist agenda, which is a key debate at the heart of feminism. One staff member at an existing women’s library warned that being independent would be a very difficult position.

In Wales there are several higher education institutions, which, along with the National Library of Wales, represent institutions that could be the ‘parent’ body for a women’s library or archive in Wales. For example, University of Wales Swansea has recently developed an MA in Gender and Culture (2004 – offered on both a part-time and full-time basis) and the University of Wales Bangor has offered an MA in Women’s Studies (via the Department for Lifelong Learning, offered on a part-time basis) since 1994. Thus they may be receptive towards providing funding and space for a women’s library and archive. However, universities have limited budgets and may wish to impose conditions or constraints on any newly established women’s library or archive. For example, in the 1970s the Fawcett Library was seeking to join a university and some offers to house it would have led to the fragmentation of the collections, discarding of some material, or the relocation out of London, none of which were attractive options to the managers of the Fawcett Library at that time. At the time of writing, the Feminist Archive (South) is in consultation with a university in the local area as the Archive’s management team feel that it is no longer possible to support the Archive and that a university would offer the optimum long-term security for the material. It is also pertinent to note that the future of the now-closed Feminist Library in London is uncertain, and whether any other women’s libraries or universities offer to take the collection remains to be seen.

Whilst the National Library of Wales has many collections that do relate to women, it does not draw attention to these as a separate collection. It houses some of the material donated via the AMC/WAW scheme such as the papers of the writer Menna Gallie. In terms of providing a structure for a national women’s library or archive
the National Library of Wales could be considered to be ideally placed, although it may not have the necessary funding to create such an institution unless it received more money from the National Assembly for Wales. It would also be unlikely to create a physically separate collection of material, thus the notion of the library or archive being a women’s space and all the material being held in a few rooms would be unlikely. The Women’s Library is the only women’s library that is currently attached to a university, although it has its own building and staff. This is due to its historical development and it is interesting to note that its successful HLF grant was for a new purpose-built building, rather than for it (as the Fawcett Library) to be integrated into the existing university library. The latter would probably not have been possible in terms of space, and would also not have brought as much prestige and media attention to the new Women’s Library.

The profile of any new women’s library or archive is thus an important concern. As was explored in Chapters 4 and 5, most of the women’s libraries tend to be fairly low-key, perhaps with a local profile, with little national or wider awareness of their significance. This is true in terms of their profile within library and women’s studies circles, partly reflected in the lack of literature about, and research on, these institutions. Since the Women’s Library re-opened in a new building after winning the HLF award, their profile has been raised considerably, and they have featured in many newspaper articles, or hosted programmes for Radio 4 and their exhibitions and conferences are listed in the culture sections of national newspapers (e.g. the Guardian and the Independent). However, this increased awareness does not appear to have trickled-down to the other women’s libraries (Ilett, 2003, p. 282) (and 4.10.1 in Chapter 4).

The importance of having a national profile is that it may attract more users to the institution, will help raise its prestige and thus its ability to attract grant funding, and it may also increase awareness of the issues of concern to women’s libraries and archives. A positive feedback mechanism may then lead to the library receiving more archive donations and there could be more research on the documents leading to more published research on women’s history and experiences. However, this
positive feedback mechanism is hard to create, particularly if there are few resources for marketing or profile raising.

6.4.5 Engagement with librarianship and feminism

A successful physical women’s library needs to engage with the library and archive professions, and with women’s issues. This is partly due to the support that may be provided by being part of a network e.g. advice on cataloguing, as well as being able to draw on the wider network in order to raise the profile and increase usage of the institution. An institution that remains outside of formal networks or professions may be isolated in its work and may not be as successful as one that engages with relevant networks.

Engagement with librarianship does not appear always to be central to some of the women’s libraries and archives. This was seen in their varying levels of networking and contact with library networks, varying degrees of following standard library practices and the lack of emphasis on recruiting qualified staff. In Wales, it was noted that AMC/WAW had felt that there was an initial negative reaction towards them; as more local record offices join their scheme, the archive and history network should become more convinced of their professionalism and commitment to archives and history. The Women in Jazz archive has links with other jazz archives in Britain, but as a specialist resource, it is perhaps excluded from other formal networks. It maintains links with the jazz and archive professions by appointing established professionals to its board of trustees, thus ensuring that its processes and development are in line with these sectors as a whole. This position is harder to maintain for Swansea Women’s Centre. As a women’s resource centre there are no immediately obvious professional networks for it to link to. Its library is currently small in scale, and although the centre provides some training, it is not an educational institution. Its networks therefore come from having a greater degree of engagement with feminism and women’s issues.

Furthermore, issues such as whether men would be allowed into a women’s library/archive, would need to be clarified. A women’s library arising out of the
Swansea/Glasgow model would probably restrict men’s access to the building, whereas if a library developed around the other two archive organisations, there may well be equal access for men and women as these organisations have slightly less engagement with separatist feminist beliefs and place more attention on increasing the awareness of, and access to, women’s archives.

6.4.6 Cultural and geographic issues
If a physical building for a women’s library or archive was established in Wales, there are a range of cultural and geographic issues to consider. With a physical library the location is of utmost importance. It needs to be accessible to a large number of people, either by being in a densely populated area, or, by being close to good transport links (including public transport). During the 1970s, when the Fawcett Library was seeking a new supporter, the members rejected an offer from the University of East Anglia because they wished the library to remain in London (Pankhurst, 1987, p. 230).

In Wales, whilst the capital city Cardiff, could claim the right to house the collection, recent developments in local government show that there is a desire for institutions to be more equally distributed across Wales to avoid an over-concentration of resources, employment and people in a few key urban areas. This can also be seen in the library sector whereby the National Library for Wales was established (in 1911) in Aberystwyth rather than in Cardiff. In fact, Cardiff has only been the capital of Wales since 1955 and other towns in Wales claim that they once were the capital (e.g. Machynlleth in mid Wales). Although the majority of the population of Wales live in south Wales - the counties of Bridgend, Cardiff, Neath Port Talbot, Swansea and the Vale of Glamorgan have 31.5% of the population of Wales (Welsh Office, n. d., n. p.) - there was a feeling among the women interviewed that a new library would need to be sensitive to the north-south divide in Wales and as a consequence, would perhaps not be located in South Wales.

3 Under the NAW’s Location Strategy 2002-2007 approximately 300 jobs will be moved out of Cardiff to Aberystwyth and Llandudno Junction
If you do something in the South, it's very difficult for people from the North to come down, and vice versa. ... There's this sort of barrier across the middle of Wales, and it's difficult to cross.

But on the other hand of course, you need to be peripatetic in Wales, and we might need to have, [one office] ... based in North Wales and Aberystwyth, and one based in the South. And, you know, in that case, the organisation becomes a bit more difficult. This is always the case with Welsh organisations. You have to get round that, geography.

If there were a lot of us together, the Women's Archive, and us, and, you know, perhaps some university women's resources if we got together, and plonked ourselves in the middle of Wales somewhere, so everybody's got easier access to us. Because if it was in Swansea or Cardiff we'd all be bitching because it's in Cardiff and not here, or it's in Swansea and not in Cardiff which is the capital. So it should be up in Aberystwyth.

Furthermore, transport links within Wales are not conducive to extensive travelling (especially by public transport), and wherever a physical library for women in Wales was located, it would lead to differing levels of access. Outside of Wales, the location of physical libraries or archives appears to be rather accidental, dependent upon historical circumstance. Thus, Glasgow Women’s Library grew out of local arts initiatives, and it remains in Glasgow despite developing a more national Scottish outlook.

Connected to the issue of location within Wales is the position and status of the Welsh language. In certain areas of Wales the Welsh language is used in daily business and social life e.g. Aberystwyth, Bangor, Machynlleth, whereas in other towns and areas it is less used and has less significance e.g. the Welsh valleys, Monmouthshire. Thus, if a physical library were to be established, and the Welsh language was given equal weighting i.e. for signage, language of work, etc, then it may be more likely that this could be achieved, or would be seen as appropriate, in an area where the Welsh language was in daily use. As a national (i.e. for all-Wales) organisation, a women’s library would perhaps wish to follow the precedent set by other national institutions e.g. the National Library of Wales, the National Assembly for Wales, whereby the Welsh language is given equal weighting and all
correspondence, paperwork etc is available in both languages, irrespective of location.

However, the language issue influences more than just the location and daily running of the library. It also has a bearing on what type of material is collected, the prominence of Welsh language material in the archives, provision of services in both languages etc. If the organisation was to be styled more as a public library (as opposed to a research-based archive), would contemporary material be provided in both languages? This raises the question of how much information about or by women is actually available in Welsh. Whilst Honno Welsh Women’s Press publishes in both languages, its commitment to the Welsh language in terms of publishing output has decreased since 1994 when it won Arts Council of Wales funding and has to publish a certain number of English-language titles each year. Over time, it has increasingly become regarded as an English-medium publisher, and few Welsh manuscripts are received (Tyler, 1999, p. 11). The other main publisher of books on women in Wales is the University of Wales Press; many of their academic books are only available in English e.g. *Our Mothers’ Land: Chapters in Welsh Women's History 1830-1939* edited by Angela V. John, *Out of the Shadows: A History of Women in Twentieth-century Wales* by Deirdre Beddoe, and *Women and Work: Twenty-five Years of Gender Equality in Wales* by Teresa Rees. Thus, whilst there could be a commitment to the Welsh language in appointing Welsh-speaking staff, creating marketing material in both languages etc, it may not be possible to create a contemporary library that houses an equal amount of material in both English and Welsh.

### 6.4.7 Summary of Option 1

In view of the range of issues that need to be considered before a women’s library for Wales could be created (e.g. geography, resources, collections, funding, management, model type and structures, language and professional considerations) it is perhaps practical to concur with a key stake-holder in this field (AMC/WAW) which does not see the development of a physical women’s library as a practical or possible aim. Whilst referred to as a ‘dream’ or an ideal, the practicalities are
perhaps too great a barrier. Whilst Glasgow Women’s Library has been successful in its 15 years of existence, this has taken much unpaid and under-paid work, commitment and dedication. The closure of the Feminist Library in London also serves as a potential reminder as to what can happen with a change in financial fortunes.

6.5 Option 2 – strengthen existing key players rather than creating a physical library or archive

In contrast to creating a new women’s library or archive centre in a physical building somewhere in Wales, another viable option would be to enhance the positions and potential of existing relevant organisations.

6.5.1 Archif Menywod Cymru/Women’s Archive of Wales (AMC/WAW)

For AMC/WAW, their current aims are not directed towards campaigning for a building, although they would welcome funding for office space, as highlighted in quote three in Section 6.4 above. The committee members of AMC/WAW see office space (and funding for a member of staff) as enabling them to more adequately meet their aims of raising awareness of women’s history and increasing the quantity and range of material donated under their scheme. A paid member of staff could undertake a range of marketing activities, increase membership figures, raise the profile of the scheme among local record offices as well as contact individuals or organisations that may have relevant material for deposit or donation.

This latter point is of key concern as the committee members of AMC/WAW would very much like to conduct a mapping exercise of resources in Wales.

Once we'd decided that we were going to be depositing material in existing archives, you know, really the focus shifted then to what else we would be doing. And a project very like the Irish project was really something we had in mind, wasn't it?

We wanted in a way, to sort of, catalogue what resources first of all existed in Wales and beyond Wales. In other words, we wanted to do what Maria Luddy and the Irish women had done. But we were, elbowed out of that, we weren't welcomed with open arms by the archive community in general, were we?
The second quote alludes to the development of Archives Network Wales (ANW), which has mapped archive collections across Wales and created a web-based resource that facilitates searching the collections held by record offices, universities, museums and libraries in Wales (http://www.archivesnetworkwales.info). As a consequence of the ANW project AMC/WAW committee members felt that their proposals had been rejected, perhaps as they were perceived to be less well established or less professional than ANW, and they have not received funding to conduct a mapping project of Wales. ANW is developing national standards for descriptions to facilitate online cross-searching of databases. The AMC/WAW committee is developing its own database of donated material to ensure that their database is compatible with ANW so that the two can be fully integrated. This would ensure that AMC/WAW material could be found using a search of the ANW database.

Because the ANW project did not have a specific objective to look for material that relates to women in Wales, it is not as extensive as the Women’s History Project Ireland. It has also not had sufficient funding to employ archivists to visit all repositories and known private collections in Wales to specifically collate data on archives and resource materials. For these reasons AMC/WAW would still like to conduct a mapping exercise contacting a wider range of repositories and to list material that may not have been formally documented. Creating this ‘virtual’ archive of women’s resources would not endanger the material itself, and could aid research into women’s history in Wales. However, to undertake work on the scale of the project in Ireland would still require substantial funding, most likely from the government.

In addition, the Irish project is also hosted by the Irish Manuscripts Commission, thus providing long-term stability and a link with the profession. AMC/WAW would therefore need to consider who might be a likely professional organisation that could contribute towards the maintaining the project. Despite these issues, this option is perhaps more feasible than the option of creating a physical building for an archive.
A recent development in Wales however, may have again superseded the ambitions of AMC/WAW. CatalogCymru: Archives and Records Council Wales has been awarded a grant by CyMAL: Museums Archives and Libraries Wales to undertake an audit of un-catalogued archival collections in Wales and to carry out research into cataloguing, indexing and appraisal practices in Wales. The project commenced on 1 January 2006. Perhaps, the best way forward for AMC/WAW is to ensure that some of their concerns e.g. noting where material pertains to women, are incorporated by CatalogCymru.

As well as the two cataloguing projects in Wales, there are other virtual collections which similar objectives e.g. Genesis and Collections Wales. Genesis was discussed in Chapter 4 and focuses on women’s archives and material in the United Kingdom. Collections Wales was the result of a collaborative project between Wales Higher Education Libraries Forum (WHELF) and Research Support Libraries Programme (RSLP) from 2000-2002. Initially an independent project, it has now been incorporated into Wales on the Web. Wales on the Web is a collection of validated websites, and is defined as ‘the gateway to internet resources relating to Wales’ (Wales on the Web, 2005, n. d.). It is funded by the Welsh Assembly Government and based at the National Library of Wales. Entering the search term ‘women’ brings up 81 results (as of August 9th 2005) –varying from details of various women’s organisations in Wales to a female basketball team in the Rhondda. There is a link to AMC/WAW. As a result of the overlap of these various online databases, AMC/WAW may find it difficult to justify the need for a virtual archive of women’s material in Wales and an extensive mapping project if similar projects already exist, although none of the existing projects specifically focus on women and women’s archives.

As a consequence of realising that a physical building for an archive was not practical or possible, AMC/WAW have turned their attention to other projects that match their core aims of raising the profile of women’s history in Wales, such as seeking to rescue relevant material.

*Because we felt, because we were informed that the Welsh archives*
operating together, under this Archive Network Wales, wanted to look at a big cataloguing project really, what is where, we swapped the emphasis for our project ... we then concentrated on doing a rescue project, didn't we? Which was a combination of, well, it was primarily 'what is out there?' and it's get back to our root idea of, stopping stuff, disappearing in the future. And there is an urgent need. To rescue it.

... our new, our system of what we rescue being put in repositories. So that really was a very good solution. And a very innovative one really.

In order to accomplish their aims of rescuing relevant material, AMC/WAW have conducted two archive Roadshows (see Section 4.3) with the intention of seeking more funding to enable them to expand this programme. The Roadshows combine organisational profile raising with raising awareness of women’s archives and could lead to further personal and organisational archive donations under the guise of their scheme.

In relation to the donation of women’s archives, Mason found that

...most people have never given a thought to their papers. Many do not even know what an archives [sic] is, and if they do, they do not realise they have anything that might be of value for historical research. ... This is especially true of women who cannot imagine they have ever done anything that merits remembering outside their home. (Mason, 2002, p. 26)

Furthermore, “[i]t takes time to identify leads, establish contacts, visit with potential donors, and persuade them of the value of donating their papers” (Mason, 2002, p. 27).

Raising the awareness of the value of women’s documents therefore could be feasible, but again, sufficient funding would be needed to perhaps employ one or more members of staff, the provision of office space, and funds to conduct marketing and to network with women’s groups in Wales. A booklet (guide) explaining the importance of women's documents, and providing guidelines for women’s organisations as to how to look after their own records, along the lines of the New Zealand booklet, is one possible development option (see Berzins, 1995).
In terms of the issues that were considered under Option 1 (e.g. funding, professional issues), the option of strengthening AMC/WAW’s core work areas could be advantageous. With regard to funding, although developing their projects would require funding, this would be on a much smaller scale than if a physical women’s library or archive was established. Furthermore, depositing material in established repositories e.g. local record offices, ensures the continuation of professional care for the material as well as regular access for the public. Other professional issues such as employing qualified staff is also taken care of under this scheme and there would be greater opportunity for engaging with the archive profession. The AMC/WAW system of regional deposits of material also overcomes geographical issues as no single area is favoured because all counties have local record offices. Material of national significance is deposited in the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth, and is in mid Wales. The issue of the Welsh language would perhaps still need to be addressed, possibly by ensuring that marketing material and campaigns are developed in both languages. It should be noted that AMC/WAW do currently have a bilingual policy and all their documentation is provided in both English and Welsh.

The one area that may bring less enthusiasm for this option is in the area of engagement with feminism. This option does not seek to create a women’s space or a creation of resources specifically for women, which is a key feature of the women’s libraries in the British Isles. However, the objectives of AMC/WAW are centred upon raising awareness of the value of women’s history and rescuing documents about women’s lives so that the history of women in Wales is not lost. Thus this commitment to feminism would not be completely abandoned by strengthening the AMC/WAW organisation.

One final point to consider is an example from one of the other women’s libraries. In 1976 the Fawcett Society decided at the AGM to take up the London School of Economics’ (LSE) proposal to house the Fawcett Library. However, members of the Fawcett Library were angry about the LSE proposal as it would disperse the collection and dispose of duplicate material. The members therefore pressed for a
special general meeting and voted to go to the City of London Polytechnic, whose
bid had originally been too late to be considered (Stott, 1987, pp. 221-222). Thus the
notion of a dispersed collection does not appeal to some people. Yet a dispersed
approach is the one taken by AMC/WAW. In Wales, as there has never been a single
united collection, the issue of material being distributed across Wales may not pose
ideological or theoretical dilemmas.

6.5.2 Women in Jazz
The strengthening of Women in Jazz is currently in process. A few months after the
interview with the founder of the archive, the organisation won a two year grant
from the Heritage Lottery Fund for the post of Heritage Development Officer to run
the Wales, Slavery and its Music project. The founder, Jen Wilson, was appointed as
the new officer. In terms of their future, she stated that:

Well, my grand vision would obviously be a building, somewhere
on the maritime quarter [in Swansea] ... even if it's in somebody
else's building, because we, the thing is with this, although we're
eternally grateful to the city for looking after us, we can't have
public access up here, with the stairs. And, you know, everything is
on top of us. If there was somebody sitting here researching we
can't do any work, you know what I mean. It just needs staffing and
this is what the trustees are now taking on board.

Whilst the new funding is not for moving the archive into a new building, it does
facilitate more research being conducted on the collections through the
establishment of a paid position. With more research being published about the
history of the jazz movement in Wales, and the history of women in jazz, the profile
of the archive should be increased. This may lead to a need for improved public
access, and thus the development of new space for the archive.

An issue that needs attention here is whether men would be allowed access to the
Women in Jazz archive, if it was housed in a new building that was for other
women’s organisations, or was part of the Women’s Archive of Wales. Jen Wilson
believes the jazz archive needs to be in a mixed-sex building because one of the key
aims of the jazz archive is to convince men that there were, and are, women
involved in jazz. She argues that this “re-education of men” could not take place if
men were not allowed in to use the building or the archive. “So I, I really do
advocate that men know about it and can come and use it.” This would suggest that should a women’s library or archive be created in one building, there may be differing views over access for men. For example, some collections donated under the AMC/WAW initiative have restrictions over access.

In addition, as was explored in section 6.4 above in relation to a physical women’s archive building, there would be a number of issues such as professional care of the material, regular access hours for the public, appointment of professionally qualified staff, computer catalogues etc that would all need to be fully considered before deciding to create a more publicly-accessible Women in Jazz archive. These sorts of issues are currently relevant as the archive already exists in a physical location, is not staffed by qualified archivists, there is no computer catalogue of the material, and conditions for different types of materials e.g. performance gowns, records, sheet music, are far from ideal. Thus, attention to issues such as professional standards and collection management suggests that Women in Jazz would benefit from development and strengthening of its core current activities and position in order to place it on a more professional level. As it is the only jazz archive in Britain that collects material in all media, it could strengthen its links with other existing jazz archives and raise its profile within Britain.

6.5.3 Swansea Multicultural Women’s Resource and Training Centre
Swansea Women’s Centre (SWC\textsuperscript{4}) also has potential to expand and strengthen its core services. It has a number of projects such as providing general advice, support and information for women on a range of issues, including domestic violence, education, health, legal advice and sexual health. It also arranges legal advice and offers training courses and volunteer opportunities. Most of these services could be expanded, given more funding. Its library and information resource collection could also be considerably strengthened e.g. in terms of quantity, quality and scope. The building housing the Centre has recently been redeveloped to provide wheelchair access and the library has moved to a ground floor position. It is however, only in

\textsuperscript{4} Swansea Women’s Centre is the name used on websites, by other agencies and by staff at SWC, despite the longer official name.
one room and is therefore still quite a small collection. At the time of interviewing, there was no budget for books or other information resources. This aspect could also be strengthened.

As the Swansea Women’s Centre is very similar in outlook and service provision to Glasgow Women’s Library, it is relevant to look at the latter to consider what options might be possible for SWC. Glasgow Women’s Library has created a programme of lifelong learning courses that attract a considerable number of people to the library. In fact, the staff felt that most women using the library were coming for these courses. This is therefore one option for Swansea, if it could seek funding to provide trainers and a varied programme of courses for women. Like Glasgow Women’s Library, SWC is in an area where there is social deprivation, exclusion and low expectations or work opportunities. For example, statistics from National Assembly for Wales show that on the overall Index of Multiple Deprivation, the Swansea area (and much of south Wales as a whole) is placed within the ‘most deprived’ category (National Assembly for Wales, n. d.-c, n. p.). It may be possible to draw on this position by creating a programme of courses and services that seek to empower women, whether by improving their skills, employment opportunities, or helping with personal issues. SWC also works with ethnic minority women and there may be potential to undertake more joint ventures with Mewn Cymru (Minority Ethnic Women's Network Wales) which is an umbrella body representing ethnic minority women across Wales. In fact, Mewn Cymru had been looking to establish a women’s building in Swansea, although they have offices in Cardiff (HQ), Newport, Swansea and North Wales (no location on their website for the North Wales office (MEWN Cymru, n. d., n. p.). One interviewee noted that this had yet not developed into firm plans.

...they’ve been talking for a long time about getting a women's building in Swansea for example, and I think at one stage that was floated and would we want a space in there.

Having a women’s building that housed a variety of women’s organisations and SWC could be beneficial in terms of improving links and networks, and providing a range of different services and opportunities. As was noted in section 6.4, the notion of a women’s space with multiple uses and users is not new, and there have been
previous examples e.g. the Women’s Service House in London in the 1920s-1940s, and examples in London in the 1970s and 1980s. This sort of development is evidence of close engagement with feminist issues and could be possible in an urban area like Swansea where there are several women’s groups.

Other options for the strengthening of Swansea Women’s Centre includes developing the centre to become national rather than focused on one city. This would call for significant funding and could be difficult to achieve unless the Centre had clear objectives as to how it would be able to serve women across Wales, given the relatively poor north-south transport links:

... the trunk road network in mid and north Wales in recent years, [is] ... for the most part, inadequate... (National Assembly for Wales, 2001, n. p.)

A number of issues would need to be addressed such as more paid staff, range of services offered, location of services (would everything be provided in Swansea?), language provision (would material and services be provided in Welsh and English?) and so on. It may also be important to consider whether a national women’s centre would remain in south Wales or relocate to mid or north Wales?

The same cultural and geographical issues apply here as were discussed in Section 6.4.6 above in relation to a women’s library in Wales. Given these potential problems, perhaps a more achievable and practical aim would be to strengthen the Centre’s influence and position within a wider regional area i.e. expand its coverage beyond Swansea and the immediate environs to include Cardiff and a larger area of South Wales. This would increase the number of potential users of the Centre and could raise its profile in areas that may be culturally, socially and economically similar to Swansea and thus call for similar services. As was discussed in Section 1.11.3, Cardiff and other towns in Wales used to have women’s centres in the 1970s and 1980s, but all bar Swansea have now closed. This may be partly due to the perceived decline in demand for women’s spaces. However, the success and survival of other women’s centres e.g. Aberdeen, Cambridge, Hull, Nottingham, Salford (see http://www.shebytes.com) suggests that women do still use women-only spaces for a variety of purposes. Enhancing SWC’s provision of training programmes and other
outreach services may well therefore have potential for meeting these women’s needs.

6.5.4 Other women’s groups and networks
In addition to strengthening the organisations that are currently most involved with the field of women’s information and archives there could be the possibility of enhancing other related women’s organisations, as well as improving networking and links between relevant groups. In the international literature, networking has been found to be an essential tool for women’s development.

*Networking among women’s groups has ... been one of the most important ways for sharing ideas, experiences and strategies within the women’s movement. Women began to link with other like-minded women within their own regions and finding common grounds. (George, 2003, p. 2)*

This is particularly important when we consider the findings from the research in England and Scotland which highlighted the potential isolation of women’s libraries and archives, and their relatively low profile, even among women’s circles or library circles.

For example, the Women’s Workshop - Cardiff Training Centre was founded in the 1980s and currently provides computer training courses for women. Collaboration between this organisation and Swansea Women’s Centre could enhance the potential services offered by SWC, and increase the potential users of the Cardiff centre. Women’s groups that have their own personal information and resource collection could be encouraged to collaborate, and donate archives under the AMC/WAW scheme e.g. BAWSO - Black Association of Women Step Out, and Welsh Women’s Aid branches. There are also several women’s organisations within the economic, political and business sectors e.g. Chwarae Teg (Fair Play), Wales Women's National Coalition (WWNC) and Wales Assembly of Women that could be brought together in networks. Improved links or networks between these like-minded groups could enable more outreach services to be provided, perhaps to reach women outside

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5 References in Hansard for 4th April 2005 state that the Women’s Workshop has suffered funding cuts this year (Parliamentary debates – Hansard, 2005, column 1169)
of the urban centres. This idea is related to the notion of community information networks (Pantry, 1999) and communities of practice whereby likeminded individuals and small groups work together, formally and informally, for their mutual benefit.

Whilst in conversation with the women of the information/archive organisations in Wales, it became evident that there was potential for improved links between women’s organisations in Wales, and that some sort of online directory or website that facilitated improved communication flows and highlighted who else is doing what in Wales would be beneficial.

Although AMC/WAW do not currently have the resources to become an umbrella body as identified in this quote, there could be potential for the development of a resource that provided links to, and information about, other women’s organisations and groups in Wales, and indeed across Britain. This could range from quite traditional women’s groups such as the Women’s Institute and the Welsh-language equivalent (Merched y Wawr), to the lesbian/bisexual newsletter *WomenZone*, produced by a team based at, but independent of, Swansea Women’s Centre. The research and resources needed to construct a directory would be considerable at the outset, but once the data had been collated, it could be relatively easy to maintain such a database. A women’s directory for Wales was printed in 1984 (see Chapter 2), but it does not appear to have been updated. If women’s organisations in Wales had access to a database or directory of other women’s groups, it could help facilitate networking, collaborative projects, reduce any potential isolation, and raise the profile of all those involved. This last point is particularly relevant to the women’s libraries and archives who, in England and Scotland, are often not extensively well known. Various directories of women’s organisation or groups have been published in Britain recently (e.g. the *Everywomen Directory 1992-1993 Women mean business* and *Women’s Organisations in the United Kingdom 2003: a directory* published by the Women’s National Commission (which is an Advisory Committee to Her Majesty’s Government) but none specifically focused on Wales. The potential for a directory for Wales, aimed at individual women and
organisations is therefore considerable. It is also relevant to note that Glasgow Women’s Library in partnership with Engender and the Scottish Executive took responsibility in 2001 to overhaul and manage a new comprehensive database of over 800 women’s organisations throughout Scotland (Glasgow Women’s Library, 2001, p. 1). This is therefore perhaps a suitable project for a similar organisation in Wales. (A list of women’s organisations in Wales that have an element of information provision is provided in Appendix 6.)

In addition to a paper (and electronic) directory of women’s groups in Wales, there may be scope for the development of a focused digital library of information relevant to women. Bishop et al trialled the development of a virtual community-based women’s health library in America, particularly to overcome issues of the ‘digital divide’ (Bishop et al, 2001). They noted that a “major barrier” for the African American women in their study was the “perceived lack of information that was conveniently available, jargon-free, relevant and culturally appropriate” (Bishop et al, 2001, section ‘Implications for the development of a community-based digital library’). By developing a tailored website to meet their health information needs the case study was able reach a variety of women to help improve their health, and the participatory action research approach meant the resource was developed in consultation with the women who would be using it. If a women’s digital library was to be developed in Wales, it would need to be focused i.e. for particular types of information (health, legal, financial) and be developed in consultation with women and potential users.

This leads into a much larger area, that of the role of women’s magazines and women’s websites as vehicles for information, which would be an avenue for future research (see Marcella, 2002). Websites targeted specifically at women were present in the early days of the Internet. For example, WIRES (Women’s Information Resource & Exchange) was established in 1993 as an online resource providing information on health, the Internet, careers and work, arts, leisure, parenting,
biographies to women in America etc (Balas, 1994). This adoption of ICT by women can be seen more recently in a number of formerly print-only feminist or women’s journals and magazines turning towards producing electronic versions, in conjunction with, or in replacement of, the hard copy (Gibbons, 2003), suggesting that electronic sources are increasingly a preference for women today. It has been argued that ICT (and the facilities of the Internet) can be seen as being a ‘global room of our own’ for women (Scott, quoting Arizpe in Scott, 2001, p. 413) but whilst ICT may change the social landscape it also contributes to social inequalities (Scott, 2001, p. 413). Electronically available information sources may therefore not necessary overcome the barriers of access to information faced by different groups of women, and do not necessarily meet either the community/social or academic/research information needs of women.

6.5.5 Summary for Option 2: strengthening existing organisations
The options for strengthening the three current organisations involved in women’s information are all dependent upon money. However, the investment is likely to be less in terms of overall cost compared with the expense of establishing a wholly new women’s library or archive in a physical building. As the infrastructures are already in place, the organisations would be able to capitalise on their known profile rather than having to develop from scratch. There is also potential to improve the networking between various women’s groups in Wales and to collaborate on joint projects. However, development of any of the women’s organisations specified would need money, and although cases could be made e.g. for social inclusion, heritage reasons, it is not guaranteed that funding would be provided by bodies such as the National Assembly for Wales, the Arts Council of Wales, the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Welsh Development Agency and so on. Furthermore, as was noted in the findings from England and Scotland, whilst one-off funding is useful, relying on grants for service provision and development can leave organisations vulnerable to economic, social or political changes if their projects are no longer deemed so relevant or important. Thus, as with Option 1, money is central for any enhancement to the existing organisations to occur.

6.6 Option 3 – enhance existing library and archive organisations

Whilst the previous two options are based on developing existing women’s archives and information centres, a third option is to focus on current mainstream providers of information and archives and to enhance these in terms of services for women. This option acknowledges that women’s information and archives are important, but maximises use of current providers e.g. public libraries, the National Library of Wales and local record offices, rather than developing separatist organisations. This may be the most efficient in terms of finances, although it does not address the issue of separate women’s spaces.

6.6.1 Public libraries

Findings from the literature suggest that public libraries, whilst excellent resources for a range of information, have not always been seen by women as containing specific information for them (see Chapter 2 Section 2.4.6). Evidence from a feminist librarian’s mailing list (feministlibrarians@yahoogroups.co.uk, which ceased operation in August 2004) suggests that public libraries do not necessarily contain material that would be sought by some women and thus there may be potential to develop this area.

In order to improve provision for women, surveys would need to be conducted with female users (and non-users) of public libraries to discover what their information needs are, whether these needs are met by public libraries, and if not, what resources the women use to find information. The results from such a survey would hopefully indicate whether women’s information needs were being met, and if not, what services could be developed in order to meet the women’s needs. However, this option assumes that the role of a women’s library is to merely provide information and ignores other reasons why a woman might visit a women’s library. Users of such libraries may deliberately seek out a women’s space, or the extra facilities on offer. Despite the lack of provision for a women’s space, this option has the advantage of building on a well-developed and extensive public library service in Wales with national geographical coverage (although some rural areas may only be
served by a mobile library service), and professionally maintained services and collections.

Referral and other ‘community’ services are also increasingly offered by public libraries in the UK, and with some expansion, could be tailored to deliver services that some of the women’s centres offer such as IT training, advice sessions and referral services. King notes that although public libraries in the UK were traditionally seen as “educational and cultural institutions” they began to take on more information functions after World War II, especially in relation to daily information needs, as Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB) were “often developed or housed in public libraries in Great Britain during and after World War II” (King, 1995, p. 181). As some of the women’s libraries provide services that are similar to Citizens Advice Bureaux, this is a possible option for either the public libraries or CABs to develop.

It is important to bear in mind however, that the “public library is not, as yet, at the top of the pecking order when the typical person is looking for information” (Vavrek, 1995, p. 25). The services of public libraries as a whole may therefore need to be marketed so that it does become the key source for all types of information and people.

6.6.2 The National Library of Wales
Whereas the above option focuses on the library-element of women’s information needs, developing services for women in the National Library of Wales (NLW) is likely to focus on women’s archives and thus women’s research needs. As has been noted, the NLW is already a member of the AMC/WAW scheme and has received material considered to be of national significance e.g. the papers of author Menna Gallie. In order to improve the quantity of women’s archives in the NLW, and the ability to search the catalogues for such material, services could be developed whereby the AMC/WAW name could be used as a search term to bring up the documents donated under their scheme. A more expensive and time-consuming option could be to go through the material in the library, noting where material is
relevant to women, that is, along the lines of the mapping exercise in Ireland. Given the size of the NLW’s archives, this would be an extensive project, but would contribute to the awareness of women’s archives and women in Welsh history. The NLW could perhaps also undertake collaborative projects with AMC/WAW to increase the awareness of, and the range of, women’s documents in the NLW, thus contributing to the aims of AMC/WAW in increasing the amount of material rescued and donated to professional archives. However, all these schemes would require varying levels of funding, commitment and space. As a publicly-funded body, the NLW does not have large sums of excess money that could be spent on new projects, and it is always fundraising to enable it to develop services it has identified as important. It is also short of space, as all national libraries are (see (Consortium of Research Libraries in the British Isles, n. d.), and may be unwilling to house more material if that material might be better placed in local record offices.

6.6.3 Local record and archive offices
Several local record offices in Wales are members of the AMC/WAW scheme and have received documents under this organisation’s name. However, as only a few record offices are currently involved, it would appear that there is potential to raise awareness of the scheme among all record offices in Wales. As local record offices are distributed across Wales there would be universal coverage and access to women’s archives across Wales. The local record offices are also professionally managed with qualified archivists, thus ensuring appropriate conditions for any material that is donated. Local record offices may well be willing to take part in the AMC/WAW scheme and it is therefore perhaps important for AMC/WAW to develop clear guidelines with regard to their acceptance and donation procedures – something they have achieved since being interviewed (see Appendix 8).

6.6.4 Summary of Option 3: developing existing library and archive services
The potential for improving services to women in public libraries, and for facilitating the depositing of women’s archives could be developed, if suitable funding was found in order to make the necessary changes or to implement new schemes. It would also ensure the professional care of archives and resources, and
would be building on well-established organisations that are distributed across Wales. However, these options do not address the element of women’s-spaces as places of their own, or the model of meeting contemporary women’s wider social needs as witnessed at Glasgow Women’s Library. It also does not take into account findings from the literature which suggest that women do not tend to use libraries as sources of information, preferring instead to use informal or formal networks (see Section 2.4.6 in Chapter 2). This is an extremely important point because if women would not use newly developed services in the libraries or local record offices, then it is questionable as to whether such services should be developed. As a consequence, the issue of creating a women’s library is also brought into question. The implications of this, and the various options, are discussed below.

Any development of women’s libraries or archives in Wales also needs to be considered in relation to current library and archive developments in Britain as a whole. Public libraries for example, are increasingly involved with literacy (both adult and child) with various national reading campaigns taking place e.g. the National Reading Campaign, the Summer Reading campaigns, School Reading Champions, and the joint BBC and public libraries RaW campaign (Read more And Write better) which began in Autumn 2005. Many public libraries also take part in the annual World Book Day event (held in March). The People’s Network has installed 32,000 computer terminals in public libraries in the UK, meeting a wide range of community needs, and is credited by some as increasing the usage of public libraries (Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, 2002, pp. 3, 6, 12). But, whilst recent Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) statistics show that public library visitor numbers have increased for the last two years, the number of books being issued continues to fall. In 2003/04, visits to public libraries in the UK increased by nearly 14 million, with over 250,000 extra visits a week, but book borrowing fell by 5% (MLA, 2005, n. p.). Recent private consultancy and Government reports, and subsequent debate in the national broadsheet newspapers, continue to either predict the end of the public library or outline negative visions for the future (BBC, 2000, n. d.; Coates, 2002; MLA, 2005b). In 2003 the Government launched its Framework for the Future, the first
ever national public library strategy, which set out a long-term strategic vision for the public library service in England. The Government’s Third Report of the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee, Session 2004-05: Public Libraries outlines the commitment to libraries, including investing in new buildings, revision of the standards to measure public libraries and the commitment to social and community improvement (TSO, 2005).

In Wales, similarities can be seen in the range of extra schemes developed by public libraries (e.g. outreach library services in local Tesco stores in Newport) and in the creation of CyMAL, which has responsibility for museums, archives and libraries in Wales. Its work includes providing advice and support services on issues such as standards, collection policies, access and ICT. The library sector in Wales is working towards improving access to the whole population by extending opening hours, participating in lifelong learning ventures and encouraging reading programmes among a range of targeted groups (National Assembly for Wales, 2003, n. p.), therefore there may be opportunities to develop targeted services to women.

### 6.7 In conclusion, what is the potential for Wales?

Although some of the literature suggests that women do not use libraries as a source of information (see Chapter 2 section 2.4.6), the continued existence of women’s libraries and archives in the British Isles and across the world would indicate that there are many women who use these institutions and that they serve certain purposes. As has been established, it is possible to discern different models for women’s libraries, archives or centres, and the purpose (or model) for such an institution in Wales is central to the debate. The question is, therefore, not just ‘is there potential for a women’s library/archive/centre?’ but also, ‘what type of institution would it be?’

Section 6.4 above outlined the potential advantages and disadvantages of establishing a women’s library or archive in a single building in Wales. One member of staff at an existing women’s library suggested that to create a new women’s
library or archive from scratch would be very difficult, and, it would be unlikely to have established important collections on which to base the collections.

*to create a library that is based upon historic collections then clearly you can’t do that overnight.* ... *So, unless you had something like that [historic collections] to build upon you wouldn’t be able to create [something] that was like this particular collection. It doesn’t mean to say you couldn’t have a women’s library, but I think it would be a different type of library.*

*I mean if you want to create a library that deals with women’s issues today, and is a focus for, women to go ..., maybe a drop-in centre, it can be all kinds of things.*

These quotes suggests that creating a women’s centre that was modelled on social-contemporary needs of women, such as that seen at Glasgow Women’s Library, might be easier to achieve than a traditional library.

The above quotes also suggest that it would be easier in Wales to enhance existing provision at the women’s resource centre rather than to attempt to create a new library or archive. However, as Swansea Women’s Resource Centre is much smaller in scale, scope and outlook than Glasgow, its development into a national (all-Wales) resource for women would still take considerable resources. Quotes from women at the various women’s libraries also suggest that it is difficult to combine different roles i.e., being an archive and/or library and being a centre with social and community visions (see Section 5.7 in Chapter 5). As Wales has both women’s archive organisations and a women’s resource centre, is has the potential to develop both models, either independently, or separately.

But, the extent to which a physical women’s library in Wales would be used must always be considered. Before any of the options outlined above could be developed into firm plans, surveys would need to be conducted to assess the potential use of these different types of women’s libraries or resource centres. Which model or type, if any, of the women’s libraries would suit the needs of women in Wales best? To some extent, the type, and possibly number, of users attracted to it would be dependent upon the type or model it emulated. If it was developed as an archive and reference resource it would probably attract researchers and students from across
Wales, whereas a social and community centre may have a more localised regional sphere of influence. Would it, like several in England and Scotland, have a very low profile and low user numbers? Would it be more practical to build on existing organisations and structures rather than to create a new building for women’s resources? The quotes below suggest that as it is very hard work to establish a new women’s library or centre, developing existing structures may be more practical.

_I think if you are willing to work really hard for a long long time you do eventually get taken seriously._

_So I think there’s a lot of benefit in pointing out where stuff is, and showing people how it can be interesting and how it can be used, and that’s very good for, I suppose to use a cliché, for women’s empowerment…_

_I think what the Welsh [Women’s] Archive is doing sounds like a very good idea to me, and admirably suited to collections in Wales with collections spread out over the whole [of Wales]…_

_[B]ecause a lot of women’s activities happens on a regional or even quite a local level, then, then it’s not, not a bad thing [to have regional women’s libraries], but I suppose I would also say that the most important starting point is what collections there are, so I wouldn’t try and create something, I might create an electronic map, or, partnership networks…_

These quotes suggest that for Wales, perhaps the most practical and beneficial option could be to develop the AMC/WAW model of distributed and formal deposition of material, whilst simultaneously improving networking amongst women’s groups in Wales, perhaps with a dedicated website of relevant resources, a directory of women’s groups in Wales and their interests, and perhaps a project where relevant resources are mapped (like the Genesis project in the UK and the Women’s History Project Ireland). These developments would be likely to improve the awareness of women’s archives, the importance of women’s history, and the networking between women’s groups in Wales.

But, such developments may not address needs that are met within the social-community centre model. With the recent closure of the Feminist Library in London (which, along with Glasgow Women’s Library provided examples of the
contemporary-needs model), there may be concern over the actual demand for such women-only spaces. Even though Glasgow Women’s Library was established relatively recently (1991) during a period outside of the main era of the feminist movement, it was achieved as a spin-off project from other developments. Thus, it may be hard to artificially create a women’s centre if there is little grassroots support to provide the momentum. Nonetheless, the existence of the Swansea Women’s Centre, and many other women’s organisations across Wales would suggest that there is still demand for, and willingness to support, women’s issues and women-only organisations.

The potential for a women’s library, archive or centre in Wales therefore is dependent on a variety of issues. These primarily include the demand for such services, willingness to develop new services, and the funding to enable such projects to develop. Whilst there are several options for Wales, the potential impracticalities of creating a new women’s library in one building would suggest that this is not an appropriate or feasible option. Developing existing women’s archive structures could be achieved more easily, as could improving existing formal library and archive institutions to better reflect women’s past and present lives. In all situations however, funding, or the lack of it, would be the deciding factor as to what was possible.