

AXIELL



The Library of the Future:
Meeting the public's needs



The Library of the Future: Meeting the public's needs

In 1850, the Public Libraries Act gave rise to the first free public libraries in the UK and in 1964 the Public Libraries & Museums Act made public library services a statutory duty for local authorities. Today, there is a significant network of public library services in the UK, delivered primarily through 4,000+ local branches.

Developments in technology, particularly in the last two decades, have created both challenges and opportunities for public libraries, with the digitisation of books for tablets and e-readers and increasing amounts of information online now co-existing with printed documents.

However, public libraries have been able to tap into this new media trend in other ways, for example, by offering eBooks and eAudio books for borrowing and providing access to internet services in the branch. In 1997, only five per cent of libraries had internet access, but by 2004 this had risen to 67 per cent.

Libraries are probably best known as places to facilitate literacy and learning, yet they also play a valuable role in the community, providing a neutral and safe place to share thoughts through interaction and engage with others who live in the local area.

But just how much have libraries evolved to become a new type of hub for the community and a service that can meet the needs of every individual in today's society?

To find out, we commissioned a survey of more than 2,000 UK adults, exploring current usage of public libraries, why people visit and the services that will entice them to go more often.

This report presents our findings, giving fresh insights into the role of public libraries today and, critically, how public libraries need to evolve to meet the needs of the community.



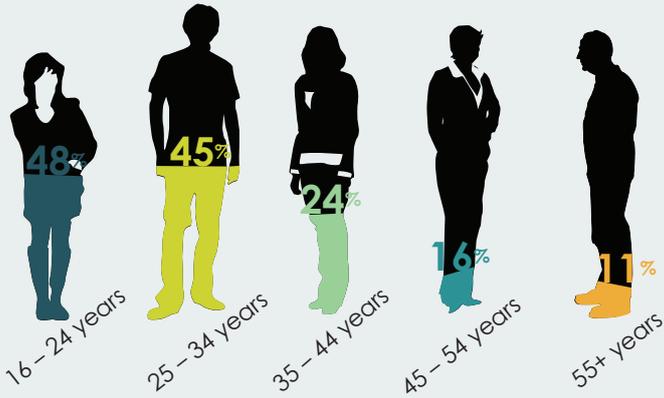
“Libraries store the energy that fuels the imagination. They open up windows to the world and inspire us to explore and achieve, and contribute to improving our quality of life. Libraries change lives for the better.”

— Sidney Sheldon



The Library of the Future

Who visits public libraries?



56%

of those in the UK aged 16 years and over visit their public library (which is just short of 30 million people)

agree that having a hub for their local area is important

78%

89%

agree that libraries are an important part of the community

would visit a public library more if it offered a better range of services

66%

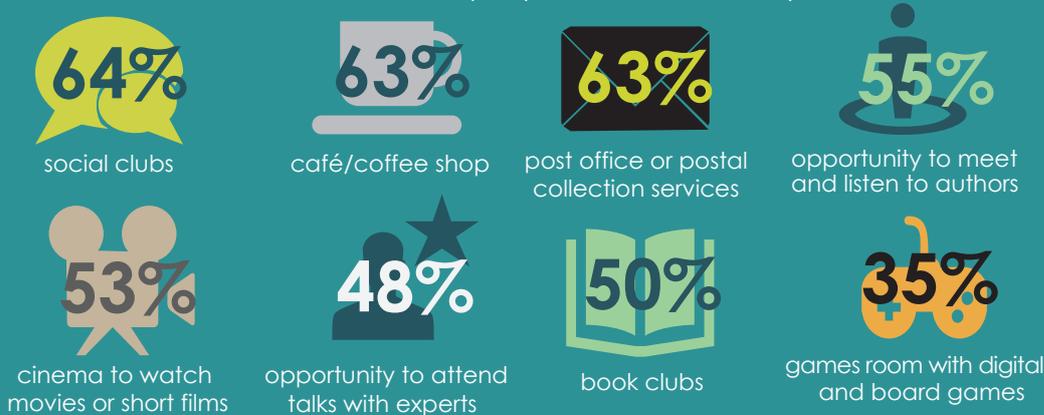
Library trends and digitisation

The research shows a clear appetite for more digitally-focused services that can be provided by a library
68% of those surveyed are interested in seeing at least one new digital element:



The library of the future

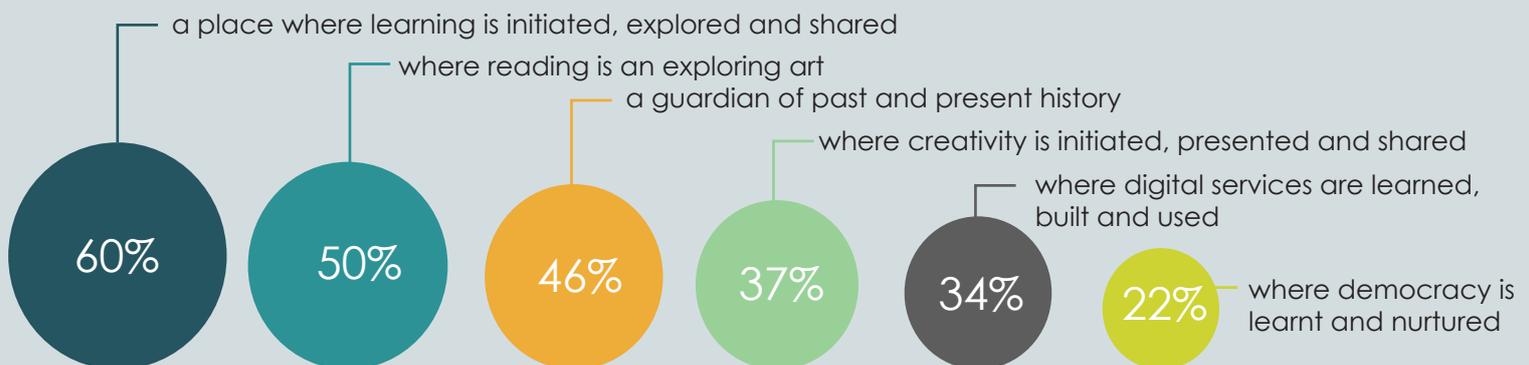
What would entice people to visit their library?



Why do you visit your local library??



A vision for the library and what it needs to become



Who visits public libraries?

With the rise of the internet and the influence that technology has on social behaviour, it's now possible for people to research, learn and interact without leaving their home or workplace. We wanted to find out if these trends are impacting public library usage by looking at who visits their local library and how often.

Our research shows us that more than half (56%) of those in the UK aged 16 years or over visit their public library, which is just short of 30 million. However, visits are not a regular occurrence, with people on average making a trip to their library just 23 times a year, with an almost even split between male and female respondents. Visits are more than twice as frequent for those aged between 16 to 24 year olds, at almost once a week.

The figures support those released in the Independent Library Report for England that states over a third of the population visits their local library. Interestingly, that number rises to almost half in the poorest areas.

CHANGING BEHAVIOURS

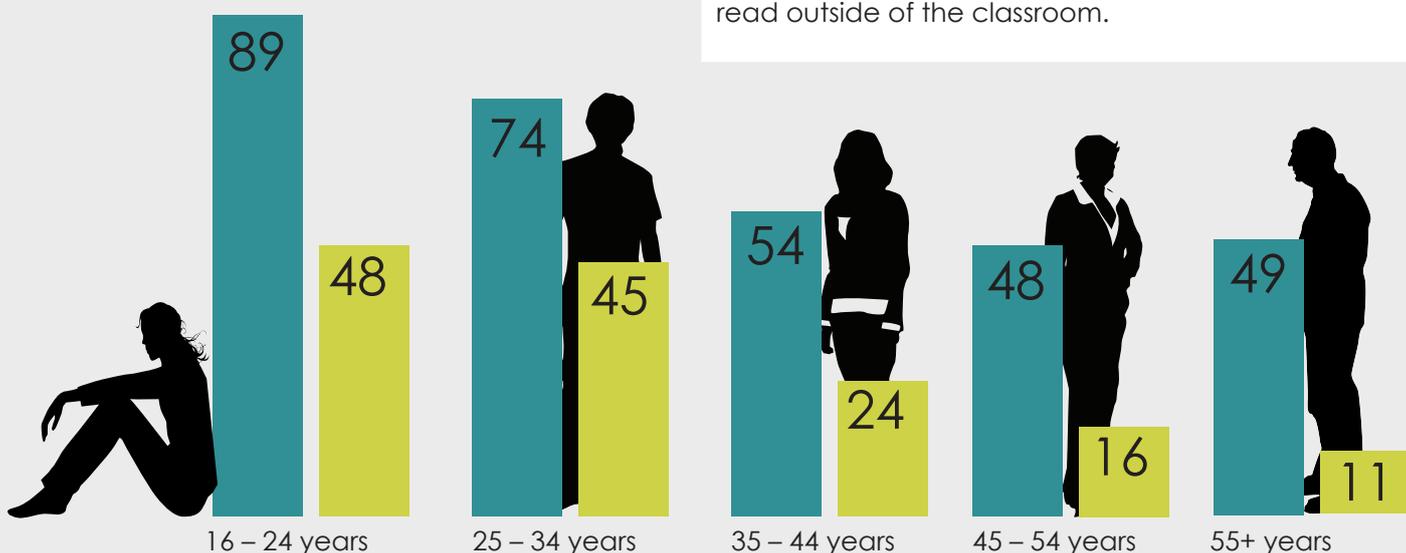
There is a clear indication that frequency of library visits is declining. While more than half of the UK's adult population visits their public library, this means that 44% do not. This is in stark contrast to how these same adults used and visited libraries when they were children, with 91% confirming they visited a public library when they were aged 16 years or under and average visits hitting 57 per year. Half of those questioned said they visited their library at least once a week as children, with 19% going multiple times a week.

A READING AND LEARNING HUB FOR CHILDREN

Across all age groups, respondents frequently visited libraries when they were children and the UK government is keen to encourage young people to use these facilities today. At the time of writing, the Rt Hon Nicky Morgan MP and children's author and comedian David Walliams have launched a literacy campaign to create at least 200 book clubs and to see every eight year old enrolled at their local library.

In line with this initiative, the government will also support The Reading Agency to work with schools and ensure more Year Three pupils are enrolled at their local library, in a move to address findings by the National Literacy Trust that one in eight (12%) rarely or never read outside of the classroom.

Frequency of visits when they were children VS. Frequency of visits today



Why do people visit their local library?

Libraries were established as places for reading and learning, so it was not surprising to see that the majority of people are using their library for this very purpose, with around two-thirds (65%) of people visiting their library to borrow a book to read somewhere else.

More than half (52%) of people also said they prefer borrowing books and educational DVDs and programs from a library rather than buying their own and, of those who visit, 60% enjoy the experience.

However, we also identified a number of other drivers that are influencing behaviours and visits. Discovery and study are key reasons, with 37% saying that they visit to research or work, and around a quarter (27%) go for casual reading within the institution itself.

Wi-Fi and broadband services are also a pull for some, with around one in five respondents visiting their libraries to access the internet. However, it was interesting to see that not everyone goes to their library for isolated studying or research, as 17% accompany friends and/or children on their visits.

Almost 11% of adults visit their libraries on an ad-hoc basis when they are looking for something to do. Only 7% say they go to their public library to attend special or educational events such as talks and art displays, although this low figure could be an indication that there are few events of this kind on offer, rather than a lack of interest from the public.

The traditional role of the library in meeting the needs of literacy and learning still stands. However, our data shows there are other drivers for making visits. Looking at the low visit numbers, is offering a traditional place to read and learn enough or could libraries be doing more to entice the public into the door?



Library trends and digitisation

GOING DIGITAL

The world has undeniably changed dramatically since the first public libraries were established in 1850 and technology is playing an increasingly role in every day lives. Today, we live in a digital world so we wanted to find out the digital elements that people want to see their libraries provide.

Our survey shows a clear appetite for more digitally-focused services that can be provided by a public library, with more than two thirds (67%) of people interested in seeing at least one new digital element, from online community pages to eBook borrowing to ICT training in the public library itself.

ICT training – 37% would like their libraries to provide training courses for all ages, for example how to use computers and tablets, photo and video editing classes, etc.

eBooks – 31% would like to borrow eBooks

Digital learning – 22% would like their libraries to offer educational programs using the web, podcasts or DVDs and CDs

Community page – 22% would like a community page with news on local events like theatre performances, music festivals, quizzes, etc.

Social media – almost 10% would like social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter to interact with other members. More than a quarter (27%) of 16-24 year-olds would be interested in seeing their libraries provide these platforms.

THE LINK BETWEEN DIGITAL AND SOCIAL DIVIDE

A letter from Mr Ed Vaizey MP, penned to CILIP in February 2015, highlighted the importance of libraries, providing 'a vital service to people of all ages, giving them the opportunity to gain knowledge and new skills and opening up new possibilities in work, education and culture'. He also referenced how e-lending is becoming increasingly popular, seeing an increase of 125% in 2014 alone.

Social inclusion and digital are closely related and, according to the Basic Digital Skills study from charity Go ON UK, around 12 million people in the UK do not have the necessary skills to perform basic online tasks. For example, a fifth of adults have never been online and almost 17% don't have basic broadband. Moreover, there are certain areas in the country that are far behind others in terms of access to or usage of digital technology.

Many libraries already offer sessions to help people with digital skills. However, there is an opportunity for libraries to expand their roles as digital hubs to provide everyone in the community with the necessary skills needed in today's world of technology.

CONNECTING OLDER PEOPLE

Our research shows that 36% of those over 55 years are keen to see their public library offer ICT training and an article in CILIP noted that over 80% of those who aren't online are in this age range. In today's world of technology, where organisations of all kinds are increasingly moving services online, it is vital to know how to use the internet, especially for older people. It not only makes life more convenient, it gives a sense of independence and helps them connect with friends, family and the community.

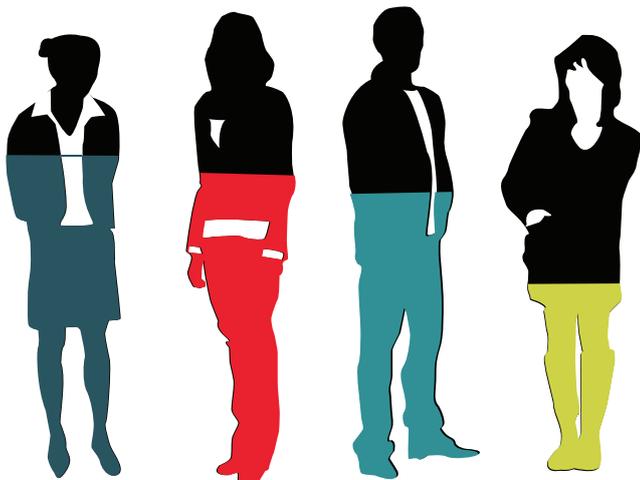
In CILIP's own research, of the over 55s who were using the internet, 86% said that being online had improved their lives and 81% said that it helped them feel part of modern society. In addition, 82% said they had saved money, 72% felt less isolated and 57% said that they keep in touch with friends and families.

As part of CILIP's digital inclusion drive, hundreds of events are held around the UK for local older people every April, with many libraries getting involved. The government also has its own digital inclusion drive to reduce the number of people without basic digital skills and capabilities by a quarter by 2016. A cornerstone of its strategy is to work closely with partners from the public, private and voluntary sectors.

The role of library staff

We can see that library services and offerings have evolved since the first public libraries came about, especially with the impact of technology and digital services. So we wanted to find out more about the role of the librarian and the impact that library staff can have on the experience the public receive when they visit.

The vast majority (86%) of adults agree that library staff can have a positive impact on their library visits, so the importance of their role in delivering library services shouldn't be underestimated. Our survey identified key ways they could add value:



57% help with information on books

53% provide information on events and activities in the library

50% help with the use of library resources

37% give reading recommendations

THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE LIBRARIAN

The heart and soul of the institution, library personnel not only deliver the public library strategy, they also bring an in-depth understanding of the local community, its population and the services they require. Yet as the library changes, the librarian must adapt his/her role and engagement approach.

The role is becoming increasingly differentiated from the front line, involving more online services and stock management. In addition, technical expertise and stock knowledge is giving way to a focus on 'softer' marketing and customer engagement skills. Reaching out to the community by taking the library service on the road or through other contact channels, is becoming key. If a library is to facilitate new services and events, it's important the community knows about them.

Encouragingly, more than two-thirds (69%) of people want to receive updates or news from their local library, showing willingness for libraries to take a more central role in the community. This percentage rises notably to 78% for those aged 25 to 34 years.

With the growth of technology and connectivity, it isn't surprising to learn that three quarters of respondents would prefer email as the channel to receive news and updates from their libraries, followed by library and community websites, cited by 25%.



"The 21st century librarian will need to be more of a community impresario with digital and commercial expertise, who can champion their communities' needs and generate new business and audiences for the library."

— William Sieghart's
2014 Independent Library Report

USING TECHNOLOGY TO SIMPLIFY ROLES

Library personnel have a central role to play in the library of the future, but this evolution is not without its complexities. Libraries usually have a mix of staff and volunteers who may work different hours on different days, depending on schedules. Also, community-based volunteer positions are commonly found in a library, which tend to have a high turnover.

With complex, paper-based systems in place, frequent induction sessions and training can become an efficiency drain, and also a tedious process for all concerned. More libraries are implementing software solutions that not only eliminate the lengthy training processes, but also provide the mobility and flexibility that help staff and volunteers perform their tasks better.

As their services evolve, libraries need systems that are easy to use and cut down administrative time so staff and volunteers can do what they do best – help communities. The research shows that 50% of UK adults believe library staff can add value to their visit by offering help with the use of library resources. Assisting someone to use a computer or find something online can take time, but if staff can access the library management system on a table or a tablet, they can perform more than one task simultaneously.

If libraries can use digital platforms to increase the diversity of content without having the expense of purchasing and stocking more physical items, staff can work in a smart way and have more time for customers.



The library of the future

Public library services, alongside other public sector services, are facing big challenges related to funding and engagement with citizens, with visitor numbers on the decline. The Independent Public Library Report commissioned by William Seighart discusses the challenges faced by public libraries such as budget cuts, reduced opening hours and a drop in librarians.

SO WHAT EXACTLY DOES THAT MEAN FOR THE FUTURE OF OUR PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICES?

Despite the challenges, our research uncovered a clear opportunity for public libraries to be the hub of the local communities they serve, by diversifying the services they provide to appeal to citizens across a wide range of age groups and backgrounds.

LIBRARIES AS THE COMMUNITY HUB

The appetite for community is strong across the UK, with as many as 78% of the adults we surveyed agreeing that having a hub for their village or town was important. Engagement is also key, with 77% wanting to know people in their local area and 71% saying they are keen to have a place to meet others in their local community.

When we questioned adults on their views of libraries specifically, there was a strong indication that they are highly valued, with a significant 89% agreeing that libraries are an important part of the community.

GREATER APPEAL THROUGH NEW SERVICES

As part of its 2011-15 plan, the Arts Council has been working with libraries to develop the services they provide. Supported by government funding, it allocated £6 million to help libraries innovate and increase the range of services and activities that are available to the public. Some libraries have chosen to stage events like exhibitions of local artists' paintings to help increase number of visitors.

It was interesting to see that 66% of our survey respondents said they would visit their public library more if it offered a better range of services.

These included offering free courses, such as language classes or learning digital skills, and expanding their book collection. However, most libraries may argue that these offerings are already available to visitors, which means the issue is not the need for services but the need to tell visitors what services are available.

Our research also showed that people are much more likely to go to their public library if new services and spaces were provided to offer entertainment or facilitate interaction with other members of the community:

WHAT WOULD ENTICE PEOPLE TO VISIT THEIR PUBLIC LIBRARY?



social clubs



café/coffee shop



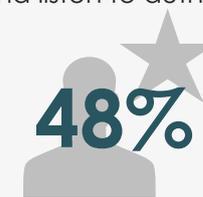
post office or postal collections services



opportunity to meet and listen to authors



cinema to watch movies or short films



opportunity to attend talks with experts



book clubs



games room with digital and board games

VISION FOR THE PUBLIC LIBRARY

Libraries can be – and many are - more than just institutions for literacy and self-development and a report by the Arts Council highlights that library services are moving with the times. In the last few years, the roles of communities – whether individual volunteers, community organisations, social enterprises or town councils – in helping to support and even manage libraries has also accelerated.

Some councils like Middlesbrough Council are going one step further and have drawn up plans that will see all except Central Library renamed as “community hubs”, adding services and expanding on existing ones to reflect a wider role. The move is not only to cope with financial cuts but also to strengthen the availability of books and digital library resources. The Council has already renamed three of its libraries as community hubs.

Creating the library of tomorrow means maximising relevance to the community and its citizen demographics. It's about creating outstanding customer experiences and embracing digital services to engage with patrons wherever and whenever they want to engage, and maintain a position as a critical community service.

We questioned people on their vision for the library of the future and what it needs to become.

As the library changes, it will be critical for the librarian to adapt to these changes. Tasked with the delivery of the library strategy, these people are the heart and soul of the library service, engaging with the community and staff at all levels to ensure the smooth delivery of services that meet the demands and requirements of everyone in the local area.

With better technology, libraries can understand their customers' preferences better and use this information to target them with more personalised communications.

Charlotte Mecklenburg Library is a clear example of this, where they have implemented a tool that groups visitors based on their activities so they can target them on a more personal level, resulting in 13,000 people coming back to the library. It's not about being 'big data' experts but using technology to leverage data to essentially be able to offer people what they want.

As William Sieghart stated, the new librarian needs to become “a community impresario with digital and commercial expertise who can champion their communities' needs”.

WHAT IS THE PEOPLE'S VISION FOR THE LIBRARY OF THE FUTURE AND WHAT IT NEEDS TO BECOME?

60% - a place where learning is initiated, explored and shared

50% - where reading is an exploring art

46% - a guardian of past and present history

37% - where creativity is initiated, presented and shared

34% - where digital services are learned, built and used

22% - where democracy is learnt and nurtured



Creating Your Library of the Future - our recommendation

All libraries have a system that they have been working with since they started. This could include anything from keeping stock to filing information on visitors. Most libraries have embraced technology and are using library management systems to ease and assist the way they work, so staff can spend time and effort helping visitors and reaching out to the community.



PHONE AND MOBILE APPS

There are cloud-based mobile apps that relieve staff from the traditional 'desk-based job', giving them the freedom to move around, not only in libraries but also offsite at community events. These apps enable library staff to perform the exact same functions, such as catalogue and cash management, as the library management system allows, only with added flexibility in where and when they can be used.

Like any app in today's world, library apps are easy to use and training is minimal. In fact, volunteers are likely to learn how to use a library app more quickly than they are the traditional, and potentially paper-based, process of storing and accessing information in the library. This is a particular advantage for libraries that might have a high turnover of volunteers or part-time staff. In addition, they can be granted different levels of access depending on their role, authority and the types of information they need.



MAKE LIBRARY MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS WORK FOR YOU

The first library management systems were developed to primarily help librarians manage the different functions of the library. However, technological advancement mean today's systems can do more than just that. They can bring together and analyse huge amounts of data in a way that helps libraries generate reports to monitor borrowing patterns and stock distribution, so stocks can be managed effectively.

The benefits go beyond the library too by enhancing the customer experience, for example by identifying what they like and making relevant recommendations. Our survey shows that people would rather borrow an eBook or a DVD from their library than to purchase it, so why not use software tools available to publicise what you have to offer?



VISUALISE YOUR LIBRARY AS A BUSINESS AND YOUR VISITORS AS CUSTOMERS

In the higher education sector, universities have been employing business managers and treating students like customers to win them over in what has become a fairly competitive market. With the existing resources that public libraries have, coupled with the right software, they can replicate this approach, offering personalised services that will not only increase the number of visitors but also the frequency of visits.

Ultimately, any engagement strategy needs to be about knowing your audience better and offering services to meet their needs. It is impossible for any librarian to memorise the needs of every visitor, but that is what technology is ideally placed to do – quickly and accurately.

With the right tools in place, libraries can not only work smart but also create an environment that allows staff to focus their time on engaging with and helping members of the community, whether they are in the library, at offsite events or online.

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How Charlotte Mecklenburg Library convinced 13,000 people to come back

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