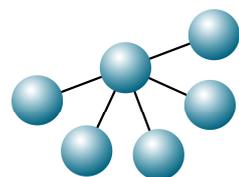


What do the public want from libraries?

User and non-user research - full research report

November 2010



SHARED INTELLIGENCE

Ipsos MORI
Social Research Institute

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Summary

Time for a focus on audiences

It's a challenging time for public libraries. As spending restrictions start to bite, library services must increasingly show that they are still valuable and relevant. Although children's usage of libraries is high¹, longer term trends of falling book borrowing² and visits amongst adults have added to this pressure.

Yet there has been surprisingly little recent research on library audiences – those who currently use library services and those who don't. Do people value libraries? If so, what is it that they value? What would encourage them to use libraries more? And how can we entice new audiences?

The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council commissioned this study to help fill this gap. The research aimed to give an up-to-date picture of public views on libraries, in order to help leaders and practitioners make decisions about the future development of the service.

The findings in this summary come from focus groups with a cross-section of user and non-user groups and a quantitative survey with a representative sample of 1,102 adults (both in England), as well as a literature review of previous relevant studies and national surveys.

Full details of this research project, including the full research report, technical report and reports of the qualitative and quantitative phases are available at <http://research.mla.gov.uk/>.

¹ *The Taking Part survey 2009/10 found that 77.9% of children aged 5-10 and 39.4% of adults had used a public library in the last year. See Taking Part: The National Survey of Culture, Leisure and Sport, Adult and Child Report 2009/10, August 2010.*

² *Murray, S. MLA Research Briefing 9 - CIPFA Library Trends, MLA*

Audiences are not homogeneous

Why do people use public libraries? Our research found that underlying motivations for library use are wide ranging.

Some are inspired to go to the library because of their **love of reading** and the **opportunity for discovering new things**; others are keen to **study** or further their individual **learning**. Some want to **educate** their children. A desire for **social contact** can be a motivating factor, while conversely, others use libraries because of a desire to **spend some time alone** in an environment that is seen as safe and acceptable. Some people use libraries infrequently, just to **find out something specific**.

Books are still the main reason why most people use public libraries – and are seen as the core offer of the library service by users and non-users alike. Our survey found that 76% of people who described themselves as ‘library users’ borrowed or used books for pleasure, and 44% for study.

The **library building** is also important to some user groups, such as older people who may feel isolated, families with young children, students and unemployed people. This is because of the role the public library plays for them – for some, a library is not just about accessing books but providing social contact, being a place for quiet time or study, or giving an opportunity for a trip out. The physical library space is valued for its unique features –; it is safe, so that children can go on their own; it is quiet, without too many distractions; while conversely for some people, it’s a place to socialise.

And what about when people don’t use libraries? Similarly, there is a range of possible explanations.

Sometimes, **‘barriers’ related to the ways services are currently delivered**, or personal and social issues, make it difficult for individuals to use libraries.

Sometimes, it’s a case of **inconvenience**. Library use is often opportunistic. Current users and non-users frequently complained about library opening hours.

However, the research also highlights the challenge public libraries face in drawing in new users in the 21st century: for some people, **libraries simply do not fit with their lifestyle or preferences, or are less preferred than alternatives to libraries**. The library sector is now facing increasing competition from the convenience of bookshops and online stores when it comes to attracting this audience – one in four people who described themselves as ‘lapsed’ or non-users cite this as their

main reason for not using public libraries today. On the positive side, it is likely that there is a large group of people who might potentially be attracted to libraries: the Taking Part survey 2008/09 found that 38% of respondents had not used a library in the previous 12 months but still read for pleasure¹.

Nevertheless, no matter what libraries do, they won't be for everyone. Our survey found that around 11% of respondents who are not current library users simply "don't like reading" and our qualitative research found that some people could never see themselves using libraries. It's difficult from current data to estimate the size of the group who are unlikely ever to be attracted to libraries, so further audience segmentation research might be helpful in future.

It's not as simple as users and non-users

When thinking about library audiences, we often talk about 'users', 'non-users' and sometimes, 'lapsed users' (those who once used libraries but no longer do). But in reality the picture is more complex. In our research, we found that **the distinction between these groups is sometimes blurred**: there is variation within the groups, some overlap between them, and people can move from one group to another.

It seems common for people to **dip in and out of using libraries over their adult lives**, and reasons for this vary. Our qualitative research showed that amongst those who used to be library members, but had not visited for at least a year, there were:

- People who use libraries occasionally or sporadically for specific purposes, but don't really consider themselves library users.
- People who used to be regular library users, but stopped because they couldn't find what they wanted. Their primary issue was the limitation of the range or choice of books.
- People whose circumstances had changed, making it more difficult or less convenient for them to go to libraries - for example, moving home or job.
- People whose life stage had changed, removing the 'need' for libraries - such as stopping studying or entering full-time work.

On the other hand, common trigger points for *starting* to use libraries (again) include taking up study, entering unemployment, having children or retiring.

¹ Data from Taking Part Survey, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2008/09, accessed via Netquest http://www.culture.gov.uk/what_we_do/research_and_statistics/6762.aspx

So, what do the public want from libraries?

A clear message from the research is that the public see libraries' core purpose as being about reading, learning (particularly children's education) and finding information. Some of the newer services that libraries have oriented towards have become well established, for example, **computers** and **children's activities**.

People value a **good customer experience**, and are relatively intolerant of poor service. We found that the key ingredients of a good experience are:

- A good **range and choice of books**.
- Friendly and knowledgeable staff.
- A pleasant **library environment**.

Satisfaction with library staff is high amongst users. But both users and non-users often expressed concern about books being "squeezed out" for other services. Current users, and some lapsed users, **would like the book offer to be better** (although not everyone wants the same: some users would like to see more "bestsellers", and others want "quality reads").

In terms of service developments, there was wide support for coffee shops in libraries (although not all groups were keen), suggesting that these fit with public perceptions of what libraries are for. Longer opening hours and more activities for children and families were also widely supported.

Figure 1: What would encourage you to use libraries more often?

| Current users (base: 631) | Lapsed users (base: 308) | Non-users (base: 162) |
|---|--|------------------------------|
| Coffee shop on site (31%) | Coffee shop on site (35%) | Coffee shop on site (30%) |
| Longer opening hours (29%) | Longer opening hours (27%) | Children's activities (26%) |
| Children's activities (28%) | Children's activities (26%) | Improving the IT offer (18%) |
| Range/quality of books (27%) | Improving the IT offer (20%) | Specialist services (18%) |
| Being able to reserve or renew books online (19%) | Better information on what libraries offer (19%) | Classes for adults (15%) |

Source: Ipsos MORI. Respondents were read a list of options and asked to say which two or three would most encourage them to make more use of libraries.

A **mix of different types of libraries** is also valued. The research suggested clearly that smaller, local libraries are important for many current users, particularly older people. Accessibility, cost of transport and parking, and the more 'impersonal' nature of some larger libraries were given as reasons preferring smaller libraries.

More communication is needed

Most people understand the core service offer (book borrowing and access to computers and the Internet). Many are aware of other services, but most are not aware of the full range of what is on offer. Low awareness is probably not the main cause of non-usage in most cases, but contributes to it alongside other factors. Non-users may “forget that the library is there”; those who haven’t used a library for some time might not know what the service is like these days.

Our survey found that people who said they were library users were much more likely to say that they felt informed about what you can do at a library - 82% felt ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ well informed, compared with 55% of self-defined ‘lapsed users’ and 46% of non-users. Nevertheless, even some current users aren’t aware of everything you can do at a library. For example, as shown in figure 1 above, 19% of current users in our survey thought that being able to reserve or renew books online would encourage them to make more use of libraries; in fact, this facility is already widely available at public libraries.

We found strong support for more advertising and promotion of library services amongst members of the public. Some non-users “just don’t think about libraries”, and limited communication from library services compounds this.

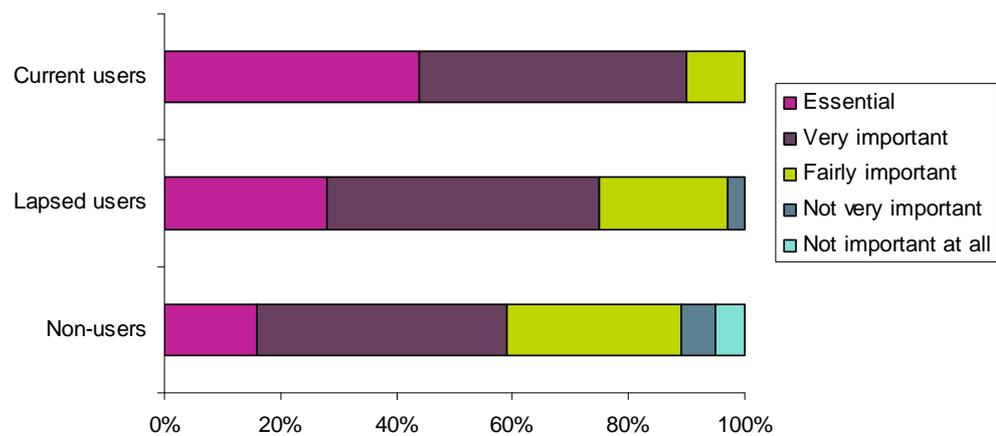
Our research suggests that library services would do well to communicate that they offer:

- **Unique services:** activities, crafts, learning opportunities, genealogy software and support.
- **Free or cheap services** - allowing people to ‘try before they buy’ and ‘take risks’ on new authors; enabling people to get hold of expensive reference books easily - again, assets that are unique to libraries.
- **Knowledgeable and friendly staff** – for example, who can recommend books that readers might like.

Public libraries are widely valued...

... even by people who don't currently use them. Most people see public libraries as an important community service. As the chart below shows, virtually all of those who consider themselves 'current library users' think libraries are essential or very important to the community (90%). But 59% of respondents who do say they are not library users still think they are important or essential to the community.

Figure 2: How important or unimportant do you think public libraries are as a service to the community?



Source: Ipsos MORI. Base: all respondents (1102)

The research suggests that public libraries are valued because:

- they are trusted
- they are one of the few public services that people often think of as 'theirs'
- they are widely perceived to be important for groups such as children, older people and people on low incomes.

Further, **libraries are a social leveller**. Compared with other types of cultural activity – such as visiting museums or galleries – libraries reach a much broader range of age groups, genders, and ethnic and social backgrounds. This ability to bring people together is valued by library users. Most people strongly believe that **libraries need to remain free at the point of use**, although **some say they** would be willing to pay (more) for specific services, such as 'premium membership' or some children's activities.

So, what did we conclude?

Libraries really do hold ‘a special place in the nation’s heart’. Reassuringly, the evidence suggests that, despite the rhetoric about public sector cuts and fiscal tightening, the library service continues to be seen by the public as a force for good, and one that should be provided free at the point of delivery (even amongst those people who do not use the service).

There is potential for greater library usage. If libraries can genuinely deliver on key features - a good book offer, a pleasant environment, and friendly and knowledgeable staff - the research suggests that they may well be able to broaden their appeal to some current non-users. A greater focus on maintaining and improving the customer experience – again focusing on these three features - would help retain users. Libraries should also promote their unique selling points. For example, the promotion of more specialist services (e.g. genealogy) might not boost user numbers as much as getting more avid book readers through the doors, but this is an area where libraries have a clear edge over the commercial sector.

Libraries do not just need to raise awareness of what they do, but communicate more effectively on an ongoing basis with users and potential users. For example, people who return to the service may have done so after significant time periods when they have not used it – so they may not be aware of the current offer. Proactive efforts to reach non-user groups, such as open days, making clear that libraries would value their participation, might help to increase usage.

Libraries have elements of a strong brand that they should be able to build on: good awareness of the core offer; high levels of trust and loyalty; and they are viewed affectionately by much of the population. Libraries should see their ability to reach across the social spectrum as an asset, particularly in building partnerships with other public services.

However, there is no ‘magic bullet’ for increasing library usage. There are some groups who, whether due to life stage or lifestyle choice, are unlikely to be drawn to their local library in the short term, or perhaps never at all.

Some changes could alienate the service’s core group of existing loyal users, particularly if new or alternative services are seen to be “taking up space for books”. Ultimately, different service developments and improvements will appeal to different groups. For example, coffee shops are popular with many - but men and older people are less likely to find these attractive. Some readers want ‘bestsellers’, others want more ‘quality reads’. Some value the library as a social

space, but others fear it will become “like a community centre”. Ultimately, it’s important to know who the target audience is at the local level.

Members of the public rarely recognise a distinction between physical libraries and the ‘library service’. Different ways of delivering library services might appeal to some non-users, but libraries would need to communicate new delivery models, such as online services, clearly - and recognise the value of the building itself to some current user groups.

This means that library services need to have a clear idea of what they are trying to achieve and who they are for. Is increasing visitor numbers the main priority, or are libraries there to serve specific purposes? Participation figures from the Taking Part survey, while useful for providing a national picture of library usage, may be too blunt a tool to be used to measure future success as they do not say anything about the need for libraries, the value of libraries to those using them or the success of libraries in meeting customers’ needs and expectations. Measures of customer retention, for example, might be more useful to individual library services.

Finally, a more sophisticated understanding of current users and potential users would help libraries to broaden participation. We hope that our research provides a useful resource for library services in developing their future strategies.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. In comparison with audiences for other cultural activities, relatively few published studies have focused on exploring the needs, attitudes and perceptions of library audiences. National surveys provide an overview of library visitors and their demographic and socio-economic characteristics, and a number of studies and evaluations have been commissioned exploring how library offers have changed, and the impact of new developments to the service. Yet research to date has given less insight into the motivations and views of those who currently use or do not use public libraries.
- 1.2. The current challenging climate for the public sector and pressures on public service delivery means that libraries are under increasing pressure to show their value, broaden library participation and turn around the drop in adult visitor numbers that has been seen over recent years. Those individuals leading library services also face difficult decisions about how to develop services in the wake of spending restrictions.
- 1.3. Given this context, more in-depth research into library audiences - current users and, in particular, those who do not currently use library services - is timely. Shared Intelligence and Ipsos MORI were commissioned in July 2010 to carry out research on public library audiences for the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA). The project aimed to provide an up-to-date picture of what the public wants and values in library services, and help leaders to make decisions about the future development of the service.

Project focus

- 1.4. In order to be feasible within the scope and timescale, the research and analysis concentrated on adult users and non-users of libraries. In doing this, the project focused on the following key themes:
 - Understanding who currently does and does not use libraries.
 - Motivations for library use and non-use amongst different groups.
 - User experience of, and satisfaction with, library services.
 - Perceptions of the value of libraries.
 - Public understanding and awareness of the library service offer.
- 1.5. The project involved synthesising existing research evidence, and generating significant new qualitative and quantitative data through focus groups and a national telephone survey.

Methodology

- 1.6. The project was carried out in three phases. Each phase fed into the next, helping to refine the research questions and making sure that each phase added to, rather than duplicated, existing research.
- 1.7. A brief overview of the methodology is given below, while a more detailed technical appendix accompanies this report.

Phase one: desk review

- 1.8. A desk review formed the first stage of the project. Drawing on the MLA's research brief, a rapid evidence review was conducted, focusing on the five main research themes set out above. Some 76 documents and data sources were reviewed in total, including: primary qualitative and quantitative studies of users and non-users; evaluations of initiatives to enhance library participation; secondary analyses of data and literature reviews; and policy documents. The aims of the review were: to draw together what was already known about users and non-users (although we were not attempting a full systematic review of the data); identify areas where the research evidence was already strong, and where there were gaps; and inform the next stages of the research. Evidence from the literature review is used in this report alongside data from our own primary research.
- 1.9. The review found that there was considerable quantitative data on socio-economic and demographic characteristics of users and non-users from the Taking Part survey; on how people used libraries from recent Ipsos MORI research for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport; and data on user satisfaction from the Public Library User Survey. There were also qualitative studies looking at 'barriers' to library use amongst specific target groups, such as potential adult learners. A qualitative study of 14-35 year old users, non-users and lapsed users by Define Research and Insight (2006) focused on similar research questions to our own study, but was limited to a specific age range. There were therefore a number of gaps in the existing evidence base. In particular, there were gaps in data to explore our research questions around:
 - what motivates users to use libraries
 - understanding who are the 'lapsed users' and among non-users, which could be 'tempted' to use libraries and which are likely to be the 'never' users
 - the trajectory of a library user, or how usage changes over time for individuals - for example, in relation to lapsed users, why and when usage 'lapsed', and what might encourage them to use services again
 - views of people in middle and older age.

1.10. There was general consensus in the qualitative research base that awareness of the current library offer was low, but there was no quantitative data to substantiate this. The same was true in relation to perceptions of value - while qualitative data suggested that users and non-users valued libraries, there was no direct quantitative data that could back this up.

1.11. These gaps informed the qualitative and quantitative phases of the research.

Phase two: qualitative research

1.12. In the second phase of the project, qualitative research was carried out with a sample of adults in England. The aims of this phase were to address gaps in the evidence base identified in the desk review and to draw out themes that could then be tested through a survey in the quantitative stage of the research.

1.13. Twelve focus groups were held, in four areas across the country (one area in each MLA region). The sampling strategy ensured that a diverse range of people were reached, living in different types of areas (urban, rural, suburban; different levels of affluence and deprivation). In total, 118 people participated in this phase.

1.14. In order to understand the different perspectives that people might have depending on how frequently they used libraries - if at all - nine of the twelve focus groups were recruited to include people with different 'usage' statuses. For the purposes of recruitment, these were defined as follows:

- A **user** was defined as someone who is a member of a library, who considers that they are a library user and who has used library services in the last year.
- A **lapsed user** was defined as someone who is a member of a library but has not used any library services in the last year.
- A **non-user** was defined as someone who is not a member of a library, who does not consider that they are a public library user and who has not used any library services in the last five years or has never used them.

1.15. The final three groups were mixed groups including users, lapsed and non-users, focusing instead on target groups that previous research suggested may have specific needs and expectations of libraries - employed people, unemployed people and parents with young children. The final focus group sampling approach is summarised in the following grid.

Figure 1.1: Focus groups sampling grid

| | | County | County | City | London borough |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------|----------------|
| | MLA region ⁴ | North | East | West | London |
| Users | Geography | Rural | | Urban | Urban |
| | Demography | Mixed | | Mixed | Older people |
| Non-users | Geography | | Rural | Suburban | Urban |
| | Demography | | Older people | Mixed | Mixed |
| Lapsed users | Geography | Industrial town | Market town | City centre | |
| | Demography | Mixed | Mixed | Mixed | |
| Mixed users and non-users | Geography | Industrial town | Market town | | Urban |
| | Demography | Parents with young children | Employed full and part time | | Unemployed |

1.16. A wide ranging topic guide was used, based on key issues that emerged from the initial desk review. Topics included: current use of library services, awareness of the range of services, experience of and satisfaction with the current offer, motivations for use and non-use, barriers to greater use; changing patterns of usage over time and likelihood of future usage; suggestions for improvements; perceptions of the value of library services to the wider community.

Phase three: quantitative research

1.17. To build on the findings of the desk research and qualitative phases, Ipsos MORI carried out a 10 minute telephone survey with a nationally representative sample of adults across England. A total of 1,102 people aged 18+ were interviewed between 4 and 10 October 2010. The questionnaire, which was designed to test and further explore issues raised in the qualitative phase, covered:

- Perceptions of the value of library services to the community and respondents themselves
- The drivers of library usage or non-usage
- Satisfaction with current library services, and reasons for satisfaction or dissatisfaction

⁴ The MLA regions are aggregations of English government office regions. They are North (covering the North East, North West and Yorkshire & Humber); West (West Midlands and South West); East (East of England, East Midlands and South East); and London.

- Awareness of current library services
- Priorities for future service development

1.18. The sample size was chosen to allow some sub-group analysis (for example, to be able to compare different user types or age groups), but would not allow for detailed exploration of issues in relation to very specific population groups (such as older people who also do not use libraries), which would require a much larger sample size. Through the literature review and analysis, we aimed to highlight areas where further research might be needed in order to understand specific sub-groups better.

This report and its accompanying documents

- 1.19. This report draws on each stage of the research, organising findings into three sections:
- **Section A: Libraries and their audiences** – this section describes what we know about users and non-users, their characteristics, motivations and perceptions, with a view towards service development.
 - **Section B: The public's relationships with libraries** – this section explores levels of awareness of library services and perceptions of value amongst members of the public, with a view to understanding the library 'brand', and whether there is a 'mandate' for libraries more generally.
 - **Section C: Conclusions and implications** – this section draws together the analysis and explores what it might mean in the current policy context and in relation to priorities for service development
- 1.20. The report is accompanied by three appendices. These include:
- Summary report of the qualitative focus group research.
 - Summary report of the quantitative telephone survey and topline results.
 - Technical appendix, setting out the methodology for each phase, sample profiles and approach to data analysis in more depth.
- 1.21. Alongside this report, we have also produced an **evidence-based guide**, aimed at library practitioners and people with strategic responsibility for libraries. This takes the research evidence and discusses its relevance to current policy debates, explores how it might be used in library service development, and draws in case studies that illustrate how these might be realised..

Use of secondary data in this report

- 1.22. As well as synthesising findings from our own qualitative and quantitative research, in this report we draw in data from our desk review, where this helps to explain, challenge or illuminate our findings. Although we did not attempt a full systematic review, by drawing in other sources where relevant we hope to provide a fuller picture of the needs, motivations and views of library users and non-users than would be possible from our research alone. Most of the studies synthesised and referenced in this report are primary research studies or secondary analyses of primary data, e.g. the Taking Part survey. We draw several times on a few excellent large-scale qualitative studies, including a piece of research into the perceptions of libraries amongst 14-35 year olds by Define Research and Insight for DCMS, the MLA and the Laser Foundation (2006) and a study by Bob Usherwood and colleagues from Sheffield University (2006), which included fifty focus groups with users. We have also drawn in evidence from a wide range of smaller-scale qualitative studies. All sources are fully referenced.

Quotations

- 1.23. Where quotations are used, these are from our own qualitative research unless otherwise specified. Quotations are used to help illuminate the findings and do not necessarily reflect the views of all the research participants.

Statistical significance

- 1.24. All differences between sub-groups highlighted in the report are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level, unless otherwise stated.

Users, non-users and lapsed users

- 1.25. We started this project with a specific objective to explore differences in views between current library users, 'lapsed users' and non-users. In carrying out the focus group research in phase two, we agreed definitions for these groups (see paragraph 1.14). However, as we continued with the research we found that the distinctions between the groups were not always clear, and that the way we might classify someone (e.g. by how recently they had visited a library) was not necessarily the way that they would classify themselves.
- 1.26. For the quantitative survey, therefore, we asked people to 'self-define'. They were asked to say which statement best described them: 'I am a current library user'; 'I used to be a library user, but am not any more'; or 'I am not a library user'. We analysed results by these three groups, as we wanted to find out whether responses varied according to how people identified themselves in relation to public libraries.

- 1.27. Meanwhile, other studies and surveys classified users and non-users slightly differently. For example, the Taking Part survey treats all those who have not used a library in the last 12 months as non-users, and asks this group to say what their reasons are for not having used a library.
- 1.28. In the report, we have tried to make as clear as possible which definitions of user/non-user/lapsed user have been employed. When reporting our survey findings, we use 'self-defined' categories, while when reporting on focus group findings, we use our sampling definitions.
- 1.29. In practice, the important point to note is that these three groups are not homogeneous, and while the distinctions can be helpful, they are blunt: there is variation within the groups, some overlap between them, and people can move from one group to another.

Acknowledgements

- 1.30. This project was carried out by Madeleine Gabriel, Ben Lee, Jackie Harrison, Rachel Rowney, Vania Kaneva and Sue Charteris at Shared Intelligence, and Victoria Harkness, Benjamin Collins and Luke Daxon at Ipsos MORI.
- 1.31. The authors would like to thank the project team at the MLA for their invaluable advice, input and support: Ailbhe McNabola, David Potts, Rachel Kerr, Richard Sved and Silvia Anton.
- 1.32. In addition, we would like to extend our thanks to the library services that supported us with focus group recruitment.
- 1.33. We are also very grateful to the Steering Group, which met twice during the course of the project and helped to shape the methodology, commented on findings and provided additional research material for the desk review: Abigail Moss (National Literacy Trust); Aileen Cahill (LB Croydon); Biddy Fisher (CILIP); Carolyn Rankin (Leeds Metropolitan University); Ciara Eastell (Devon CC); Claire Creaser (Loughborough University); David Brownlee (Audiences UK); Genevieve Clarke (The Reading Agency); Helen Williams (DCMS); Ian Watson (Society of Chief Librarians); Javier Stanziola (Leeds University); and Kate Millin (Dudley MBC).
- 1.34. Finally, the authors would like to thank the members of the public who contributed to the research.

SECTION A: LIBRARIES AND THEIR AUDIENCES

This section describes what we know about users and non-users, their characteristics, motivations and perceptions, with a view towards service development. Chapters within this section include:

- **Chapter 2: Who currently uses public libraries?** This chapter explores the characteristics of current library audiences, drawing primarily on Taking Part survey data.
- **Chapter 3: Why do people use libraries?** This chapter looks at: the range of services used by different groups; the incentives that encourage people to use libraries; and the underlying motivations for library usage.
- **Chapter 4: Customer experience and satisfaction with services.** This chapter examines survey data and qualitative evidence on the quality of the customer experience for current library users.
- **Chapter 5: Why don't some people use libraries?** This chapter aims to go beneath user data to gain a more qualitative understanding of the reasons for not using libraries, amongst different groups of people.
- **Chapter 6: Developing the service and widening participation.** This chapter draws together findings on what might improve customer experience, attract 'lapsed' users back, and encourage new users to try library services.

2. Who currently uses public libraries?

2.1. This section explores the characteristics of current library audiences. It sets out some quantitative data, mainly from the Taking Part survey, to explore the socio-demographic characteristics of those who use libraries more and less often. Several large-scale studies have looked in depth at Taking Part data to understand participation and this section does not try to summarise all the key points in those documents, but simply sets out some of the main trends, in order to give background for other sections in the report. The evidence shows that:

- In 2009/10, 39.4% of adults - equivalent to 15.46 million people - said they had visited a library in the last 12 months. Fewer adults visit libraries each year now than five years ago. However, visits have remained stable since 2008/9.
- Library participation is different to that of other cultural activities, in that people using library services are much more evenly distributed across the population. There is less of a divergence in usage, for example, between women and men, and higher and lower socio-economic groups, than for other cultural activities, which tend to be much more polarised. A greater proportion of people from black and minority ethnic (BME) than white backgrounds use libraries - in contrast with other cultural activities.
- People's 'self-defined' status as a library user or non-user cannot always be predicted simply from how recently they visited a library. For example, our own survey found that 30% of those who have used libraries over a month ago but within the last six months consider themselves to be 'lapsed' users, while 63% of this group perceive themselves to be 'current' users.

Levels of library usage

2.2. Most of the data in this sub-section comes from the national Taking Part survey.⁵ Taking Part data suggests that 39.4% of adults aged 16 and over - some 15.46 million people - have visited a public library in the last 12 months (2009/10). As has frequently been reported, there has been a significant decrease, of around 9 percentage points, in the proportion of adults visiting libraries since 2005/6. Nevertheless, over the last two years the proportion visiting libraries has remained stable.

⁵ *Taking Part is a face-to-face survey that explores participation in a wide range of cultural and sporting activities. With a rolling sample of up to 28,000 households per year in England, Taking Part provides official National Statistics on library participation and is the most reliable and representative dataset available on library use and non-use nationally.*

Figure 2.1: Proportion of adults who have visited a public library in the last year

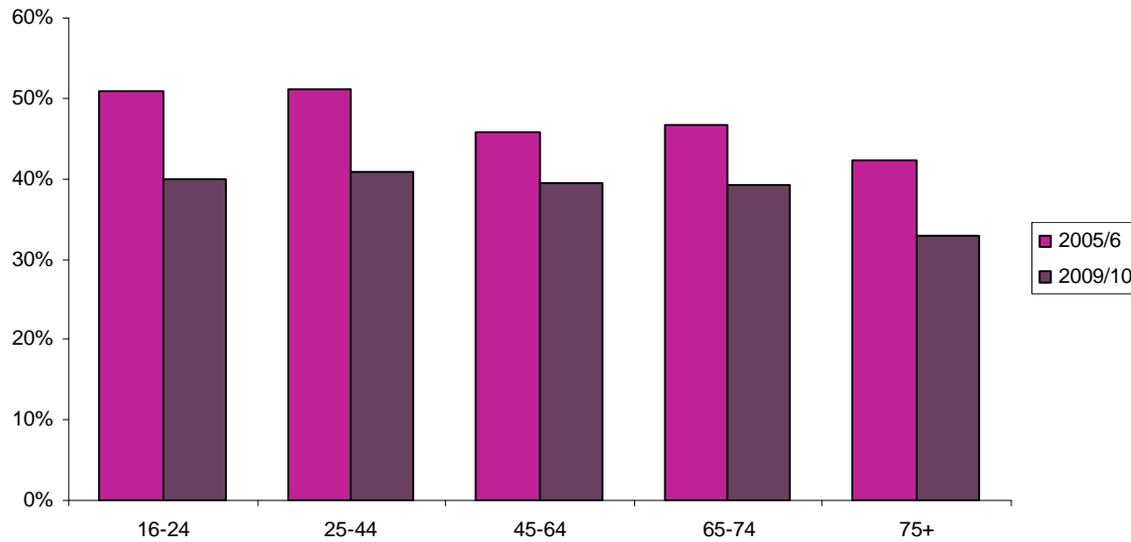
| 2005/6 | 2009/10 | Difference |
|--------|---------|------------|
| 48.2% | 39.4% | -8.8 |

Source: Taking Part survey, Statistical Worksheet - Libraries, DCMS⁶

Usage by age, gender and ethnicity

2.3. The downward trend in library visits seen at a national level is reflected across all age groups. Younger age groups are still the most likely to have visited a library in the last 12 months, but the difference in usage between age groups has narrowed since 2005/6.

Figure 2.2: Proportion of adults who have visited a public library in the last year, by age group

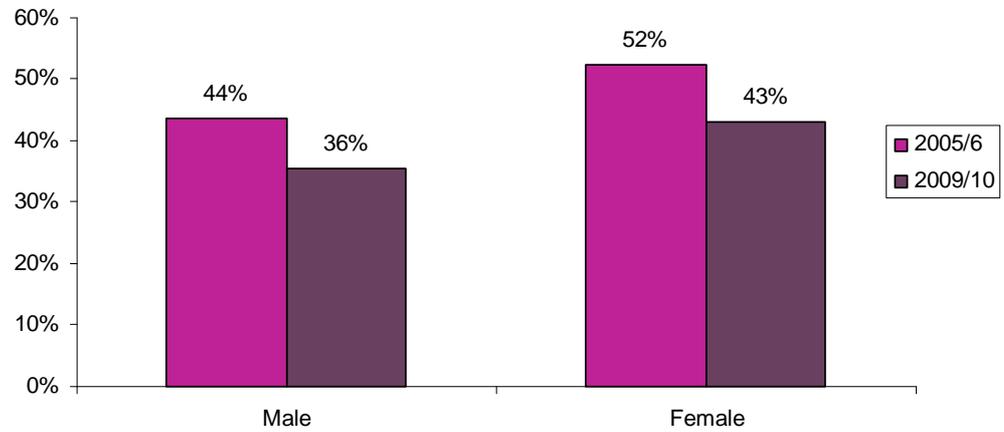


Source: Taking Part Survey, Department of Culture, Media and Sport

2.4. Women are significantly more likely than men to have visited a library in the last year. Nevertheless, library visits are much more equal between the genders than participation in other cultural activities, where women are considerably more likely than men to participate (DCMS, 2010).

⁶ <http://www.culture.gov.uk/publications/7386.aspx> Accessed 5 November 2010

Figure 2.3: Proportion of adults who have visited a public library in the last year, by gender



Source: Taking Part Survey, Department of Culture, Media and Sport

2.5. There is a big difference in library usage levels between those of white ethnicity, and those from a black or minority ethnic (BME) background, with the latter much more likely to have visited a library in the last year. While visits have fallen in both groups over the last five years, they have fallen more slowly amongst people from a BME background. Some research has shown a difference in participation between religious groups, although the drivers for this are not fully clear. For example, analysis of Taking Part data for 2006/7 showed that library use was significantly higher amongst Muslims than other religious groups (Barauskas, 2008).

Figure 2.4: Proportion of adults who have visited a public library in the last year, by ethnicity

| | 2005/6 | 2009/10 | Difference |
|-------------------------------------|--------|---------|------------|
| White background | 47.2% | 37.9% | -9.3 |
| Black or minority ethnic background | 57.5% | 50.6% | -6.8* |

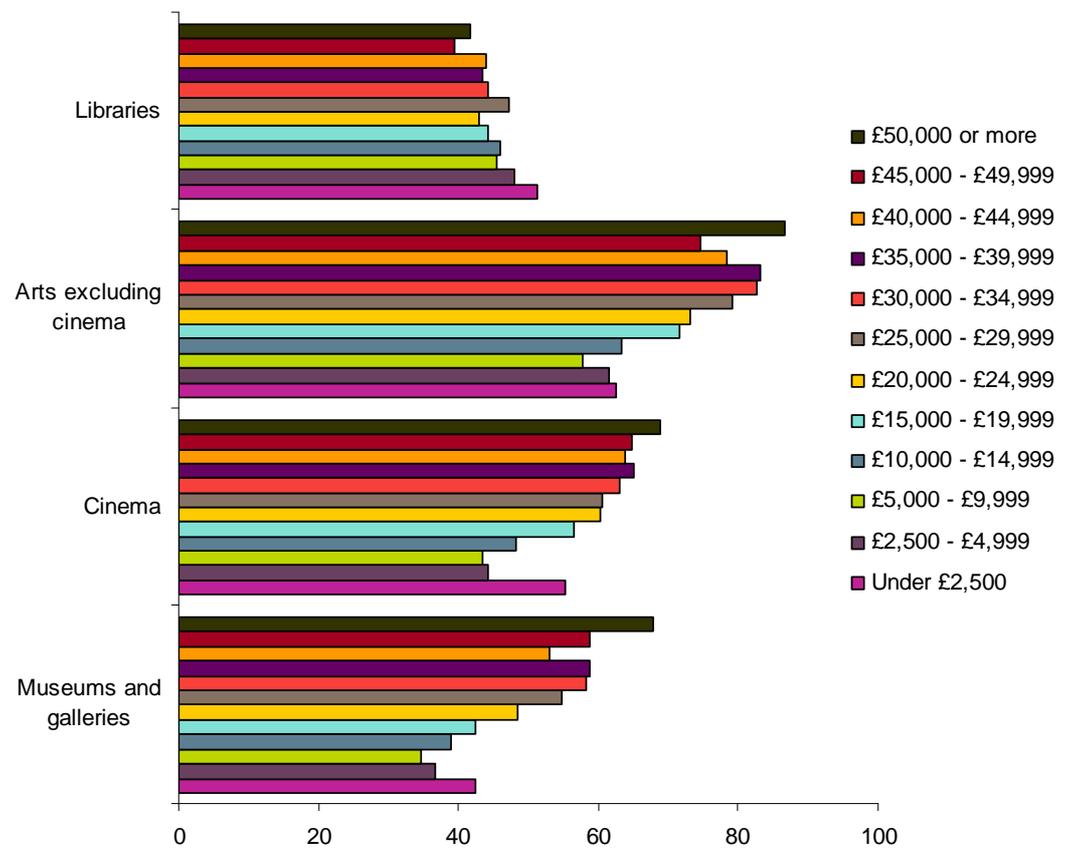
*Taking Part survey, Statistical Worksheet - Libraries, DCMS. *The drop in usage amongst BME groups between 2005/6 and 2009/10 is not statistically significant.*

2.6. People with a long-term limiting illness are less likely to use libraries than those without, but there is a relatively small difference. Other cultural activities show a bigger gap, with those without a long-term limiting illness much more likely to participate.

Usage by income and education

- 2.7. For other cultural activities, there is often a positive relationship between income and participation, with usage increasing as levels of personal income increase.
- 2.8. However, for libraries, a different picture emerges. Those earning the most are actually least likely to have used a library in the last year, but overall, the spread across income groups is much flatter than for other cultural activities.

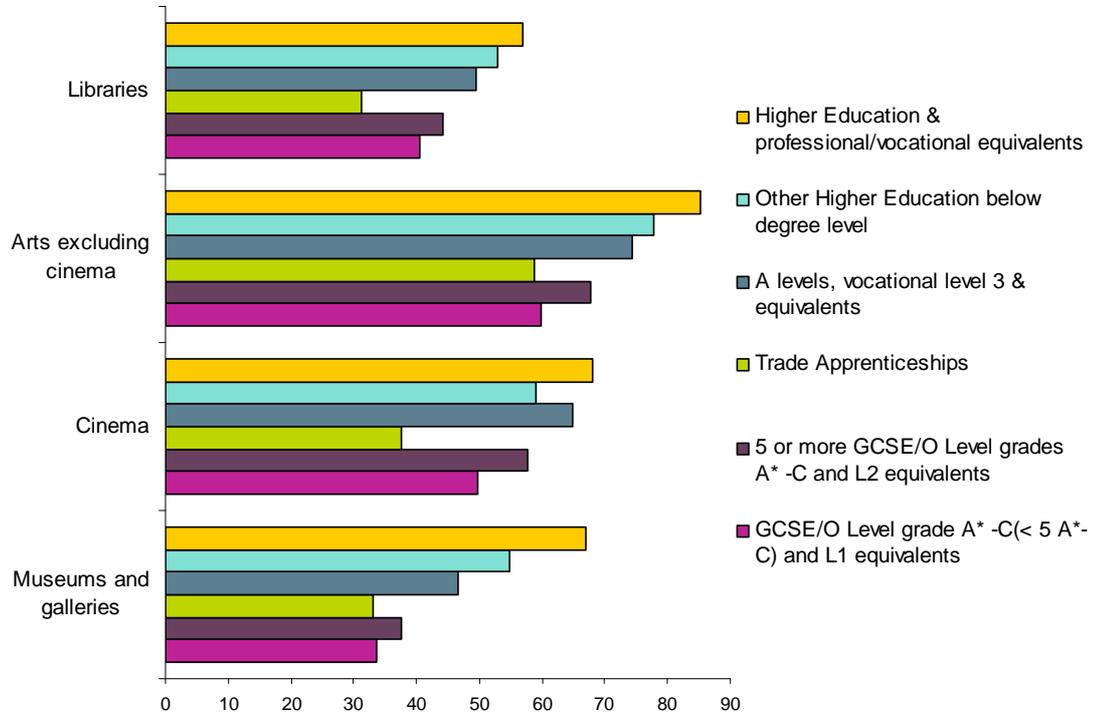
Figure 2.5: Adults participating in cultural activities in the last year, by income



Source: Taking Part Survey, 2007-08, DCMS, accessed via Netquest. Data refers to personal earnings in the last year before tax and other deductions

- 2.9. A greater proportion of highly educated people use libraries than people with fewer qualifications. Nevertheless, the difference in usage between these groups is smaller than for arts activities, and museums and galleries.

Figure 2.6: Adults participating in cultural activities in the last year, by highest level of education



Source: Taking Part Survey, 2007-08, DCMS, accessed via Netquest

Which groups have seen the biggest drops in library usage?

- 2.10. Some socio-economic measures suggest that the biggest declines in library usage in the last five years have been amongst those with greater economic means, while the drop has been less amongst those who are less affluent.
- 2.11. For example, those who are not working are more likely to have used a library than those in employment. Although visits have declined amongst both groups over the last five years, there has been a bigger drop in library visits amongst those who are working than amongst those who are not working.

Figure 2.7: Proportion of adults who have visited a public library in the last year, by employment status

| | 2005/6 | 2009/10 | Difference |
|-------------|--------|---------|------------|
| Not working | 49.7% | 42.4% | -7.3 |
| Working | 47.2% | 37.4% | -9.8 |

Taking Part survey, Statistical Worksheet - Libraries, DCMS

2.12. Similarly, according to Taking Part, five years ago there was a significant difference in library usage between those living in private rented accommodation and owner occupiers, and those in the social rented sector. In 2009/10, library participation was still lowest amongst those in social rented housing but was not significantly lower than amongst the other groups.

Figure 2.8: Proportion of adults who have visited a public library in the last year, by housing tenure

| | 2005/6 | 2009/10 | Difference |
|-----------------------|--------|---------|------------|
| Private rented sector | 53.3% | 39.8% | -13.5 |
| Owners | 48.7% | 39.8% | -8.9 |
| Social rented sector | 41.9% | 36.8% | -5.1* |

*Taking Part survey, Statistical Worksheet - Libraries, DCMS. *The drop in usage amongst those living in the social rented sector between 2005/6 and 2009/10 is not statistically significant.*

Self-defined usage

- 2.13. Our research has found that the way people describe their usage of libraries is fairly complex, and does not necessarily reflect their frequency of library use.
- 2.14. For example, the results of the quantitative survey carried out by Ipsos MORI as part of this project show that respondents who use libraries at least monthly are generally likely to define themselves as current users. However, there is more of a mixed picture when it comes to less frequent use. Three in ten (30%) who have used libraries over a month ago but within the last six months consider themselves to be lapsed users, while six in ten (63%) perceive themselves to be current users. Conversely, for those using libraries over six months ago but within the last year, around half (54%) consider themselves to be lapsed users, but 32% still regard themselves as current users.

Self-defined library users

- 2.15. In our survey overall, 57% of respondents said that they were current library users. People who had used libraries recently were highly likely to think of themselves as 'current library users': 97% of those who had used libraries in the last week said they were current users, while 93% of those who had used in the last month (but not in the last week) felt the same. Our survey also found that:
- Women were more likely than men to see themselves as 'current users' (64% compared with 50%).
 - Those with children in the household aged up to 17 were more likely to see themselves as 'current users' (64% compared with 53% of those who do not have children).

- Older people (aged 65+) and middle aged people (aged 35-44) were more likely than other age groups to say they were current users (65% and 62% respectively).
- Amongst people who were not working full-time, 64% defined themselves as current users compared to half (48%) of those working full-time.

Self-defined non-users

- 2.16. Some 15% of respondents to our survey said that they were ‘not a library user’. Yet, according to our survey, the great majority of people who defined themselves as ‘not a library user’ actually appeared to have had contact with public libraries at some point in the past (90%), and one in six (16%) said they had used a library service at least once in the last year.
- 2.17. The qualitative research points to some possible explanations behind this. For example, these people may have joined a library for a limited or specific purpose (e.g. to borrow a piece of sheet music), and, having done what they wanted, not used the library service again. Others may have been to the library on behalf of someone else, and consequently did not consider themselves users. For example, people who took their grandchildren to children’s activities, or who read the papers while their partner was borrowing books, did not always consider that they had used libraries. Our focus groups found several people who had been into libraries in the last year, but thought that that their usage ‘didn’t count’ because they had not gone in to borrow books.

“I go to the library but I take my children, I don’t use it. I personally don’t use it.”
Lapsed user, industrial town

- 2.18. The profile of people who defined themselves as ‘not a library user’ showed that:
- Men were more likely than women to say they were non-users (20% compared with 10%).
 - Younger adults (aged 18-24) were the most likely to define themselves as a non-user (22% vs. 15% of respondents overall) and the least likely to define themselves as a current user (45% compared with 57% of respondents overall).

People who say they used to be library users, but are not any more

- 2.19. Some 28% of respondents to our survey said that they ‘used to be a library user, but were not any more’. Our survey found that the groups most likely to classify themselves in this way included:
- People in full-time work (35%)
 - People who look after the home (36%)
 - Those who do not have children in the household aged up to 17 (30%)
- 2.20. These patterns all underline the importance of changes in personal circumstances to library use. As our focus groups found, major changes in somebody’s day-to-day life (e.g. getting a full-time job or children leaving home) may mean they no longer have the same reason or opportunity to visit libraries, moving them from being ‘current’ to what we might call ‘lapsed’ users. Conversely, as people retire or have children they may be more likely to become ‘users’ again.

The link between childhood and adult library usage

- 2.21. Childhood library usage has been found to be an important predictor of library usage later in life and that people who recall being positively encouraged to read as a child are also more likely to use libraries later in life (EPPI Centre and Matrix Knowledge Group, 2010). Our own qualitative research backed this up, with the majority of those who were current users saying that childhood usage was important in getting them “hooked” on libraries. The majority of focus group participants supported the idea of getting children into libraries at a young age, for example through partnerships with schools.⁷

⁷ Focus group participants were not always aware of the types of partnerships that exist between schools and libraries - examples include the Boys into Books and Book Ahead programmes, both of which were funded by Department for Education and have been evaluated by the MLA.

3. Why do people use libraries?

3.1. People use libraries for a wide variety of reasons. Our research explored the range of different services used by different groups within library audiences. We then probed further to try to understand why people choose to use libraries. We have described these factors as ‘incentives’ for library use. Finally, we look at what might be the underlying motivations behind library usage.

3.2. Our research shows that:

- Book borrowing is the most common activity amongst library users in our survey, with 76% using libraries to borrow books for pleasure and 44% for study. Nevertheless, a sizeable proportion use libraries for other purposes, such as to use computers (20%) or to rent DVDs or CDs (15%).
- Reasons for going to libraries vary between groups, and some variations might be surprising: our survey found that 18-24 year olds who use libraries, for example, are likely to value them for the quiet study space. Unemployed people are more likely to borrow books for pleasure than those who are in employment.
- Some elements of the library service offer (when delivered well) can act as real incentives for people to choose libraries over alternatives such as bookshops or online retailers. These include: a good range of books; helpful, friendly and knowledgeable staff; and a pleasant library environment. Some users are attracted by libraries’ ‘emotional appeal’ – going to the library makes them feel good, for example because they feel welcomed, safe and relaxed.
- Other ‘selling points’ for libraries include the unique services on offer, and the fact that services are free or cheap. Libraries make books accessible to people who could not otherwise afford to buy them, and they also offer users who do buy books the opportunity to try out new authors, ‘risk free’. Access to reference books, that would otherwise be expensive, is also appealing.
- The physical space provided by the library building is important for many library users, particularly those who are motivated by a desire for social contact – or conversely, those motivated by a desire to spend some ‘quiet’ time alone in an environment where this is seen as safe and acceptable.
- Other underlying motivations for library use include a love of reading and particularly the opportunity for discovering new things that libraries provide; and an aspiration to educate children or undertake lifelong learning or personal development.

What do people do at the library?

- 3.3. The quantitative survey commissioned as part of this research project asked all respondents who considered themselves library users what their main reasons were for using library services.
- 3.4. The survey showed that book borrowing was overwhelmingly the most popular activity amongst users. Some 76% of users borrowed books for pleasure, and 44% borrowed books for study. Nevertheless, significant proportions of people used libraries in order to use computers, or as a source of information, as well as for other purposes, as Figure 3.1 shows.

Figure 3.1: Main reasons for using library services - top six responses

| | % of respondents |
|--|------------------|
| Using/ borrowing books for pleasure | 76% |
| Using/ borrowing books for study | 44% |
| Use computers with Internet connections | 20% |
| Find local information, e.g. maps, phone numbers, tourist information, information about public services | 17% |
| Rent CDs, DVDs, videos or vinyl | 15% |
| Somewhere to take the children/children's activities and clubs | 14% |
| <i>Source: Ipsos MORI. Base: All who consider themselves current library users (631) Respondents were not read a list of services, but asked for unprompted, 'top-of-mind' answers</i> | |

- 3.5. The survey showed some significant differences in what people do at the library amongst different demographic groups. For example, among self-defined users:
 - Users aged 65+ were more likely than users overall to say they go to use or borrow books for pleasure (82% vs. 76%), and to read newspapers or magazines (11% compared with 6%). They were also more likely than users overall to say they use the library as a community focal point (7% vs. 3%) and to conduct family history research (6% compared with 3%).
 - For younger users, libraries were more important as a place for quiet research. Those aged 18-24 were more likely than users overall to say they read or borrow books for study (72% vs. 44%) or that they go because it is a place where they can study (17% compared with 6%).
 - For users aged between 25 and 44, taking children to the library is a particularly important reason for going (30% compared with 14% overall), whereas those aged 45-64 were more likely than average to say they go to find out local information (27% vs. 17%).

- Full-time employees were more likely than average to say they use or borrow books for study (50% vs. 44% of users overall) or rent CDs, DVDs, videos or vinyl (19% vs. 15%). Their non-working counterparts were more likely to say they borrow or use books for pleasure (84% of part-time workers and 85% of retired respondents vs. 76% of users overall).
- Users in education or training were the most likely to say they read or borrow books for study purposes (80% vs. 44% for users overall) or that they go to the library because it is somewhere where they can study (30% compared to 6% of users overall).
- Studying is also an important reason why users from minority ethnic backgrounds use library services. They were more likely than others to say they borrow or use books to study (61% vs. 41% of those from a white ethnic background) or that they go because the library is a place to study (21% compared with 4%).
- There was a similar split between rural and urban users, with those in urban areas being more likely to say they use or borrow books for study (47% vs. 35% of rural users). On the other hand, rural users were more likely to say they borrow or use books for pleasure (85% compared with 72%). Those living in London were also particularly likely to say libraries are a place they go to study (16% compared with 6% overall).
- Women users were more likely than male users to say they go to the library because it is somewhere to take their children (19% compared with 8%).

Why do people choose to use libraries?

3.6. Going beyond describing the range of services used by different groups, we aimed to draw out the reasons why people choose to use libraries. We describe these as the 'incentives' for use. These can be seen as the factors that differentiate libraries from other sources of similar services (e.g. commercial bookshops). They represent strengths within the current offer. These include that:

- libraries are cheaper than alternatives
- libraries offer some people a preferable option than alternatives
- there are aspects of library services that are unique
- library services have an emotional appeal.

Libraries are cheaper than alternatives

3.7. The fact that library membership and use of most services are free was a big incentive to many users. Our focus groups, as well as some other research

studies, found that this was a particular benefit for users from lower income groups, and for people who borrowed a lot of books (who were often older people).

- 3.8. Other research found that younger people who used libraries tended to see libraries as a ‘clever choice’ in economic terms, because not only were services free that they might otherwise pay for, but libraries offered a chance to ‘try before you buy’ (Define Research and Insight, 2006).
- 3.9. Libraries also offer readers “the opportunity for risk-free experimentation with authors and genres of books they might not otherwise read”. According to another study (which surveyed over 2,000 people), 46% of those who sometimes borrow instead of buying books do so because it enables them to try out new authors or subjects and over half say they are willing to experiment when borrowing, compared with 13% who would experiment when buying (Book Marketing Ltd, 2000).
- 3.10. Further, for ‘heavy readers’ and those with less disposable income, buying alone is not an option. 61% of those who sometimes borrow, use libraries because they can’t afford to buy all that they want to read (Book Marketing Ltd, 2000).

“For pensioners [it’s] a question of money. You can’t afford to buy every book you read.” Library user, older person, rural area

For some, libraries are a preferred option

- 3.11. Our focus groups also showed several aspects in which libraries could have an edge over other sources of similar services or activities. Not all libraries currently matched users’ expectations in these areas. However, where users were happy with services, they picked out these elements as key incentives to library use:
 - **Friendly and knowledgeable staff** - users valued staff’s expertise, in particular their ability to help with inquiries for information, and to recommend books that readers might like. They also valued friendliness and good customer service. For example, a group of older users in a rural area described how staff at their local libraries would get to know them and make recommendations around books they might like.
 - **Range and quality of books** - when libraries ‘got this right’ they were seen as better than their competitors - for example, for a group of older, regular library users in a rural area, the range of books offered by their library was said to be better than on the high street, as it was “not just best sellers”.
 - **A quiet, relaxing, safe space** - the library space meant different things to different groups of people, but the physical library building was highly valued

by many user groups for its unique features – a quiet space without too many distractions to study or relax, a safe space where children could go on their own, and a space for some groups to socialise.

"At home I can't concentrate, I'll just get up and make a brew whereas in the library..." Library user, parent, industrial town

Libraries offer some unique services

3.12. Our focus groups showed that libraries also offered some services that users simply couldn't get elsewhere. These included some services that all libraries offer, as well as specialist services available within some, but not all libraries. For example:

- For those studying (of all ages), **access to reference books** was an important reason to visit the library. Not all learners had access to university or college libraries. While focus group participants studying at universities sometimes questioned why others used public libraries for study, it was clear that people doing distance learning, studying at school or college, or studying or researching on their own really valued access to reference works in public libraries.
- Some users spoke of their delight at **being able to "order any book"**, and in particular, expensive books that they would never have been able to afford otherwise. One user described ordering a book that would have cost £200, only took two weeks to arrive, and hadn't been borrowed since 1979. Again, this was often a real incentive for people needing particular books for study purposes.

"I find one of the most amazing things about libraries that you can order amazingly specialised books." Library user, industrial town

- The **opportunity to get help from library staff as information professionals** was also mentioned by some focus group participants – and information services tend to be very highly rated in user satisfaction surveys, as chapter four of this report shows.

"If you need information, it's a nice place to start". Library user, urban area

- **Free use of the Internet** was also seen as unique, and a real incentive for those who didn't have this at home, who included some people in lower income groups, older people and unemployed people.
- The opportunity that libraries provided for **children** to get involved in activities and more generally, to help them develop a love of reading, were strong

incentives for parents – again, particularly because these activities were free, or low cost.

- Some users had taken advantage of specialist **services unique to particular libraries** or authorities, such as genealogy research materials and courses and music libraries. While these tended to have niche appeal, they also provided a clear reason to use public libraries over alternatives. Some focus group participants recommended that libraries should develop their ‘specialist’ offers.

“Here’s my idea – have different libraries specialising in different areas of collections.” Non-user, urban area

- It was clear in the research that libraries also offer something unique in relation to **learning opportunities** as they provide an informal environment for learning. Libraries’ non-exclusivity - the fact that “anyone can walk in” – was picked out as an important incentive by users in less affluent areas. This theme was reflected in relation to online learning in Brophy (2004), who found that users of the People’s Network were attracted to libraries to learn. The environment of a library (not a formal learning institution) gave them the confidence to take part, particularly for older learners, or ‘reluctant’ learners.

The emotional appeal of libraries

- 3.13. It was clear that users found libraries appealing not just because they offered services that they needed, but because they appealed to them emotionally as well. Library users participating in our focus groups on the whole used positive words to describe how the library made them feel the last time they visited: “relaxed”, “happy”, satisfied – “I found what I wanted”, “grateful”, “welcome”.
- 3.14. The library environment clearly had an influence on this appeal for some. Users often described libraries as places that were non-threatening and not intimidating, friendly, clean and comfortable.

“Libraries are a haven for some people.” Library user, urban area

“It’s like a sanctuary.” Library user, rural area

[Libraries are] “a place of tranquillity and focus.” Library user, industrial town

- 3.15. For some, the emotional appeal of a library was linked to its size and perceived ease of use and access. In one area where we carried out focus groups, the central library drew criticism from users and non-users for being “intimidating”, “too big”, “difficult to get to” and “difficult to find things in”, while smaller, local libraries were seen as much more friendly and welcoming. Several of our focus groups

found that the personal service that staff in smaller libraries offered was highly valued, particularly by older people, and some users stressed the importance of local libraries and said that they would not use libraries if their local library shut down. However, it was not always the case that ‘small is better’ - in another area where we carried out focus groups, the Victorian county library was often referred to in a positive light even though most people also used local libraries, and in a third area, the large, well equipped flagship library was also viewed very positively. Most focus group participants tended to think that a mix of small and large libraries was needed.

Underlying motivations for use

- 3.16. An interesting model posited in *‘Culture on Demand’* (FreshMinds, 2007), suggests that contextual, personal, perceptual, practical and experiential factors are all important in determining cultural engagement – and that the personal factors have often been under-researched.
- 3.17. Our research drew out a number of reasons for usage that could be described as ‘underlying motivations’. These concerned the role libraries played in people’s lives and their personal motivations for using libraries. We found that people were most often motivated by: a love of reading; a desire for education or personal development; wanting to make contact with others; or conversely, wanting the peace, space and opportunity to be alone that libraries are seen to offer.

A love of reading

- 3.18. Our focus groups found that the key motivation for many was a love of reading. It was common for users amongst all demographic groups to describe their passion for reading as motivation to use libraries. Although some also used libraries for other purposes (e.g. job hunting on the Internet), they often still described their primary motivations as relating to reading and finding out new things. This applied to users in all age groups, although more affluent groups, and older people, tended to associate libraries most closely with reading for leisure.
- 3.19. When talking about reading as a motivation for library use, people tended to speak in enthusiastic terms. For example, users described the opportunities for “discovery” and “interest” that libraries offered – both in terms of finding out new knowledge, and finding new writers or works of fiction that they would not otherwise have come across.

“I absolutely love the library. It’s got me interested in things that I wouldn’t think I would be interested in.” Library user, market town

- 3.20. Another study, a survey of 150 users in two libraries (Hayes and Morris, 2005), explored the value of reading to users' lives. It found that the majority of respondents thought that reading was 'very important' or 'essential' to their spare time, something they felt they literally couldn't live without. Reading was also found to be very important for relaxation.

"Reading is my hobby plus my need and I cannot live without books. I think it is the most valuable thing in our life." User quotation from Hayes and Morris, 2005

Children's education, lifelong learning and personal development

- 3.21. Our focus groups found that education and learning was a strong motivation, particularly for parents, students, people living in urban areas and people from minority ethnic groups, who often saw education as libraries' main purpose.
- 3.22. Virtually all participants in our focus groups thought that libraries had a key role to play in children's education, and parents often used libraries to help their children learn – both by taking part in children's activities, and by taking their children to the library to read to/with them. Another study with parents of young children found that this group valued the learning environment that libraries offered, seeing it as more 'wholesome' than alternatives (Define Research and Insight, 2006).

"I think it's good for them [children] to explore and investigate in a physical world, not a virtual one." Library user, parent, industrial town

"I'm a little bit selfish – I'm trying to enforce my literary taste on children – haven't got them on Chekhov yet." Library user, parent, industrial town

"The job of the library should be to continually endeavour to get young people there - nothing can compare to holding a book – it's about getting young people and children reading." Non-user, older person, rural area

- 3.23. Adults were also motivated to use the library for study or 'self-betterment'. Sometimes by this they meant opportunities to take courses, and some participants in our focus groups had taken up formal learning opportunities at libraries. However, most often, participants in our focus groups referred to study they were undertaking as part of a course offered by another institution, or simply research they were undertaking for their own interest.

Social contact and 'somewhere to go'

- 3.24. A really important motivation for some groups to use libraries was as an opportunity for social contact. Libraries offered the opportunity to get out of the house and catch up on local news. For some groups, particularly older people,

parents and people living in rural areas, it was seen as a social hub and a good place to meet friends.

“The library is the hub of village – you get all the gossip. You get to know the librarians.” Library users, rural area

- 3.25. Our research also found that for people experiencing isolation, libraries were sometimes seen as a “lifeline”. This has been reflected in other research - Hayes and Morris (2005), for example, found that “for those who live alone, especially older people, a regular visit to the library is an important point in their week.”

“Bean counters don’t understand the real value of a library. For people who live in villages on their own, [visiting the library] is like an outing.” Library user, rural area

“It’s somewhere to go, to get out of the house, you know. Sometimes I spend all day in here, find a quiet corner and read the papers...It’s really important to me to be able to come here otherwise I’d just be wandering the streets.” User quotation from Hayes and Morris, 2005

- 3.26. For families, another motivation to use libraries that we found was the chance for a trip out. Libraries were described as a reliable, convenient option for people, particularly from lower-income groups, looking for an activity outside the house to do with their children. Again, this has been reflected in other research. As one study noted, “for some, the family day out role is far more prominent and meaningful than any information seeking function” (Usherwood et al, 2006).

“I know if I’m really stuck for something to do, we can go and she’ll [my daughter will] enjoy it.” Library user, parent, industrial town

‘Me time’

- 3.27. Conversely, some users in our focus groups also mentioned how libraries offered a space where it was okay to be on their own, and valued libraries a place where they could get some “peace and quiet”. For those with busy lifestyles, such as parents, going to the library meant they could have some time to themselves.
- 3.28. This theme was reflected strongly in research carried out with 14-35 year olds (Define Research and Insight, 2006), which described the ability of libraries to “accommodate or facilitate quality ‘me time’” as a “core trigger” for library usage amongst this group. While providing personal space, libraries also “legitimised being alone”, which was valued by users in this age group.

4. User experience and satisfaction with services

- 4.1. This chapter explores the quality of the customer experience for current library users. The research shows that:
- Satisfaction with library services overall is very high amongst users. However, satisfaction ratings are not always linked to 'objective' measures of quality, such as level of book stock or opening hours. This suggests that these ratings may be linked to perceptions of value of library services (and in turn how aware people are of what they offer) and loyalty to services, as well as (and perhaps more than) quality of services and the customer experience.
 - The factors that seem most important in driving customer satisfaction are: the range of books on offer being good, staff being helpful, staff being friendly, and the library being convenient and easy to get to. These key elements also came through as 'incentives' to library use, for current users.
 - The Public Library User Survey suggests that current users tend to be very satisfied with the service they get from library staff, but less so with the range and quality of books on offer - suggesting the latter is an area where the current user experience could be improved.

Satisfaction with services amongst library users

- 4.2. When asked if they are satisfied with services, library users tend to rate them very highly.
- 4.3. For example, 92% of the 724,440 respondents to the Public Library User Survey (PLUS) in 2006/7 rated their library overall as 'good' or 'very good' (51% rated their library overall as 'very good' and a further 41% rated their library as 'good').
- 4.4. A similar finding came through our own survey, which asked respondents to say how satisfied they were with local library services. Amongst those who defined themselves as 'current users', 94% were 'very' or 'fairly' satisfied. As might be expected, satisfaction is highest among the most frequent users of public libraries: those who say they used a library in the last week (95% say they were satisfied) or the last month (94%).
- 4.5. However, these high ratings, while positive, do not mean that library services should be complacent about the need to improve the customer experience. There is still scope for improvement – moving ratings from 'good' to 'very good' – and our own focus groups found that, while some user groups were very satisfied with current library services, they still saw areas where the customer experience was less positive. Research by the Audit Commission (2002), meanwhile, noted that

very high satisfaction levels may be partly driven by users' loyalty to services and a desire to protect them, and found that PLUS ratings were not correlated with other 'objective' indicators of quality, such as opening hours or quantity of stock.

What drives user satisfaction?

4.6. Our survey asked users who said they were satisfied with library services (the vast majority of all users) why this was. Respondents were asked for 'top of mind' answers, rather than being read a list of options. The aim of this was to find out what drives customer satisfaction. The findings showed that satisfaction amongst users is driven by a number of factors, but most importantly:

- range of books being good (cited by 40% of satisfied users)
- staff being helpful (39%)
- staff being friendly (23%)
- library being close by or convenient to reach (22%)

4.7. These findings reflect closely the 'incentives' for library use identified in chapter three, above.

4.8. Reasons for being satisfied vary between different demographic groups. For example, satisfaction amongst younger users is more likely to be driven by the range of books (56% of users aged 18-24 who are satisfied with library services cite this compared to 40% of satisfied users overall) and those in education or training (56%).

4.9. The helpfulness of staff is more likely to drive satisfaction for older users (47% of users aged 65+ who are satisfied cite this, compared to 39% of satisfied users overall).

4.10. Users aged 25-44 are more likely than other groups to say they are satisfied because the library is a good place to take children (20% vs. 10% of all satisfied users).

How satisfied are library users with specific aspects of the service?

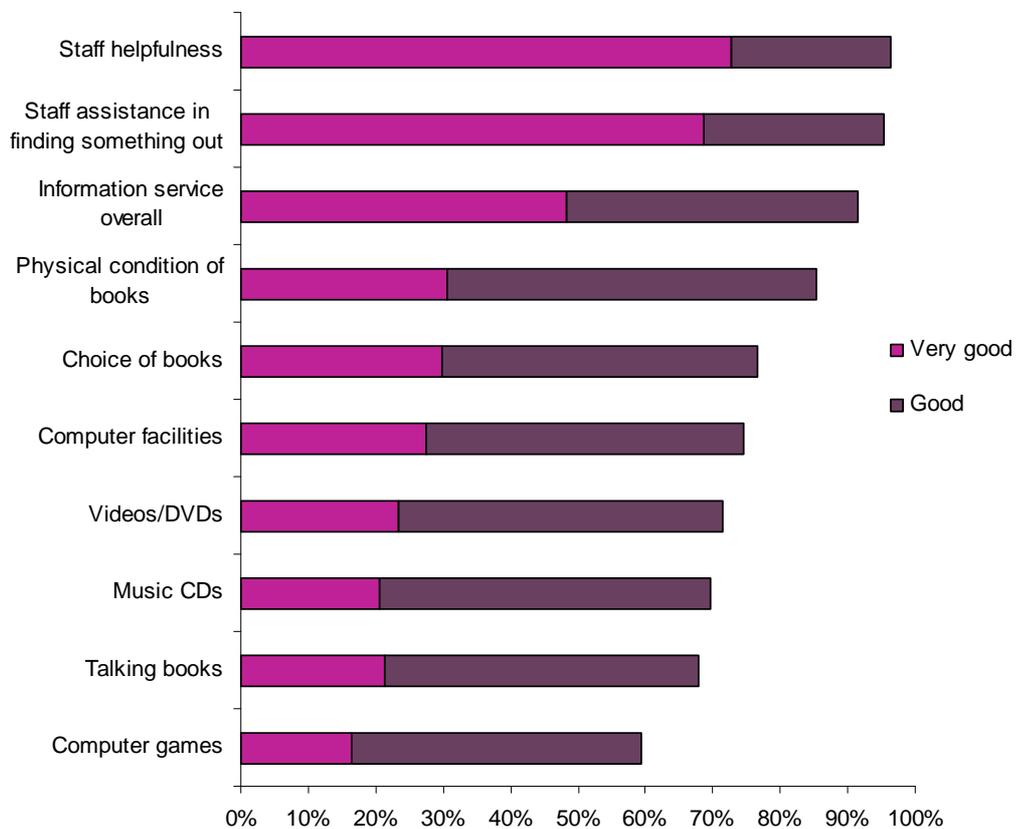
4.11. The Public Library User Survey (PLUS) goes further than our survey, asking users to give ratings to each aspect of the library service that they have used.

4.12. PLUS data shows that respondents are more willing to rate the overall library service as 'very good', than they are to rate specific *aspects* of the service as 'very good'. The exceptions to this are responses relating to library staff. As figure 4.1 shows, satisfaction with staff assistance in finding things out is very high; in 2006/7

some 68% of respondents rated this as ‘very good’, and nearly half of respondents in the same year thought that the information service overall was ‘very good’. Some 72.7% of respondents thought that staff helpfulness was ‘very good’.

- 4.13. Nevertheless, in relation to other aspects of the service offer, PLUS data hints that some improvements might be needed. For example, less than 30% of PLUS respondents rated the condition and choice of books as ‘very good’. Given the importance of this as an incentive to library use, and in driving overall satisfaction with services as our own survey suggests, this stands out as an area for further development.

Figure 4.1: User satisfaction with specific aspects of the library service



Source: Public Library User Survey National Report, 2006-7, CIPFA, Total UK responses PLUS is a self-completion questionnaire; respondents are asked to rate all services they have used

- 4.14. The quality and range of the book offer also came up as an issue in virtually all of our focus groups, with current users, and a number of those who had been users in the past, concerned about not being able to get the books they wanted in libraries. However, there were some divergent views - some groups wanted to be able to get hold of bestsellers, saying this was difficult in their local libraries, and that they often had to buy these elsewhere instead. Other groups, including older

people who were very regular library users, thought that too much space was given to bestsellers, and that there needed to be more “quality reads” or classics available. Some participants talked about a lack of depth in the offer, and the difficulty of finding specialist reference material or a good range of genre fiction. There was a sense that the proportion of library space given over to books was declining and this was seen as a bad thing.

Users’ experience of library services

- 4.15. Further questions in the Public Library User Survey explore more objective measures of user experience, by asking whether users got what they wanted from the library, on the specific occasion when they filled out the questionnaire. Responses to these questions present a mixed picture. For example, in 2006/7, 87% of users who came to libraries to borrow books were able to find one to borrow.
- 4.16. However, only 40% of those who came for a music CD succeeded in borrowing one. Some 76% of people who came to the library in order to find something out succeeded in doing so (although most of the rest succeeded at least ‘in part’). This may in part explain the lower satisfaction ratings with videos/DVDs, music CDs and computer games shown in figure 4.1, above. The qualitative research carried out as part of this project also found that some users felt that the range of DVDs and music CDs was limited.

Figure 4.2: PLUS findings on user experience

| Users who came to the library specifically to do the following AND SUCCEEDED in doing so: | Percentage |
|--|------------|
| Borrowing books | 86.9% |
| Using a computer | 89.1% |
| Finding something out | 75.9% |
| Borrowing talking books | 51.8% |
| Borrowing videos/DVDs | 50.0% |
| Borrowing music CDs | 40.1% |
| Borrowing computer games | 14.2% |
| <i>Source: Public Library User Survey National Report, 2006-7, CIPFA, Total UK responses</i> | |

5. Why don't more people use libraries?

5.1. Previous research on public library participation has often focused on exploring socio-economic factors associated with use and non-use. Our project aimed to go beneath this to gain a more in-depth qualitative understanding of why some people don't use libraries. The research suggests that non-participation is a result of a combination of factors, which include different motivations and preferences, disincentives to library use (compared with alternatives) and specific barriers to participation.

5.2. The research shows that:

- 'Non-users' are not a homogeneous group. There are many different rational, emotional and practical reasons why people do not use libraries, and these vary between groups.
- Non-use usage cannot just be attributed to 'barriers' to access, although these do exist for some groups. As such, increasing use is not only about 'fixing problems' with the current service.
- Many non-users read for leisure – but currently get their books elsewhere, mainly because other sources are seen as more convenient. Those who read, but do not currently use libraries, may potentially be attracted to the service in future, if libraries can find ways to compete with commercial booksellers.
- Being a 'non-user' is not a fixed state - many people move in and out of library use over the course of their lives, and 'not now' does not necessarily mean 'not ever'. Some people, for example, describe how they used to be library users when they were studying, currently felt no need to use libraries, but expected to return to libraries later in life.
- However, for some people, libraries simply do not fit with their lifestyle or preferences, and there is little motivation for them to use services. It is clear from the research that a significant minority are unlikely to be attracted to use libraries - for example because they "don't like reading".

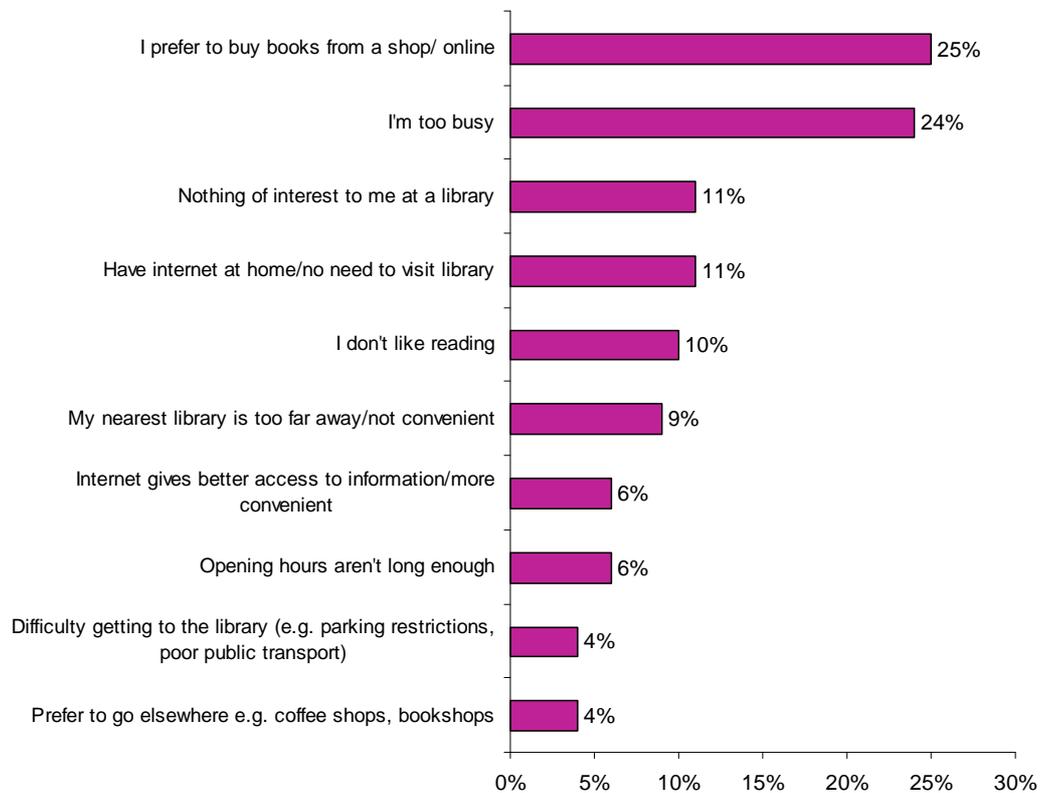
Overview of reasons for non-usage

5.3. Our quantitative survey also asked those who considered themselves not to be current library users (regardless of how recently they had visited a library) to state their reasons.

5.4. '**Lack of time**' was cited as a key reason for not using libraries: 24% of all non-and lapsed users stated that they were 'too busy' to use libraries. This suggests that for these groups, library use is currently not a priority.

5.5. The remaining responses hinted at different underlying reasons for non-use, which are explored in the remainder of this section. For example, 25% of lapsed users and non users in our survey said that one of their main reasons for not using library services was that they prefer to buy books from a shop or online - suggesting that while they may be readers, they prefer alternatives to libraries. Others said that there is nothing of interest for them in the library (11%), or that they have the Internet at home and do not need to go (11%). This suggests that for some, the service offer simply doesn't feel relevant because it doesn't give anything they can't access elsewhere, or they simply prefer to do other things with their time.

Figure 5.1: Main reasons for not using public libraries - top ten responses



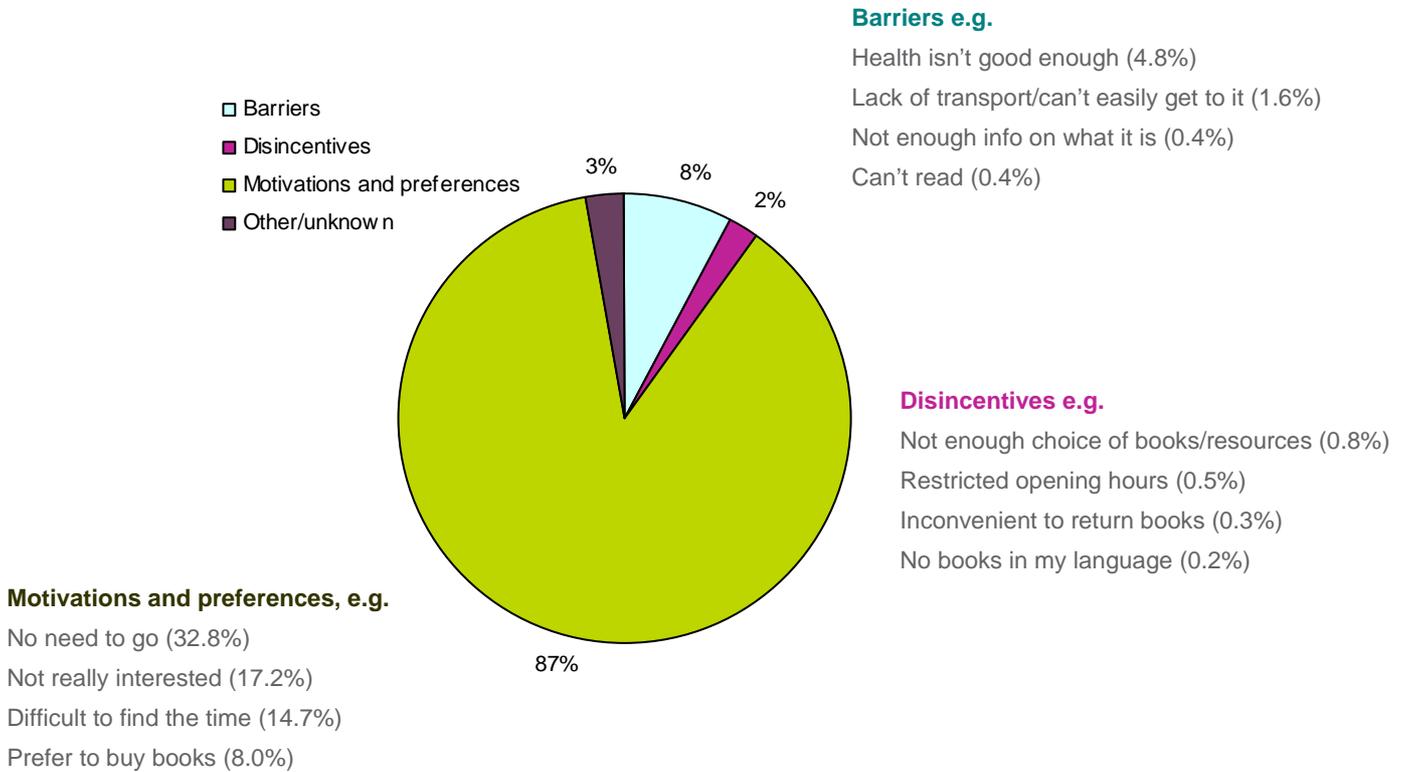
Source: Ipsos MORI. Base: Self-defined lapsed and non-users (470). Respondents were not read a list of options, but were asked for their unprompted, top of mind answers. They could give more than one answer.

- 5.6. To explore reasons for non-use in more depth, we divided these under three headings:
- **Barriers:** personal factors or things about the ways services are delivered that make it difficult for people to use library services, or exclude them in some way.
 - **Disincentives:** factors about the way services are delivered that put people off using library services or make libraries unattractive, 'push factors'.
 - **Motivations and preferences:** personal factors that 'pull' people towards other services or activities or make libraries less relevant to them.

Which types of reasons are the biggest drivers of non-usage?

- 5.7. To explore the relative importance of these three groups of reasons, we analysed findings from the Taking Part survey, which gives data on the reasons for non-use amongst people who have not used libraries in the last year. We have used Taking Part data for this analysis as respondents were only allowed to give one main reason, while in our own survey, multiple responses were permitted.
- 5.8. The analysis suggests that it is most commonly motivational and preference factors that explain non-usage. This is potentially a flawed analysis, as there is some overlap between the categories, and it is not always easy to draw a clear distinction between them.
- 5.9. Nevertheless, it does suggest that, rather than assuming that non-usage is a result of *problems* with the current service (or even with individual non-users), a greater understanding is needed of why some groups are not motivated to use libraries at the moment, and how services might need to be developed in order to be attractive to these groups. On the other hand, it is important to note that 'barriers' may be linked to socio-economic status, so addressing these will be important in order to achieve equity in the way services are delivered.

Figure 5.2: Main reasons for not using libraries



Source: Taking Part survey, DCMS, 2007-08

Barriers to library use

5.10. 'Barriers' are commonly discussed in existing research literature on reasons for non-usage. We have defined these as things that make it difficult for people who might otherwise want to use libraries, to do so. Some are related to characteristics of individuals, while others relate to the library service itself.

Accessibility

5.11. Accessibility, in terms of being able to get to the library, is clearly a barrier for some groups, although overall only 4% of respondents to our survey who were not current library users named this as a 'top of mind' reason for not using libraries. We found, though, that for older people, problems with accessibility were more important as reasons for not using libraries than for other groups. One in ten non-users or lapsed aged 65+ (10%) said they had difficulty getting to the library (e.g. in relation to parking restrictions or poor public transport).

- 5.12. Cost of getting to the library - transport and parking - was also raised in our focus groups as a barrier to use by some users and non-users. This was an issue both in cities, where people discussed the difficulty of getting to city centre libraries, and in rural areas, where getting to any library could be difficult. Our survey found no significant difference between urban and rural respondents in likelihood to name this factor as a barrier to getting to the library.
- 5.13. Other research suggests that the importance of accessibility as a barrier differs by location. For example, a study of non-users of cultural services in Northumberland (Davenport and Newman, 2010) found that “the time, effort and (with children) emotional work of undertaking long journeys on public transport systems that are seen as being (variously) infrequent, unreliable or simply non-existent was a key barrier to people’s participation.”

Not feeling welcome

- 5.14. Our own survey and focus groups did not find a widespread feeling amongst non-users or lapsed users that they would not be welcome in libraries. Nevertheless, some libraries were described as ‘intimidating’. For example, users in one focus group described their central library as difficult to navigate, and this put them off trying this library. However, they still used their local library - so this view was more to do with a specific library than library services generally.
- 5.15. Some of the previous qualitative research into non-user groups that we reviewed found perceptions that libraries are ‘not for people like us’ or would be ‘intimidating’. Amongst young people, for example, one study found that for some this was linked to aspirations and perceptions of the types of people who used libraries - they saw library users as ‘geeky’ and did not want to associate themselves with people like that (Define Research and Insight, 2006).
- 5.16. Amongst some other groups, this view was more linked to how they thought library staff, and other users, might see *them*. Amongst potential adult learners, one study found there was a perception that they would not be welcome - for example they might be told to be quiet (Shovlin, 2005). Define Research and Insight (2006) also found anxiety about ‘looking silly’ amongst non- or lapsed users from lower socio-economic groups and those who had been lower achievers at school. Parents with young children, on the other hand, worried about being “embarrassed” if their children made too much noise in the library.

Personal and social barriers

- 5.17. A meta-review of research into the social impact of museums, libraries and archives (BOP Consulting, 2005), describes how a range of ‘personal and social’ barriers can exclude some members of BME groups and low income white groups

from library usage. These included: lack of basic skills, lack of income, low self-esteem, language barriers, direct and indirect discrimination and social pressures. The impact of poor health as a barrier also shows up in Taking Part data.

- 5.18. These issues were not reflected in our focus groups or survey, but this may be because our research and literature review was not specifically designed to find evidence of personal and social barriers to library usage. While our approach ensured we engaged with a representative cross-section of the population, a more targeted methodological approach would have been needed for us to explore these types of barriers (e.g. by carrying out interviews with people with low skills, people whose first language is not English). This therefore remains an area where more in-depth, targeted research may be needed.

Lack of awareness

- 5.19. The relationship between awareness and library usage is discussed in more depth in chapter seven of this report.

Disincentives to library use

- 5.20. In our research we identified several reasons for non-usage that could be described as 'disincentives' - things that put people off going to libraries. These are slightly different from 'barriers'. They represent things about the ways services are currently delivered or designed that reduce the attractiveness of libraries for some people.

Poor prior experiences

- 5.21. Our research suggested that poor prior experience could be a disincentive to library use and a reason for 'lapsed' usage. Our survey showed that satisfaction was much lower among 'lapsed' users (57%) than amongst current library users (94%). Our focus groups with lapsed users also found examples of people who said that they no longer used libraries because they could not find anything that they wanted to read, or could not find specialist reference books that they wanted.

"There is a need for a public library system... it's just not working as it should be, as a public service, in the shape that it is." Lapsed user, industrial town

- 5.22. Other research has drawn out similar findings. Analysis of Taking Part survey data has shown that visits to libraries are more sensitive to quality of experience than many other cultural and sporting activities (EPPI Centre and Matrix Knowledge Group, 2010). 'Supply-side' factors, in particular falling book stock, are cited as a key reason for falling book borrowing in a study by Grindlay and Morris (2004). Meanwhile, research with 14-35 year olds (Define Research and Insight, 2006) found that stock being out-of-date or of limited interest, and there being insufficient

copies, were mentioned as reasons for no longer using services by people who used to be library users.

- 5.23. However, on the whole, limited stock seemed to be more of a concern to current library users than to non-users. Our survey only found a small proportion of lapsed or non-users (3%) who cited the range and quality of books not being good enough as a 'top of mind' (unprompted) reason for not using libraries. Similarly, Taking Part (2007-8) found only 0.8% of those who had not used libraries in the last year cited 'not enough choice of books' as their key reason for non-usage.
- 5.24. Only a very small proportion of respondents who were not library users (1%) cited 'the staff aren't helpful' as a reason for not using libraries in our survey. Nevertheless, some focus group participants whose library usage had lapsed did mention being put off by unhelpful or "standoffish" staff. This suggests that just as helpful and knowledgeable staff can be an incentive to library use, poor customer service can be a reason for non-usage for a minority of people.

Inconvenient opening hours or location

- 5.25. Some 9% of lapsed and non-users responding to our survey cited 'inconvenience' or 'library is too far away' as a reason for not using libraries, while 6% cited 'opening hours aren't long enough'.
- 5.26. The importance of inconvenience as a disincentive for library use frequently came up in our focus groups when users talked about periods when they had stopped using libraries so often, or were prompted about why they used some libraries rather than others. For some lapsed users, their usage had stopped because, for example, they changed jobs and the library was no longer on their way home. Distance was not a 'barrier' as such – some of these participants could get to the library if they really wanted to - but because it was no longer convenient, the incentive to use libraries had been taken away. Some participants blamed their own "laziness".

"The town centre library might as well be on Mars for me." Lapsed user, industrial town

- 5.27. Other studies have also commented about how library use is often opportunistic. Grindlay and Morris (2004), for example, argued that people are often unwilling to go out of their way to use a library, though they might use it otherwise. Our focus groups backed up this idea. Both users and current non-users frequently mentioned that they would like libraries to be open at more convenient times. Nevertheless, this was rarely the key thing that prevented people who would otherwise be keen to use libraries from doing so. As another research report

concluded, “inconvenience is [often] an ‘amplifier’... If other factors stand against a service or destination then effort to get there/use it is a real issue that prevents use. Where a service is seen as worthwhile, however, inconvenience is almost always overcome or re-evaluated” (Define Research and Insight, 2006).

Access to the Internet at home

- 5.28. Overall, having access to the Internet at home does not appear to make library usage less likely. In fact, access to the Internet and visiting library websites is positively associated with engagement with libraries (EPPI Centre and Matrix Knowledge Group, 2010).
- 5.29. Nevertheless, some people do state that being able to access the Internet at home removes their need to visit public libraries. In fact, this was one of the most commonly stated reasons for non-usage of libraries in our survey, cited by 11% of non-or lapsed users. Some participants in our focus groups also perceived having the Internet at home as likely to make libraries less relevant for some groups, though this tended to be an assumption about others than a reason they gave for themselves.

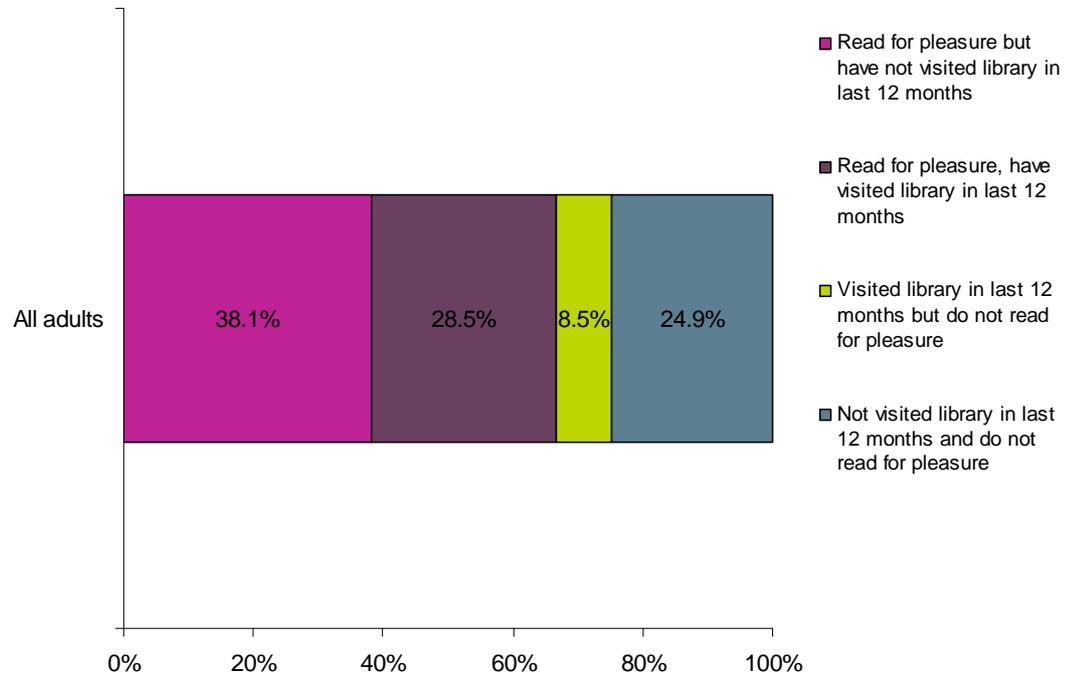
Different preferences and motivations from current users

- 5.30. The Taking Part survey found that the majority of people who have not used a library in the last year say they do not engage with libraries because they are not interested or don't see a need to go. These were much more commonly given as reasons for non-usage than ‘barriers’ or specific ‘disincentives’. In 2007/8, for example, 17.2% of respondents said they were ‘not really interested’ and a further 32.8% said that they had ‘no need to go’.
- 5.31. This suggests that those who do not currently use libraries value or prioritise different things than those who do, and that these different preferences or motivations are among the factors that influence their choice not to use libraries.

Many non-users read - but get their books elsewhere

- 5.32. While a love of reading is often an incentive to library use, a large proportion of those who read for pleasure do not use libraries. Data from Taking Part (2008-09) shows that 38.1% of respondents - equivalent to some 15.9 million people in the English adult population - say they read for pleasure, but had not visited a public library in the last 12 months. This was in fact a larger group than those who read for pleasure and *had* visited a public library (28.5% of respondents, equivalent to 11.9 million adults). Meanwhile, 24.9% of respondents did not read for pleasure, and had not visited a public library in the last 12 months.

Figure 5.3: Reading for pleasure and library usage in England



Source: Taking Part Survey, 2008-09, DCMS

5.33. Taking Part shows that around 11% of those who have not used a library in the last 12 months cite ‘preferring to get books elsewhere’ as their main reason for non-usage. Our own survey, which allowed people to list as many reasons as they wanted, found that a much bigger proportion of lapsed or non-users - 25% - said that they preferred to buy books from shops and online, and that this was a reason for not using libraries. The convenience of buying books online, at high street bookstores or in supermarkets was frequently raised by non- and lapsed users in our focus groups as a reason why library usage was not a priority for them.

Figure 5.4: Primary reason for not using libraries - books from other sources

| Primary reason | % of people who have NOT visited a public library in the last 12 months |
|--|---|
| Prefer to buy books | 8% |
| Have enough books at home | 1% |
| Get books from other sources (friends, charity shops, etc) | 2.2% |

Source: Taking Part Survey, 2007-8, DCMS

- 5.34. Those who read, but do not currently use libraries, may potentially be attracted to the service in future, if libraries can find ways to compete with commercial booksellers. Previous research has shown that book buying and borrowing are not mutually exclusive and that more people do both than borrow or buy only (Book Marketing Ltd, 2000). Nevertheless, more people buy than borrow, and expanding household income has made it easier to buy books - possibly one reason for falling book issues at public libraries (Grindlay and Morris, 2004).

Non-users prefer other sorts of environment

- 5.35. Alongside a preference for book buying is a preference to spend leisure time in different sorts of environments than most libraries offer - or are perceived to offer.
- 5.36. Some non-users in our focus groups commented that the library environment seemed poor quality, or 'low value'. Libraries were sometimes described by non-users as "shabby", "down-at-heel" and "not inviting". This has been reflected in other studies (Define Research and Insight, 2006; MORI, 2002)
- 5.37. For others, the issue is less that libraries themselves are unappealing, but simply that they do not see the library as a social space. For example, younger people without children, and people who work full-time, were less likely to see the library as a place to spend time, and less likely to value the library 'space'. They preferred alternative environments, such as coffee shops, if they were going to relax and read. Focus group research with young people (including our own) found that they did not, on the whole, see libraries as a place where they would go to hang out with friends (Define Research and Insight, 2006), seeing them as a place where they would not be able to make noise - and a place that was not 'cool'.

Some people are not used to libraries

- 5.38. A minority of participants in our focus groups talked about never having been library users, and thinking they probably never would. In our survey, only 2% of people said that they had 'never' visited a library. However, other research has found that lack of exposure to library services, and these not being 'the done thing' in families or peer groups, could contribute to non-participation.

"It's a cultural thing isn't it? I never ever went to the library, and certainly not museums until very recently... in fact I still don't go to museums! I grew up in a small town and it just wasn't part of life. I remember my aunties using the small public library for Catherine Cookson and gardening books... but that's the kind of lasting image it has for me. I've had to use the library since starting college and

now I would encourage the kids to.” Focus group participant, parent, North West, from Usherwood et al, 2006

Some non-users don't see any personal need for libraries

- 5.39. The research suggests that there is a significant minority who cannot see a personal need to use libraries, and whose leisure activities do not overlap with what libraries offer – for example, they do not read for pleasure. Amongst non-users in our focus groups, while many said after discussion that they would consider using libraries in future, some could not think of any service developments that would attract them.

“Since most people have their own computers they use them to find out - you don't need libraries.” Non-user, urban area

“I still wouldn't use it - my life's too hectic.” Non-user, urban area

“Nothing really attracts me to it – seems boring.” Non-user, urban area

- 5.40. Amongst younger non-users in particular, apart from when at school or studying, a general view found in our focus groups was that libraries were not really relevant to them. Younger participants commonly did not see libraries as somewhere to “hang out”, especially if their friends don't go and also commented that if they had the Internet at home the need for a library was reduced. This finding reflects themes in Define Research and Insight's report into library usage amongst 14-35 year olds (2006), which identified a significant group of people who were ‘disconnected’ from library services.

“Your computer is your home library now.” Non-user, urban area

- 5.41. It is difficult, from existing quantitative data analyses, to tell how large this group is. Our survey gave some hints, although is likely to underestimate the true size of this group as questions were unprompted: 15% of those who said they were non-users when asked for their main reasons for not using libraries mentioned that there is ‘nothing of interest to them at a library’. Some 17% said that they did not like reading.

“I don't blame the libraries for me not wanting to use them - I blame me for not wanting to read.” Lapsed user, market town

Why do people stop using libraries?

5.42. Our qualitative research showed four common reasons for lapsed usage:

- Some had been regular library users, but had stopped using libraries because they found they could not get what they wanted – primarily, because they found the range or choice of books to be limited. There were also ‘non-user’ participants who had tried libraries, but felt they could not find what they wanted. Both of these types of participant had since found alternatives, such as buying second-hand books, and tended to think that they would not use libraries again.
- Some people had used libraries occasionally or sporadically for specific purposes, but had never really considered themselves library users. For instance, one lady had used the library (reference books, the computers, photocopiers) to prepare for an interview, and another man had used the library to complete a Learndirect course.
- Some people’s life circumstances had changed, making it more difficult or less convenient for them to go to libraries. Common ‘triggers’ for lapsed usage of this sort included moving house or job to an area where libraries were less easy to get to.
- Some people’s life stage had changed, removing their perceived ‘need’ for libraries. Common ‘triggers’ for lapsed usage included stopping studying or entering full-time work. People in these groups often thought that they may use libraries again in future. Conversely, having children or grandchildren, retiring, or entering unemployment were common triggers for reintroducing adults to libraries. This suggested that taking a ‘life course’ view might help in better understanding library usage patterns.

“Life got in the way I think – you had student life and you didn’t have time to read, then you started a new job.” Lapsed user, industrial town

“It’s more of an age group thing. As a child and when you get older. You have to think about your priorities- return to the library for them.” Lapsed user, urban area

“I would say there’s a spell in your life when you haven’t got time to go to the library. When we retired...[we] started to use the library.” Lapsed user, urban area

5.43. Our survey found that ‘lapsed’ users were more likely to give conditional reasons for not using libraries at the moment, suggesting they might use them in other circumstances. For example, they were more likely than non-users to say they were too busy (27% compared with 18%) or that opening hours were not long enough (8% compared with 2%). Only 7% of ‘lapsed’ users said that they did not

like reading (compared with 17% of non-users), and only 4% of lapsed users said that *none* of the potential improvements listed in the survey would encourage them to make more use of libraries.

- 5.44. However, we should not overstate the likelihood of attracting lapsed users back; not all lapsed users thought that they would use libraries again, at least not in the short term. Like some non-user groups, these lapsed users had found alternatives to libraries, or did not find libraries relevant to their current lifestyle and preferences.

“[I’m] as likely to go back to using libraries as I am to sell my flat-screen TV and go back to black and white portable.” Lapsed user, industrial town

“The library has nothing to offer me - if I read for pleasure I buy off the Internet - maybe later in life.” Lapsed user, urban area

“[I’ll go back] possibly when I’m old and I’ve got more time but not when I’m working.” Lapsed user, industrial town

6. Developing the service and widening participation

6.1. This chapter looks at factors that might encourage people to use libraries more in future. It shows that:

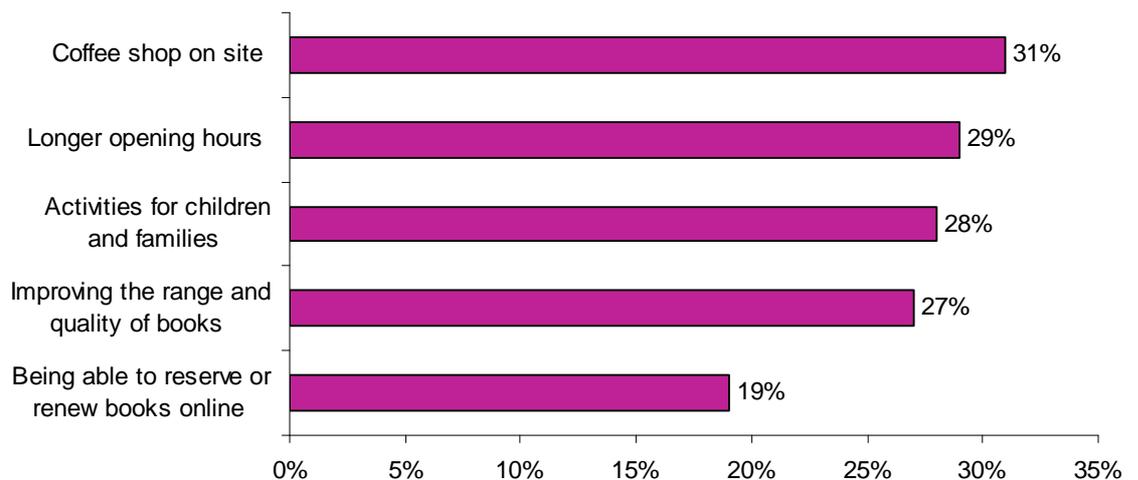
- There is no ‘magic bullet’ that will increase library participation.
- However, some potential service improvements – such as having a coffee shop on site, putting on more activities for children and families and extending opening hours – are important to a range of groups, and do not vary significantly by whether people currently use libraries or not. In fact, coffee shops were most frequently cited as factors that would encourage people to use libraries more – although they were less popular amongst very frequent users, men, and older age groups.
- As current users tend to be quite satisfied with libraries overall, they would prefer to see improvements to the current service rather than fundamental changes to the offer. The quality of the book offer is important to current users. Further, improvements to the customer experience are likely to help retain users whose usage might otherwise ‘lapse’.
- Attracting lapsed users back to the service, and drawing in non-users, is likely to require proactive marketing and advertising. Events, open days and other activities linked to the core offer might help attract some of these groups, as well as promoting other things that are of interest to them, such as specialist services and adult learning opportunities. Nevertheless, as chapter five showed, not all non- or lapsed users will be attracted back, whatever changes are made.

Improving user experience

- 6.2. Our survey asked respondents to say what would most encourage them to use libraries more often, from a list of 13 options (they could also suggest other things that would encourage them if they wished).
- 6.3. Amongst all respondents, ‘having a coffee shop on site’ was the most popular service suggestion, cited by 32% of respondents in total (and 31% of current users). There was no significant difference between users, non-users and lapsed users in terms of likelihood to say this. However, conversely, 23% of all respondents (and 24% of current users) said a coffee shop would *not* encourage them to use libraries more. Again, there was no significant difference across user types, but some differences between demographic groups - people aged 55+, and men, were less likely than average to want coffee shops.

- 6.4. Current users were also likely to say that opening hours should be longer, for example, that libraries should be open later in the evening. In qualitative research, some users commented on weekday closures at their local libraries, which were viewed as “ridiculous”. They were also likely to say that there should be more activities for children and families, and that the range and quality of books should be improved. This reflects users’ priorities and motivations, as discussed in chapter three – for example, the book offer is very important to most current users.
- 6.5. Interestingly, 19% of respondents who were current library users said being able to reserve or renew books online would encourage them to use libraries more – when in fact, library services offer this already. This backs up the finding that there is a lack of awareness, even amongst current users, of what is on offer – further discussed in chapter seven below.

Figure 6.1: Top five factors likely to encourage current users to use libraries more often



Source: Ipsos MORI. Base: 631 people who defined themselves as ‘current library users’

- 6.6. Our qualitative research, as well as some other studies, showed that there is also a range of “small changes” that users would like to see to improve their experience – for example, reducing queues for computers or making the environment more welcoming. Overall, current library users were quite satisfied with the service, so while they had suggestions for improvements, they did not want to see fundamental changes to the way services were delivered. As one focus group participant commented (to wide agreement from the group), “don’t fix it if it’s not broken”.

Current users' views on new service developments

- 6.7. Current users tended to have mixed views on developments such as self-issue machines - some were strongly in favour of these, as they reduced queuing. Others, particularly older users, felt that they reduced the personal touch and found them “alienating”. In most cases people accepted the need to move towards greater automation of the service, but felt that this should not be at the expense of maintaining a knowledgeable and helpful staff base.
- 6.8. Some participants queried whether the library could offer a paid-for online service (distinct from current services for housebound readers) where books were ordered and delivered to your home.⁸
- 6.9. Most current users had not used e-books, although some were interested in doing so. For example, an older lady in one of our focus groups commented that e-books would enable her to borrow more, because she could not carry many physical books. However, she felt she would need help from a library staff member to use e-books.
- 6.10. On the whole, though, current users were more likely to say that they liked “the actual book” and preferred the experience of holding a book to reading online. In two focus groups, users suggested that the future of libraries would be electronic, and this was usually seen as a negative thing.

“Libraries are being taken over by electronic media.” Library user, urban area

- 6.11. Some users also expressed concern at developments that would compromise the ‘quiet space’ provided by libraries, and were keen that libraries should not be “like community centres”. This highlights that developments that might be attractive to some audiences, could put off some others.

Attracting back ‘lapsed’ users

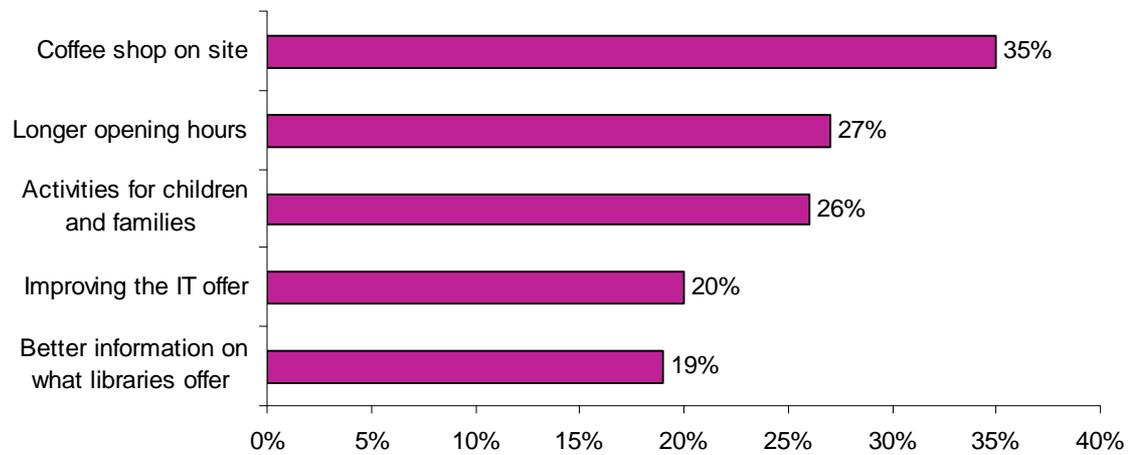
- 6.12. As set out in chapter five above, our focus groups suggested that some ‘lapsed’ users might be encouraged to use libraries again. In exploring the factors that could be important in this, our survey found that lapsed users often shared views with current users. For example, they were also likely to say that having a coffee shop on site, improving opening hours, and improving the range of activities for children and families would encourage them to use libraries more.

⁸ A feasibility study looking at online library loans was commissioned by MLA in 2009. The study, by Hopkins Van Mil: Creative Connections showed that the service was likely to cost more than users would be willing to pay.

“Seems to me that you’ve got to find a way of making me want to take my kids there.” Lapsed user, industrial town

- 6.13. Some 20% of lapsed users said that improving the IT offer would be a factor that would be likely to encourage them to use libraries more often, a concern that was less important for current users (14%).

Figure 6.2: Factors most likely to encourage ‘lapsed’ users to use libraries more often



Source: Ipsos MORI. Base: 308 people who said that they ‘used to be a library user, but are not any more’

- 6.14. Some 19% of lapsed users said that better information about what libraries offer would be likely to encourage them to make more use of libraries. The importance of communication in attracting back lapsed users also came through in our focus groups.

“There isn’t any point if nobody knows about it.” Lapsed user, market town

“I haven’t gone to my local one (or one in town) for a long time...[they should] advertise what they’re doing, what they’ve got- if I went past it I’d probably go in to check it out.” Lapsed user, urban area

- 6.15. Building on this, some lapsed users thought that new types of events or activities, such as ‘meet the author’ events, might help ‘entice’ them back. Nevertheless, on the whole lapsed users wanted libraries to build on, rather than replace, their core offer. They also tended to think that more pro-active advertising, market research and improvements, would be needed to draw them in.

“They need to find out what people actually want [like what we’re doing now] – that’s what a business would do.” Lapsed user, industrial town

“A speaker, discussion groups - like-minded groups ... interested in, I don’t know, art and crafts - or even use a room for a hobby related to books you want to borrow.” Lapsed user, urban area

- 6.16. The research also suggested a need to focus on customer retention to stop users from ‘lapsing’ in the first place. As noted in the previous chapter, some people stop using libraries because they are dissatisfied with services, and in our survey, 14% of self-defined ‘lapsed’ users said that improving the range or quality of books would encourage them to use libraries more often. Reflecting views of current users, lapsed users also sometimes felt that small changes to the customer experience could encourage them to use libraries again.

“A lot of the things we’re talking about aren’t about spending money – customer care, awareness.” Lapsed user, market town

- 6.17. Lapsed users also sometimes questioned the current offer and whether it was appropriate. For example, some, particularly those working and in middle income groups, expressed scepticism that libraries could develop all their services to be competitive with the private sector. DVD and CD hire was not thought to be competitive, and some considered this “obsolete”. Some thought that it was pointless for libraries to offer DVDs as far better alternatives existed, such as LoveFilm.

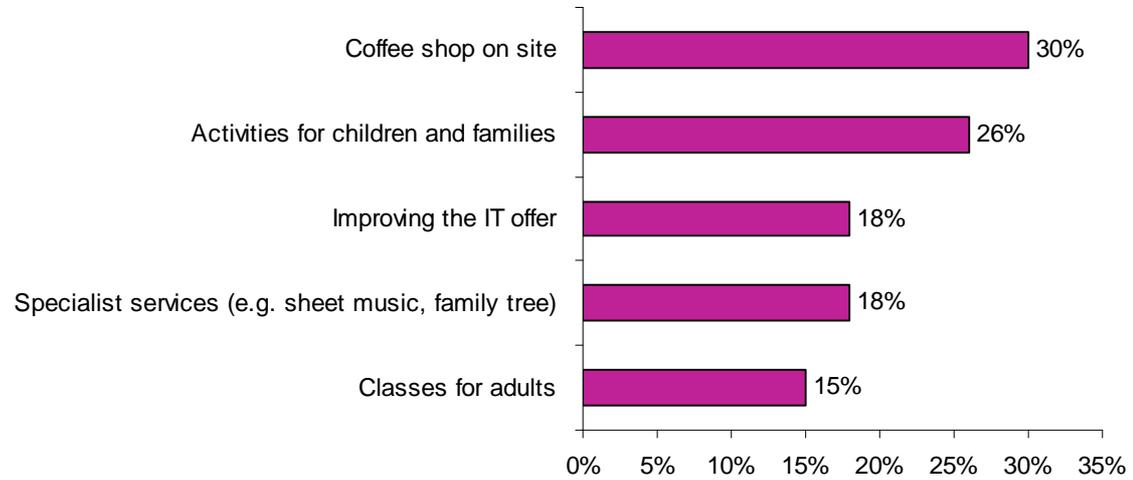
“Loads of people download...and they have come down in price... readily accessible anyway, and a lot cheaper than it used to be.” Lapsed user, urban area

“When they first started to do it [offer DVDs for hire] it was relevant then, but the market’s caught up.” Lapsed user, urban area

Attracting new users

- 6.18. The research suggested that there are some non-users who would consider using libraries in future. Looking at factors that might encourage them, our survey found that, like for other groups, having a coffee shop on site and delivering more activities for children and families were widely supported.

Figure 6.3: Factors most likely to encourage non-users to use libraries more often



Source: Ipsos MORI. Base: 162 people who said that they are not library users

6.19. Only a small proportion of non-users (8%) said that improving the range and quality of books would encourage them to make more use of libraries. Similarly, only 14% of non-users said that longer opening hours would encourage them to make more use of public libraries - significantly fewer than users (29%) and lapsed users (27%).

6.20. Our focus groups suggested that lapsed and non-users might support innovations in the way services were delivered, particularly if these would make services more “convenient”. For example, in two of our focus groups, participants discussed moving libraries to ‘non-traditional’ locations, and expressed some support for this concept. Some participants also suggested that libraries should share buildings, with the Citizens’ Advice Bureau, GPs, etc. Another group thought that locating libraries in other buildings, e.g. pubs and shops, could be sensible, but this should be “targeting a need, rather than creating a need that doesn’t exist”.

“If you had a big library, right next to a supermarket [that would make it more accessible] Parents who are not taking the children [to the library] but they’ve all been to Morrison’s or Sainsbury’s.” Lapsed user, industrial town

6.21. However, the focus groups clearly showed books were still seen as core to the library offer for non-users, and they did not necessarily want to see libraries moving too far away from this.

“I last visited a library 18 months ago and was surprised that one section of the library was being used for careers advice and another for IT. While I understand we’re in an IT revolution it seems that books and the knowledge of the people [that work there] take second place.” Non-user, older person, rural area

- 6.22. As with lapsed users, proactive marketing would be important to draw non-users in, as they would be unlikely to seek libraries out. Raising awareness of where libraries are, when they are open and what they offer would appear to be needed. Amongst some non- and lapsed user groups, there was strong support for open days – either general or aimed at specific user groups. Younger and older participants were more likely to prefer an open day directed at them. For these groups, open days would show that the library was “making a particular effort” and taking an interest in non-users.

“[Open days would show] somebody thinks it’s important enough to want to encourage people like me [middle aged man] along”. Non-user, urban area

SECTION B: THE PUBLIC'S RELATIONSHIP WITH LIBRARIES

This section explores levels of awareness of library services and perceptions of value amongst members of the public, with a view to understanding the library 'brand', and whether there is a 'mandate' for libraries more generally. The chapters within this section include:

- **Chapter 7: Awareness and understanding of the library offer.** This chapter explores how far members of the public feel informed about library services, which aspects of the current library offer they are less aware of, and how far awareness affects usage.
- **Chapter 8: How far do the public value library services?** This section explores how far libraries are valued as public services, and for what reasons they are valued.

7. Awareness and understanding of the current library service offer

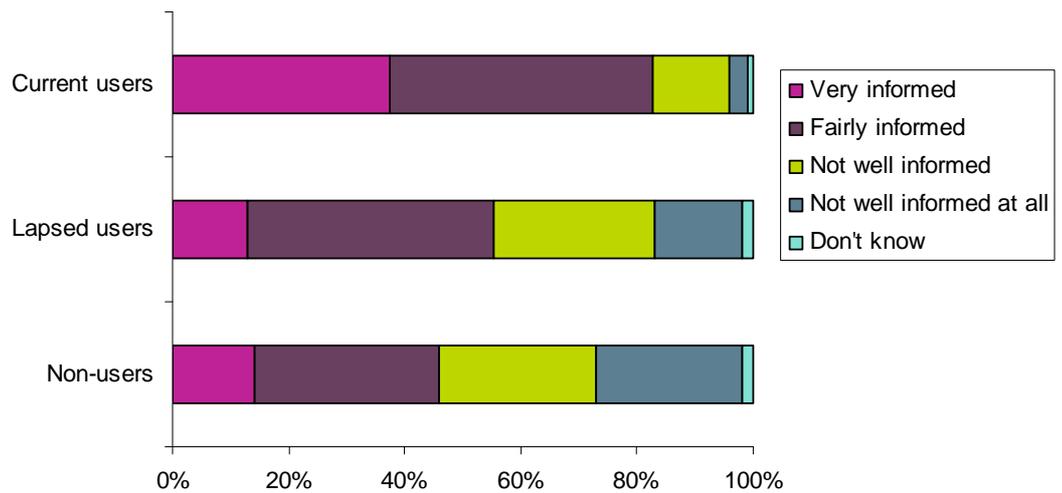
7.1. Library services have widely varying practices in relation to promotion and advertising (Audit Commission, 2002) and it has been argued that low awareness contributes to non-usage of services (Usherwood et al 2006, Shovlin, 2005). The research therefore explored how far members of the public feel informed about library services, which aspects of the current library offer they are less aware of, and how far awareness affects usage. Key findings include:

- The quantitative survey by Ipsos MORI as part of this project found that awareness of services was significantly higher amongst current users (82% felt informed) compared with self-defined 'lapsed users' (55%) or non-users (46%). Only 14% and 13% of non-and lapsed users respectively felt 'very informed' about what libraries do.
- Nevertheless, 'not knowing where my library is or what it does' is only infrequently given as a main reason for non-usage (specifically cited by only 3% of lapsed or non-users).
- Three common themes emerged from the research in relation to public awareness of library services:
 - Non-users may simply 'forget that the library is there'. Libraries are not high profile in the minds of some non-user groups, and limited communication from library services compounds this.
 - Amongst lapsed and non-user groups, most understand the core service offer (book borrowing and access to computers and the Internet), and many are aware of other services, but most are not aware of the full range of what is on offer. Meanwhile, not all current users fully understand the range of services on offer, and some express frustration at this.
 - Some groups have a low understanding of 'what libraries are like now' for example in relation to the library environment, attitudes of staff and the customer experience. Nevertheless, there was general understanding that library services have changed over the years – if not always for the better.
- There was strong support for more advertising and promotion of library services, amongst users, lapsed users and non-users alike. Proactive efforts to reach non-user groups, such as open days and making clear that libraries would value their participation might help to increase usage.

Do members of the public feel well informed about libraries?

- 7.2. Our survey asked respondents how well informed they feel about what they can do at their local public libraries.
- 7.3. As might be expected, the most frequent users felt best informed about public libraries. Over four in five of those who said they had used a library in the last week or month (84%) said they feel informed about what they can do, compared with almost half (49%) of those who said they last used a library over a year ago.
- 7.4. Similarly, over four in five self-defined current users (82%) said they felt informed, compared with just over half of lapsed users (55%) and less than half of non-users (46%).

Figure 7.1: How well informed, if at all, do you feel about what you can do at your local public libraries?



Source: Ipsos MORI. Base: All respondents (1102)

- 7.5. Amongst non-users and some lapsed users, it was common for previous research and our own to find that some people had simply “forgotten the library was there”. Those who had not used libraries as adults, or had not used them for some time, may rarely think about libraries, and a lack of communication from library services meant that they had a very low profile in some people’s minds.

“I just don’t think about libraries”. Non-user, urban area

What aspects of the offer are people aware of?

7.6. Our focus groups explored awareness in more depth amongst groups of users, non-users and lapsed users. We found that awareness of key elements of the core offer – book borrowing, access to computers and the Internet – was high amongst all groups.

7.7. Awareness of the range of services on offer was not as low as might have been expected. Between them, participants in each of the groups (user, lapsed and non-user) could list most of the services commonly available in libraries, and each group came up with a long list of services. Nevertheless, few individuals participating in any of the groups could name all services on offer, and there were some, particularly amongst non-users, who professed very low awareness.

“I don’t know what libraries do you see...I get leaflets about pizzas come through my door...I don’t get a leaflet about the library.” Non-user, urban area

“It’s a well kept secret where the library is.” Lapsed user, urban area

“I’m flabbergasted at the range of things you can do there.” Non-user, older person, rural area

7.8. Further, within most groups, some participants were surprised by some of the other services on offer. Commonly, these participants were unaware of support for researching their family history (e.g. access to genealogy software), the opportunity to buy second hand books in some libraries, web-based services (e.g. the online catalogue, inter-library loans) and some of the courses and activities on offer.

7.9. There was some frustration amongst some users that they didn’t know what was on offer, even though they went into libraries regularly. For example, in some focus groups, participants mentioned activities in local libraries that other users did not know about. It was common for participants to complain about not being able to find a book they wanted in their local library – only to be told by other members of the group that it was possible to order books in from another library. Amongst our user groups, it also seemed that awareness of online services was relatively low – few had tried them and most did not know what they could do via their library website.

7.10. Meanwhile, some participants in non-user groups were unaware of where their local library was, and some even commented about library signage being inadequate, so that it wasn’t possible to recognise a building as a library.

- 7.11. All groups thought that libraries should do more promotion and marketing. Nevertheless, it was not clear that this would change participants' own usage patterns in all cases. Some non- or lapsed users said that they would try libraries now that they knew more about what was on offer, but others still thought that libraries were not relevant to them.

How far are people aware of 'what libraries and librarians are like'?

- 7.12. Previous research has found that some groups, particularly lower income groups or those that may be at risk of social exclusion, have a low understanding of 'what libraries are like now' (Shovlin, 2005; Muddiman et al 2000) and think of libraries and librarians in terms of 'traditional stereotypes'. This has been described as a barrier to library participation, as it is argued that people perceive that they will not be welcome in libraries and do not recognise how services have changed and improved.
- 7.13. For example, Shovlin (2005) found that potential adult learners may have strong expectations that library environments are unattractive or unappealing ("old and dull"), staff will have negative attitudes towards them ("I'd be worried they'd be looking at my books and thinking, 'what an idiot'") and the customer experience will be unpleasant ("too confusing").

"Libraries – they're just books and Sshh!!! Aren't they?" – Focus group participant quotation from Shovlin, 2005

- 7.14. Define Research and Insight (2006) also found that negative perceptions about libraries' image and identity were common amongst 14-35 year olds. For example, in relation to library buildings, "the norm was seen as old, unattractive buildings in need (or in dire need) of refurbishment and updating." The expected attitudes of library staff were also raised as an off-putting factor amongst these groups.

"It's one of those places where you feel naughty when you walk in and you haven't even done anything ... it's cos it feels like all eyes are on you." – Focus group participant quotation, male lapsed user, from Define Research and Insight, 2006

- 7.15. Our own focus group research reflected these views to some extent. There were some participants who viewed librarians in a stereotypical way – for example, a fairly stern woman, "looking over her glasses", feeling superior. There were also people who described the library experience in similar terms to those above.

"I don't really think of it as a social place... when you go into the library I've been told many times to keep my mouth shut, been told off." Lapsed user, urban area

- 7.16. Nevertheless, we also found some different themes. For example, where we found negative perceptions of staff amongst non-users, these were more often related to a perception about public sector staff in general. For example, older non-users in one focus group thought that customer service standards amongst library staff had dropped over the years, reflecting a general perceived drop in public sector customer service. This view was reflected amongst mixed-age focus groups in urban areas, where again perceptions were that public sector staff would have worse customer service skills than the private sector.

“[Library staff] don’t seem to have to compete.” Non-user, urban area

“Librarians aren’t trained to be sales people.” Non-user, urban area

“We could teach them [the staff] a few things about manners and personality.”
Non-user, older person, rural area

- 7.17. Amongst our focus group participants, there was also relatively wide recognition that libraries had changed over time, for example, that new services had been introduced. However, there were variations between groups in terms of whether change and modernisation was seen positively or negatively - reflecting the fact that what attracts one group, may put off another. A strong theme in both user and lapsed user groups was recognition of a tension between space for books and space for other activities and resources - with some thinking this was to the detriment of what they saw as the ‘core service’. Some non-users also expressed these concerns, while others liked the wider range of services now on offer and recognised the need to modernise.

"Libraries have come too far – books are taking second place." User, rural area

“You can’t put libraries in a time warp. They need to evolve.” Non-user, older person, rural area

Who do people think are libraries for?

- 7.18. There was a strong perception, from virtually all our focus groups (users, non-users and lapsed users), that the groups of people who currently benefited most from library services were children, students and older people. Several groups also mentioned people on low incomes as a key beneficiary group. To some extent these perceptions reflect current usage patterns (a large proportion of children visit libraries, while older people are amongst the most frequent users). Nevertheless, because these perceptions are strong and consistent, they may also help to *reinforce* these patterns of usage.

- 7.19. In terms of who library services *should* be for, some focus groups tended to think that libraries should be aimed at children and young people. Older people, and people with young families, were particularly likely to say this. These groups tended to think that education was libraries' main purpose, and that libraries should be trying to get children in early, in order to support their education and build a love of reading. For the parents' focus group, the perceived benefits of libraries for children were many and varied: they learn to read, socialising opportunities, parents can seek peace, additional activities, bonding between parents and children, good 'experience' for children, gives kids independence, they can concentrate on homework.

"If you take them before school age, they are not so daunted when they see a book in school." User, urban area

- 7.20. This may reflect recent efforts by library services and their partners to attract children and families – for example, through programmes like BookStart and the Summer Reading Challenge (the latter was mentioned several times in our focus groups, which were carried out in late August/early September 2010). It suggests that library services have been successful in creating an impression that they are places where children and families are welcome. This may not have been the case a generation ago (several focus group participants commented on how when they were young, they did not feel comfortable in libraries) – so this also suggests that libraries have been able to change public perceptions about 'who they are for' over recent years.
- 7.21. Other groups thought that libraries should be for everyone, and commented that more should be done to target "the middle groups" who were not currently using services. That participants recognised these groups as less regular users suggests that libraries would need to do more marketing in order to change public perceptions about who 'they are for'.

How far does awareness affect usage?

- 7.22. As noted, some other research studies have cited a lack of awareness of library services as a major barrier to use (Usherwood, 2006, Shovlin, 2005). Our research aimed to tease out how far a lack of awareness currently affects usage – and how far improving awareness would help broaden participation.
- 7.23. Our survey found that only 3% of respondents who considered themselves lapsed or non-users cited a lack of knowledge of where their local library was, or what it did, as a reason for non-usage. The qualitative research findings discussed above also suggest that generally, there is reasonable awareness of libraries' core offer and some awareness that libraries have modernised. Nevertheless, it is also clear

that perceptions of what libraries are like vary across groups, and detailed knowledge of the range of services on offer is not high, even amongst some user groups. It also seemed that for many non-users, libraries were simply not at the forefront of their minds or something they regularly thought about. In this sense, low awareness does seem to compound non-usage, although it may not be the primary reason amongst most groups.

- 7.24. There is some evidence that improving awareness would help to broaden participation. Define Research and Insight (2006) asked focus group participants to visit libraries before coming to focus groups, and to fill in short questionnaires based on their visit. The researchers discovered that participants were often surprised by what they found - both in relation to the services on offer and the environment - and some non-users did join libraries as a result. Similarly, some of the non-users amongst our own focus groups indicated that they might be willing to use libraries in future, after having discussed and thought about libraries during the research.
- 7.25. Finally, increasing awareness of library services may also help to increase satisfaction with them. As we find with wider research across the local government sector, satisfaction with local public services (in this case libraries) is heavily influenced by how informed people feel about them (even if they do not necessarily use them). 85% of respondents to our survey who felt informed about public libraries were also satisfied with the service, compared to 55% of those who did not feel well informed.

8. How far do the public value library services?

8.1. This section explores how far libraries are valued as public services, and for what reasons they are valued. These types of questions are relevant both in exploring how far there is a 'mandate' for libraries, and in further understanding the brand value of libraries. The research shows that:

- Library services are widely valued as a public good, both by users and non-users. Some 90% of current library users think libraries are 'essential' or 'very important' to the community – but even amongst those who say they are not library users, 59% think that libraries are essential or very important.
- Libraries are valued as community assets, and also because they are trusted institutions. Libraries are often viewed differently from many other public services in that there is a strong sense of ownership and identification with libraries amongst users.
- Qualitative research has shown that most people strongly believe that libraries need to remain a free service – but that some would be willing to pay for specific services, such as 'premium membership' or some children's activities.
- Library users tend to think that services offer good value for money.
- While satisfaction with library services is very high amongst users, around half of lapsed and non-users are satisfied with services as well. Further, very few within these groups say they are actively dissatisfied – the remainder do not express an opinion.

The value of libraries as a public good

8.2. Several research studies have found that the majority of both users and non-users value the idea of libraries as a 'public good'. For example, a large study by Sheffield University, which included 50 focus groups with adults, concluded that "respondents indicated a real moral and ethical obligation to preserve and maintain [library] services irrespective of their levels of use and patronage" (Usherwood et al, 2006).

8.3. This means that people can see a value in libraries beyond the 'intrinsic' value they gain as individual users (DEMOS, 2006). In explaining this, studies have suggested that libraries have a 'contingency' value above and beyond their value to users (BOP Consulting, 2005). For example, libraries have:

- 'option' value ("I want to know something will still be there if I choose to visit it in the future")
- 'existence' value ("I'm glad it is there")

- ‘bequest’ value (stewardship for future generations).

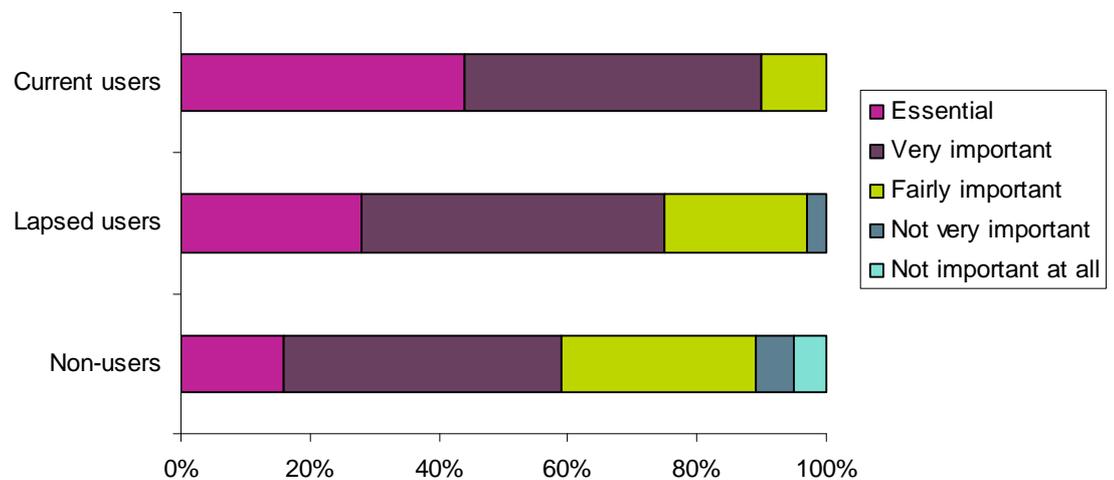
8.4. These themes were reflected in our qualitative and quantitative research, which explored how far libraries are valued by the public, and in what ways they are valued.

Libraries as community assets

8.5. Our survey supported the idea that libraries are widely valued as community assets. Current library users were more likely to express strong support for libraries as community assets than other groups, with 90% saying they are ‘essential’ or ‘very important’ as services to communities.

8.6. Amongst those who considered themselves lapsed users, 75% thought libraries essential or very important to the community. Even amongst those who said they were not library users, 59% felt this way, and only 11% of this group thought they were ‘not very important’ or ‘not important at all’.

Figure 8.1: How important or unimportant do you think public libraries are as a service to the community?

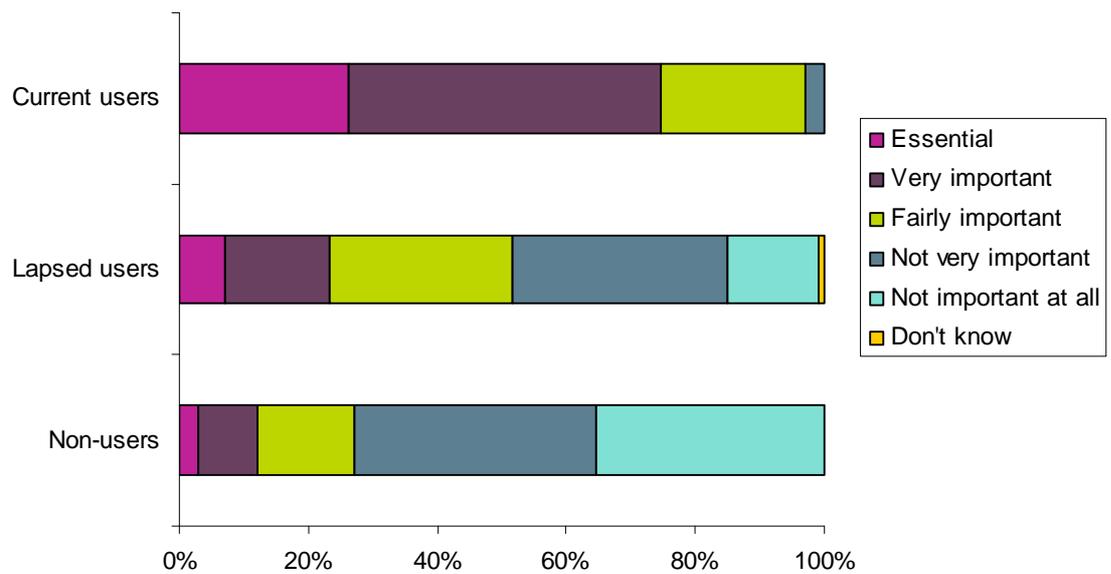


Source: Ipsos MORI. Base: all respondents (1102)

“They provide an important community service... provide books for the readers, they provide the Internet for people that don’t have it, DVDs for someone that doesn’t want to spend £4 for one night at Blockbuster, for old people who want to learn to use a computer and keep up with the young generation. Everything that they do is important for somebody in the community somewhere.” Lapsed user, market town

8.7. In fact, all groups - current library users, lapsed users and those who were not library users - were more likely to think that libraries were essential or important to communities than they were to say libraries were essential or important to them personally.

Figure 8.2: How important or unimportant are libraries to you personally?



Source: Ipsos MORI. Base: All respondents (1102)

8.8. This was reflected in qualitative research as well. Many of our focus group participants thought that libraries played an important role in bringing communities together. At one focus group in a rural area, participants even used the term “community cohesion”.

“The library is essential to community – it adds cohesion to the village.” Library user, older person, rural area

“In my library I see a lot of people come in. It’s a large range of age groups... Bengalis turn up in big numbers... Chinese groups use it as a sort of drop-in.” Library user, urban area

“As pubs and post offices close the library is the last throw of the dice.” Library user, older person, rural area

8.9. Nevertheless, there were some who were willing to question the value of libraries to the public. For example, in a focus group with more affluent people in a

suburban area, there was a divergence of opinions, with some strongly valuing libraries, and others less sure.

“Libraries don’t matter as much as we’d like them to matter.” Non-user, urban area

- 8.10. Some data sources suggest that if forced to decide between public services, most people would not place libraries on their list of ‘essential’ services. One such source is the Place Survey 2008/09⁹, which included a question on what is important in making an area a good place to live. Only around 10% of respondents chose ‘cultural facilities (e.g. museums and libraries)’ as one of their top five selections, from a list of 20 options.¹⁰ However, the survey asked people to compare and prioritise amongst very different aspects of a place, such as crime rates, education provision and health services – so this may not be a fully fair comparison.

Libraries as trusted institutions

- 8.11. Our study did not look at trust in libraries specifically, because there were already several other studies that explored this. For example, a meta-review of research literature on libraries’ impact (BOP, 2009) found that “libraries are trusted institutions: users and non-users identify public libraries as inclusive, non-market, non-threatening, non-judgmental spaces.” This conclusion was formed on the back of several primary studies, including a study on the role of libraries in the knowledge economy, which described how “libraries have a high trust status” and as such, can generate “civic capital” (Clayton and Hepworth, 2006).
- 8.12. Another large study found that information provided by libraries is highly trusted, and trusted more than other key sources of information (e.g. newspapers, the television and museums). This was because of perceived higher levels of authenticity and neutrality; lack of editorial bias or manipulation; the professional assistance and standards offered by staff and the availability of a variety of authoritative published sources (Usherwood et al, 2006).

Libraries as a source of pride and identity

- 8.13. The notion that libraries are valued, even when they are not regularly used, can also be linked to the idea that the public often identifies in a special way with library services. Libraries are one of the few public services that people think of as ‘theirs’. All participants in our focus groups with users strongly identified with ‘their’

⁹ *The Place Survey was a resident opinion postal self-completion survey about local public services, carried out across all 352 English local authority areas in late 2008.*

¹⁰ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/corporate/statistics/placesurvey2008>

libraries and could be described as ‘library fans’. This type of close identification has been reflected in other research, such as the study of users by Hayes and Morris (2005), who found that most users felt passionately about their local libraries and would feel anything from “disappointed” to “devastated” if they disappeared.

- 8.14. Libraries can also be a source of civic pride and help define a community. This is particularly the case with local, smaller libraries, although larger, national libraries are also a source of pride and help to reinforce identity for some. DEMOS (2006) go so far as to argue that without libraries, museums and archives, “we would have very little to define ourselves as a society”.

“Generally without a library [the town] would be a very sad place.” Lapsed user, market town

“Libraries make a huge difference because it is important part of national life.” Non-user, urban area

“I think a lot of people would be sad if physical libraries were to go away.” Lapsed user, industrial town

- 8.15. Usherwood et al (2006) found that the extent to which an individual feels ownership of libraries is directly related to their individual sense of community belonging and identity. People in urban centres and regions with a strong sense of civic and cultural identity were most likely to feel a sense of ownership and pride in cultural organisations, while 18-25 year olds, and parents who had moved away for professional or personal purposes, were least likely to feel this way.

“If I had stayed in my home town I’d still go to my childhood library and want my kids to go there. It’s like wanting to get married in the same church as your Mum and Dad...” Focus group participant, parent, North West, from Usherwood et al 2006

“I suddenly got an image of my Gran using her local library... but that really was a local library, I don’t really have that... I don’t feel any sense of ownership in relation to this library [central], and this is the one I use.” Focus group participant, parent, Midlands, from Usherwood et al 2006

Value of libraries as a free service

- 8.16. Our focus group research found that library users tend to think that library services offer good value for money. The vast majority of participants in our focus groups

(though not all) also felt strongly that public library services should be free, even if they did not use libraries themselves. Reasons for this included:

- An ideological position - knowledge should not be the preserve of the rich. This view was particularly strong amongst lower income groups.
- A view that since people paid for libraries through council tax anyway, it was not fair to charge additional fees.
- Personal need: several participants said that they would not be able to afford to pay for books (particularly lower income groups and older users who borrowed large numbers of books), while others noted that visiting a library isn't free once the cost of public transport and parking is taken into account.
- Libraries' perceived value to others: some stressed that if libraries were no longer public services, this would disadvantage some groups in the population.

"[It's] very important that they are there for people who want to use them." Non-user, urban area

"[It's important libraries are free because] otherwise education is only going to be for the middle and upper classes - life will get even more imbalanced." Lapsed user, urban area

"We should at least get something back for our council tax." Library user, urban area

"I wouldn't be able to afford it if it was not free." Library user, urban area

- 8.17. Nevertheless, a minority questioned whether libraries should be free at the point of delivery or whether they could be afforded in the current economic climate. Some also questioned how well public funding was being used at present.

"I reckon a lot is being creamed off at the top and it's not getting to delivery, to the library assistants". Non-user, older person, rural area

- 8.18. Further, some users in our focus groups said that they would be willing to pay for some aspects of the library service. For example, some people would not mind paying for a 'premium' service, e.g. the ability to borrow more books at a time, or for specific activities or materials, such as the Summer Reading Challenge pack or craft sessions for children. Others suggested a membership scheme that would allow people to benefit from author readings, talks and so on. In some areas, users thought fines for late returns were too low (e.g. two pence) and were no

disincentive; they also suggested fines should be larger. Nevertheless, people were keen that returns were reinvested in the service.

“You would pay for certain services, as long as it is not extortionate, disproportionate.” Library user, industrial town

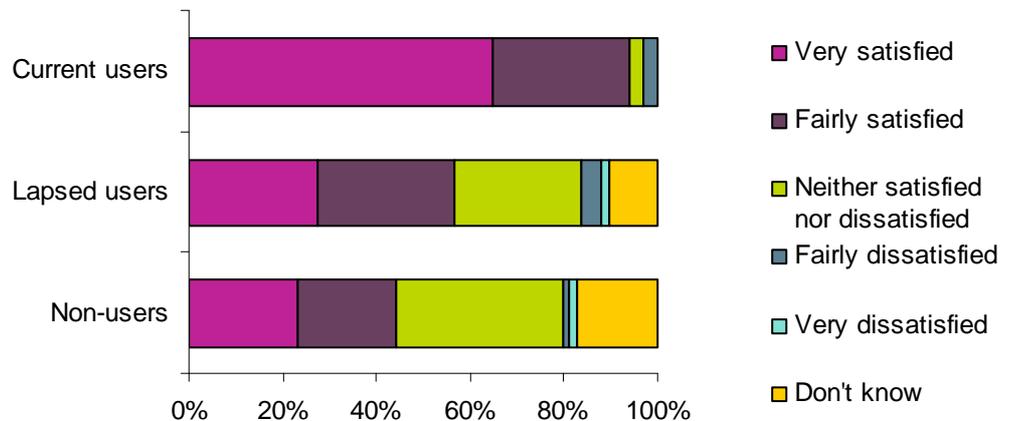
“You would have to know any profits are going back into the library and not being swallowed up by the council.” Library user, rural area

- 8.19. There is some other evidence that suggests that users in particular feel that libraries are good value for money. An important example is a study carried out in Bolton, which explored how far members of the public valued libraries in economic terms (Jura Consultants, 2005). The study of 325 Bolton residents found that, on average, library users were ‘willing to pay’ £3.63 per month to support library services, which at the time in fact cost council tax payers £3.33 per head each month. Non-users also demonstrated some ‘willingness to pay’ for library services, again underlining the fact that non-users still value libraries. However, they were willing to pay less - on average, £1.00 per month.

Satisfaction with library services generally

- 8.20. Finally, our survey explored how satisfied respondents were with public library services generally. Some 94% of current library users said they were ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ satisfied with library services. Nevertheless, 57% of lapsed users, and 44% of those who said that they were not library users, also said they were ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ satisfied with libraries. There were very few ‘dissatisfied’ people.

Figure 8.3: How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the current library service?



Source: Ipsos MORI. Base: all respondents (1102)

SECTION C: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This section draws together the analysis and explores what it might mean in the current policy context and in relation to priorities for service development.

9. Implications for service development in the current policy climate

Public libraries still have value in today's society

- Libraries really do hold 'a special place in the nation's heart'. A significant proportion of current users described libraries as "essential" to their lives, and the vast majority of people think that libraries are important community assets. The research therefore shows that public libraries are far from irrelevant to the public in 2010, despite an overall decline in usage, and suggests that there is a clear 'mandate' for public libraries.
- Reassuringly, the evidence suggests that, despite rhetoric about public sector cuts and fiscal tightening, the library service continues to be seen by the public as a force for good, and one that should be provided free at the point of delivery (again, even amongst those people who may not even use the service). Inevitably, the service will be facing some tough choices about where to best focus its resources going forward, but the research points to some clear messages about the impact and attractiveness of different types of service development in relation to different user groups.

Libraries can be a social leveller and have a strong social role

- While library use is higher amongst those with more education, it is nevertheless much more equally spread across social groups than many other cultural activities.
- This is not to underplay the need for community engagement in widening participation to under-served groups. Nevertheless, libraries should see their ability to reach across the social spectrum as an asset, particularly in building partnerships with other public services.
- Libraries are places where people of different ages and backgrounds can meet – users themselves noted the importance of libraries in bringing communities together and in helping to create more cohesive communities.
- Our research also highlighted that members of the public recognise libraries' role in supporting learning, amongst children and adults, and in ensuring that knowledge is accessible to all, regardless of income.
- Libraries are able to play this role because the majority of services they offer are free at the point of delivery. Participants in our research felt that free public libraries played an important social role and noted that there would be a detrimental impact on themselves or other people if services were no longer free of charge.

Books are key to the public library offer

- A clear message from the research is that the public see libraries' core purpose as being about reading, learning (particularly children's education) and finding information.
- Current users, and some lapsed users, would like the book offer to be better. While users are very satisfied with library staff, they are less satisfied with the range and condition of books. Users were often concerned about new developments seen to be "taking up space for books". Given the importance of reading as an incentive to library use, and of the book offer in driving overall satisfaction with services, this seems a key area for improvement.

Potential for greater library usage - but services need to decide who they want to attract and why

- Many non-users read for pleasure and many are positively disposed towards libraries, which suggests that there is potential to attract them into libraries. Meanwhile, a greater focus on maintaining and improving the customer experience – again focusing on these three features - would help retain users.
- However, the research illustrates that there is no single 'magic bullet' for increasing library usage. This is partly because libraries mean different things to different people - for example, a quiet space for some and a social space for others.
- As such, while the research points to some potential 'hooks' for getting lapsed or non-users into libraries (e.g. coffee shops or different opening hours), the service needs to be mindful that some of these changes could come at the expense of alienating others. For example, it could compromise the 'quiet space' valued by many of the service's core group of existing users. Ultimately, different service developments and improvements will appeal to different groups, so library services will need to take decisions about which groups are most important for them to engage with. There are also some groups who, whether due to life stage or lifestyle choice, will unlikely be encouraged into their local library.
- This means that library services need to have a clear idea of what they are trying to achieve and who they are for – i.e. clear strategies and priorities.
- Linked to this, participation figures from the Taking Part survey, while useful to provide a national picture of library usage, may be too blunt to be used as measures of success, as they do not say anything about the need for libraries, the value of libraries to those using them or the success of libraries in meeting customers' needs and expectations. Measures of customer retention, for example, might be more useful to individual library services.

Library services should build on their strengths – but beware of diluting the brand

- The research showed how libraries have elements of a strong brand: there is generally good awareness of the core offer; they are trusted; current users are loyal; and they are viewed affectionately by much of the population.
- Currently, though, there is a lack of consistency in the way library services are delivered, which means that potential users do not know ‘what to expect’ when they go to a library.
- Positive aspects of the service, which could be used to promote it, include:
 - Unique services beyond the core offer: activities, crafts, learning, genealogy.
 - Free or cheap services - allowing people to ‘try before they buy’ and ‘take risks’ on new authors; enabling people to get hold of expensive reference books easily - again, assets that are unique to libraries.
 - Knowledgeable and friendly staff – for example, who can recommend books that readers might like.
- Our survey shows that although there is generally good awareness of the core offer, even current users are not fully aware of all the services that libraries offer. Some of these would be attractive to users and non-users. For example, 19% of users say they would use libraries more if they could reserve or renew books online (they can). Meanwhile, 26% of lapsed and non-users say more activities for children and families would encourage them to make use of libraries - most libraries offer these types of activities already.
- Library services should consider carefully how potential service developments would fit with the library ‘brand’. Some developments, such as coffee shops in libraries, seem to make sense to many members of the public and fit with their perceptions of what libraries are for.
- However, the research found considerable concern amongst some groups, including both users and non-users, about developments that they perceived to be “pushing out” core services. This suggests working to make core services more attractive and accessible might be more effective than attempts to reorient libraries around a different set of services, which could put off as many (or more) people than they attract.

Understanding why, and when, people do and don't use libraries

- The research shows clearly that when people don't use libraries, they have a range of reasons for this.
- These are not all down to 'barriers' related to the ways services are currently delivered, or personal and social issues that make it difficult for individuals to use libraries – although these do exist for some groups.
- As well as understanding 'barriers', library services would benefit from getting a better understanding of the 'disincentives' that can put people off from using libraries, and the different preferences or motivations they have, which can encourage them to use alternatives to libraries, or make libraries seem irrelevant.
- The research also shows that non-usage is not a fixed state. People often dip in and out of library usage over lifetimes. Trigger points for 'lapsed' usage include finishing studying and moving home or job, while trigger points for starting to use libraries (again) include entering unemployment, having children or retiring. Being aware of these triggers, and tailoring communications or engagement activities to try to stop people 'lapsing', might be one way of increasing usage.
- Overall, the research suggests that a more sophisticated understanding of users and potential users would help libraries to develop effective strategies to broaden participation. Some library services have used market segmentation approaches to help identify appropriate ways of reaching new users, but no national segmentation model exists. Developing something like this in future (similar to those prepared for sport and arts audiences¹¹) may be helpful to support library services in thinking about who to target and how.

The library building versus the library service

- Members of the public do not readily distinguish between 'the library service' and 'the library building'. Although our research aimed to explore library services in a wide sense - including online services - most people still thought of a physical building when they thought about libraries. This suggests that, if libraries are aiming to promote a service that is not identified with the building, they will need to work to communicate this clearly to the public.
- Further, it was clear that the physical library building is an important part of the service for many user groups, including some that might be considered high priority or vulnerable – such as isolated older people, families with young

¹¹ http://www.sportengland.org/research/market_segmentation.aspx;
<http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/about-us/research/arts-based-segmentation-research/>

children, students and unemployed people. This is because of the role the library plays for them – not just accessing books but providing social contact, being a place for quiet time or study, an opportunity for a trip out.

- The research also suggested clearly that smaller, local libraries are important for many current users, who would not or could not always use larger, town centre libraries. Focus group participants tended to think that a mix of large and small libraries was needed because these catered to different groups and user needs.
- Some research participants had heard of ideas to put libraries in ‘unconventional’ locations, such as supermarkets, and there was some tentative support for these ideas, as long as they were “meeting a need”, rather than “creating one that doesn’t exist”.
- Thinking about people who don’t currently use libraries, but who could potentially be users, there may be more scope for a non-buildings based service; it’s implied by what they value in alternatives - convenience, ease of access, good choice of books; they are less interested in the social aspect.

More communication is needed

- Libraries do not just need to raise awareness of what they do, but communicate more effectively on an ongoing basis with users and potential users. Virtually all our focus group participants thought that more promotion and marketing by libraries was needed. Proactive efforts to reach non-user groups, such as publicity (e.g. open days) and making clear that libraries would value their participation, might help to increase usage.
- People who return to the service may have done so after significant time periods when they have not used it – so they may not be aware of the current offer. Again, this would imply that targeted communications might be needed, for example, if trying to attract recent retirees or people who have just become new parents.
- Some people who would not consider themselves service users do go into libraries every now and then to find something specific. It would follow that if libraries are able to meet these needs effectively, they may be able to encourage these individuals to use services more often. Communicating with ‘irregular users’, reminding them of the range of services on offer – particularly support to ‘find things out’ – may also be helpful.

Policy issues where more in-depth research would be worthwhile

- The scope of the current project did not allow detailed research into all areas with implications for service development in the current policy context. Mobile libraries, for example, came up in focus groups as important in supporting

some groups to access library services and 10% of our survey respondents, particularly older people, thought that more mobile or outreach services would encourage them to make greater use of public libraries. However, we were not able to get a detailed understanding of the relative importance of mobile services within the confines of this research project.

- It was not within our scope to explore the potential impact or feasibility of new service developments, such as downloadable e-books, in depth. We therefore have limited evidence on whether an expanded digital offer could increase usage, although some focus group participants expressed an interest in this.
- Mergers or delivery of library services by trusts or other bodies that are not local authorities did not come up in user discussions. It may well be that these are not issues that concern users greatly and we suspect that quality of service is more important to users and non-users than who delivers it. However, we did not actively probe these areas, so further research would be needed to find out whether the scale, size or identity of a library provider is important to members of the public.
- Finally, our research was necessarily ‘broad brush’ and the methodology did not allow for more in-depth, targeted research with specific socio-economic and demographic groups who may find it difficult to use libraries (e.g. people with low skills or people whose first language is not English). This remains a gap in the current evidence base and an area where more research would be recommended.

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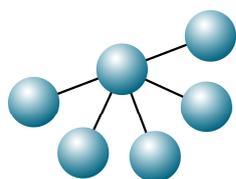
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ISBN 000-0-000000-00-0

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