

Evidence review of the economic contribution of libraries

Arts Council England

Final Report
June 2014

BOP
CONSULTING



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Front cover: Readers at the opening of Manchester Central Library. Photo: Joel Fildes

Foreword from Arts Council England

Every day, across England a wide range of people walk into their library, or visit their library online to do an extraordinary range of things: borrow a book or DVD, attend a training session, track down some crucial information, meet a friend or client, study quietly and even download an e-book.

Libraries support us in an everyday way, throughout our lives. Walk into any library and see toddlers, mums and dads at Story Time, studious teenagers and the local job club. And while just about everybody is getting online, around a quarter of us don't have access at home. Whilst anything can happen in a library, something you rarely see is money changing hands. Perhaps the odd overdue charge, a small fee to attend a workshop or borrow a film but overwhelmingly library services are free for all at the point of use.

And so when we talk of an 'economic contribution', as we increasingly must with arts and culture at a time when local authorities face significant financial challenges, libraries may not immediately spring to mind. Think a little more laterally and it becomes clear that there are many arguments for the vital financial role that libraries play.

For example, whilst libraries may not 'turn a profit' they provide us with many things that support local economies, from information for businesses, to access to essential text books. Libraries have a local presence and may contribute to a sense of place. Then there are the beneficial effects of services accessed in a library whether that be a social reading club, support to quit smoking, or help looking for jobs online. These are the services that ensure effective and financially efficient public spending and enable us to lead healthy and fulfilling lives.

So it is entirely believable that libraries make an economic contribution, but what we don't know is how it is made or how much it

is. This report is our first step in understanding what it is about public libraries that can make an economic contribution and the scale of contribution a library can make. It is a question of some complexity and this report summarises both the available evidence on the subject, and the ways in which others have approached the question, including the advantages and potential pitfalls of the different methodologies.

Having this consolidated base of evidence allows us to take the next step, and begin to develop new research into this question. In the next 12 months we will be investigating further one area of impact and asking how libraries contribute to healthy lives and what that represents financially.

Answering the question of the economic contribution of libraries is no small undertaking, and one that Arts Council England will not be able to do alone. So we are working with partners (such as the Society of Chief Librarians, the British Library and the Local Government Association) and wider library constituency to develop our research in this field. In the meantime, the evidence presented here will support discussion at local and national level about library reform and raise the debate about this subject up to the level it deserves and requires.

Brian Ashley
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Executive summary

In February 2014, BOP was commissioned by Arts Council England to undertake a literature review on how public libraries and their services contribute to the economy. The aim of this review is to identify and review the available evidence at national level and provide Arts Council England and the wider libraries sector with a better understanding of how libraries create economic benefits.

Economic valuation studies of public libraries

As the traditional metrics for measuring the economic contribution of an industry are not appropriate in a public library context, researchers have used a number of different methods for quantifying the economic value of libraries. We identify three different hypotheses across the literature as to how public libraries make a contribution to the economy:

- as economic actors in their own right (economic impact)
- as institutions that facilitate the creation of economic value in the adjacent area and local economy (place-based economic development)
- as organisations that deliver a wide range of services, most of which are valued by both users and non-users when set against their cost of provision (benefit-cost/total economic value approaches)

All three hypotheses require empirical methods based on the collection of primary data, which makes them both bespoke and relatively expensive. They have not been designed to add up to an aggregate picture of the economic value of public libraries in England nor for their results to be comparable.

As the early sections of this report demonstrate, the economic impact literature shows that public libraries employ people and spend money, having a knock-on effect in the local economy, through supply chain expenditures and the wage expenditure of employees. A few large library facilities may also trigger significant ancillary spending in the local economy by visitors who are drawn to the area by the library.

However, while economic impact assessment is well tried and tested within other industry contexts in the UK and in other country contexts with regards to libraries (specifically the US), it has, unfortunately, few merits for libraries within a UK public policy context. Libraries simply do not have the characteristics to perform well when assessed using the additionality requirements that are embedded in public policy economic impact appraisals in the UK.

Libraries' contribution to wider place-based economic development is an area which suggests greater promise, based on the existing current case studies both in the UK and internationally. Libraries can be anchor tenants in mixed-use physical developments and regeneration initiatives, potentially boosting the footfall, buzz, image and profile of a neighbourhood or area – particularly if the library is new, large and/or housed in an iconic building. Finally, where specialist services are provided, they can also support local economic development through business advice and support for individuals, micro businesses and SMEs.

However, the evidence base on libraries contribution to wider place-based economic development is at present under developed. It is based on only a small number of case studies, which vary greatly in detail and lack longitudinal analysis and attempts to account for other factors that may also have contributed to identifiable regeneration and local economic development.

Benefit-cost studies are the most numerous and, in the case of contingent valuation (CV) methods, have the potential to gain the most traction with national government stakeholders. There is near universal consistency across these studies in reporting positive benefit-cost ratios for public libraries – whether using stated or revealed preference methods – across both multiple countries and institutional contexts (eg studies at different geographic scales and for institutions of differing sizes). This demonstrates that societies value public libraries over and above what they pay for them collectively.

But benefit-cost approaches, particularly CV methods, are also very expensive and complex to undertake to a credible standard. The robustness of many CV studies within the libraries field is compromised due to a range of methodological weaknesses. Furthermore, the wide

differences in method, assumptions and quality standards and the combination of different revealed and stated preference methods within the overall benefit-cost literature undermines the cumulative value of this evidence base.

So while we know that the benefit-cost of public libraries is positive, we do not know whether this is one-and-a-half, twice or 10 times the cost of provision. The choice of methods and assumptions does, however, seem to have a consistent bearing on benefit-cost ratios:

- CV studies are more likely to produce lower benefit-cost ratios than revealed preference studies
- Studies that ascertain willingness to pay (WTP) are likely to produce lower benefit-cost ratios than those that only assess willingness to accept (WTA)
- CV studies that use WTP and attempt to correct for the range of cognitive biases that are embedded in the CV approach are likely to produce the lowest benefit-cost ratios

Finally, there are arguably three structural weaknesses that are characteristic of studies that use economic valuation techniques to measure the value of public libraries:

1. The various estimation techniques are all focused on producing an overall figure for impact, value, or return on investment. They pay little attention to how the constituent library services, resources and buildings generate this value (aside from some revealed preference studies that look at one or two services only, such as book and media lending).
2. This emphasis on the aggregate quantification of value can also seem somewhat abstract. For instance, it does not generate the kind of evidence that facilitates detailed decision making and therefore it can seem remote from the day-to-day reality of service planning and budget setting. Relatedly, using economic valuation methods alone means that it can be hard to communicate the benefits of libraries to non-economist audiences. All the methods require some degree of technical knowledge to properly understand, with CV studies being particularly complicated and specialist.

3. Lastly, studies really only measure the short term economic value of library services. In theory, through attempting to capture the total economic value of library services, CV methods should provide a broad brush quantification of all of the possible social, educational, and cultural benefits that society gains from public libraries, including extending into the future by measuring 'existence value'. However, in practice, very few CV library studies actually measure non-use values, due to practical and cost constraints. This means that the wider value to society in the present is not captured and neither is the value of these in the future.

These structural weaknesses in economic valuation approaches mean that literature from disciplines other than economics is required in order to understand in more detail, and more holistically, how public libraries make an economic contribution to society.

Studies on libraries' educational and social impact

The study considers libraries' educational and social impact within five key areas, chosen to cover the main activities currently taking place across the library service:

- **Children and young people's education and personal development:** Existing research provides compelling evidence that library usage is linked to reading levels among children and young people, and that library usage and reading, in turn, are important factors in literacy skill levels and general educational attainment. Some research also suggests that the quality of public libraries' space supports educational attainment. While there is no evidence of the direct financial benefits of libraries' impact specifically, some recent studies indicate the private and public economic benefits that would be obtained by addressing low literacy and education levels.
- **Adult education, skills and employability:** While some surveys have established a link between adult reading habits and library usage, it remains difficult to confirm the direction of causation between the two. Similarly, there is only limited available evidence of their impact on adult literacy levels. Recent large-scale US-based surveys demonstrate that libraries' information and communications technology (ICT) provision in particular is used by adults to support

their learning and for job searching activities. Literature from the UK also provides evidence of the provision of job support services, if not evidence of impact. Overall, research in the UK on adult learning, skills development and library-based employment support remains largely focused on local, smaller-scale studies.

- **Health and wellbeing:** While there is no consistent data on the provision of library-based health and wellbeing activities, existing research suggests that such activities are increasingly becoming a core part of the public library offer in the UK. Bibliotherapy activities are now widely available across public libraries in the UK, and computer-based cognitive behavioural therapy (cCBT) activities are increasing. Existing research also suggests strong correlations between reading and mental health benefits, as well as a link between literacy and health literacy – people’s ability to access and use health information. For all of these reasons libraries contribute to the health ‘prevention agenda’. A small number of studies also suggest library-based health provision could contribute to reducing the current high costs of ill health. Evidence is lagging behind practice in terms of demonstrating what benefits service providers may get from using libraries to deliver health activities, although several UK-based case studies suggest that libraries are valued for their non-clinical atmosphere and community reach. Overall, several reports highlight the lack of quantitative information on the take-up and benefits of libraries’ health services and the need to use standardised methodologies, specifically those that will be recognised by the medical sector.
- **Community support and cohesion:** Current research demonstrates that a majority of library users and non-users consider libraries as important for their community, and it suggests that libraries may play an important role in contributing to the social capital of communities. Evidence exists in particular for libraries’ contribution to facilitating social contact and mixing within local communities, as well as through increasing levels of trust among people. Existing research also demonstrates that people place a high trust in libraries themselves as institutions. While it might be argued that this may contribute to wider trust in institutions in general – a further marker of

social capital – there is currently only little evidence to support this. Several studies further suggest that through increasing social capital, libraries contribute to enhanced community cohesion and thereby to healthier, safer communities. Although evidence of the impact of cohesion on reducing deprivation is limited, the cost of ill health and crime within communities illustrates the potential cost savings that could be realised through healthier and safer communities.

- **Digital inclusion:** Studies demonstrate a high level of available ICT provision across the public library networks, as well as the high usage of this provision by library users and the role libraries thus play in increasing digital inclusion. Evidence also shows that library ICT provision is frequently used by visitors to gain information important to their everyday life, including education, work and social networks. In addition, several recent studies highlight the personal benefits of digital inclusion by increasingly employability, in addition to the cost savings to the state through services increasingly being provided online under the ‘digital by default’ agenda.

Summary of the evidence

The existing literature on the educational and social benefits of libraries naturally contains limitations and weaknesses, including in particular issues around:

- a general lack of longitudinal studies and surveys/studies with large sample sizes
- studies that take a limited case study approach or are largely anecdotal, with short case studies and/or a focus on one particular library service or small group of users
- the need for further research that is aimed at, and fulfils the requirements not only of the cultural sector, but also of the medical sector, in order to gain recognition of the service within the health sector
- a lack of aggregatable management and impact data on libraries’ various local services and their users and partners
- the difficulty of establishing causality between library usage and a range of outcomes

- Lack of evidence of the savings to the state generated by libraries regarding the downstream outcomes that libraries contribute towards

However, evidence is already sufficient to conclude that public libraries provide positive outcomes for people and communities in many areas – far exceeding the traditional perception of libraries as just places from which to borrow books. What the available evidence shows is that public libraries, first and foremost, contribute to *long term* processes of human capital formation, the maintenance of mental and physical wellbeing, social inclusivity and the cohesion of communities. This is the real economic contribution that public libraries make to the UK. The fact that these processes are long term, that the financial benefits arise downstream from libraries' activities, that libraries make only a contribution to what are multi-dimensional, complex processes of human and social development, suggests that attempting to derive a realistic and accurate overall monetary valuation for this is akin to the search for the holy grail. What it does show is that measuring libraries' short term economic impact provides only a very thin, diminished account of their true value.

1. Introduction

1.1 Aims and Context

In February 2014, BOP was commissioned by Arts Council England to undertake a literature review on how public libraries and their services contribute to the economy.

The aim of this review is to identify and review the available evidence at national level and provide Arts Council England and the wider libraries sector with a better understanding of how libraries create economic benefits. Arts Council England is strongly aware of the large range of activities that take place across libraries in England today, and the unique role that they can play in the lives of individuals and local communities. The Arts Council was therefore keen for the review not only to explore the *direct* economic impact libraries may make, but to also identify and consider the *indirect* ways in which libraries make an economic contribution via the social and educational benefits they provide (through their core services and the many other activities they offer).

This literature review comes at a challenging time for libraries. Reduced local authority budgets have led many library services to face a period of restructuring. Alongside the current pressure on funds, libraries are also facing a further longer term challenge to traditional measures of use: both library visits and book lending have been in steady decline for the past 15 years.

Not all is doom and gloom. The role of libraries as community spaces that provide a gateway to a wider range of public services has become increasingly important, and in this area of their work libraries have seen some increase in funding through various programmes and initiatives. Take-up of services such as ICT provision, programmes and activities is also on the increase. Overall visitor numbers are falling but statistics show that large parts of society still consider libraries as

essential or very important for their communities (whether they are library users or not). That policy makers believe in the lasting importance of public libraries is demonstrated by the fact that alongside library closures, 40 new libraries were opened in the last 15 months¹, including new flagship libraries in Birmingham, Liverpool and, most recently, the renovated Manchester Central Library.

Nevertheless, to move on successfully, libraries clearly need to continue to adapt – to a different funding climate, new financing models, new technological opportunities, as well as to changing visitor needs and behaviour. And in order to be able to do so, libraries (just as the wider arts and culture sector) also need to provide sound evidence of the social, education, health and economic contributions they make to society, in order to secure future public (and private) funding.

So while it is a challenging time for the library service it is also an interesting one: it offers new opportunities for libraries to develop their offer and role in society, and to develop an evidence base which will help them to be considered as ‘the strategic national resource’² that they truly are. As the lead strategic body for the library sector, Arts Council England recognises and supports this. The recent publication *The value of art and culture to people and society* therefore marks the beginning of a substantial research programme to plug some of the evidence gaps that currently exist, which, ‘in 2014, ... will [focus] on researching the economic contribution of museums and of libraries’³.

This literature review marks a first step in this effort, identifying what evidence already exists around libraries’ direct and indirect economic impact, and where there are gaps in our knowledge. It is hoped that the review will enable Arts Council England and the wider sector to better understand, and have stronger evidence of, how libraries make an economic contribution and, in doing so, support the Arts Council England in further developing and advocating the public value of libraries in the future.

¹ Reading Agency, accessed 2014 (a)

² Arts Council England, 2014, p.4

³ Arts Council England, 2014, p.43

1.2 Methodology

This evidence review is based on a rapid but thorough literature review of the latest evidence in the area of research. It focuses in particular on literature published since 2009, when the last detailed literature review on the impact of libraries was published⁴. Although this did not focus specifically on libraries' economic impact, it captures many of the themes particularly around social and educational impacts, which are also relevant to this review. However, the library landscape has changed considerably since then, making this a timely update of the previous review.

The review includes both international academic literature and 'grey' literature, i.e. non-academic journal literature, including work by foundations, trusts, charities and government bodies. While primarily focusing on the anglophone world, a search was also conducted for studies on the economic impact of libraries published in Spanish, French, German and Portuguese, to provide added insight into the approaches and methods used outside of the anglophone world.

In addition to this desk-based review, BOP conducted a consultation process, which included:

- Email-based consultation with a reference group made up of library stakeholders on relevant literature to be included in the review
- A preliminary findings meeting with the internal project steering group
- A meeting with members of the steering group and reference group, to discuss findings and implications

This report represents the conclusion of the review and consultation process. The findings have been grouped into **three identified key hypotheses**, which are most commonly used to demonstrate libraries' economic impact in the existing literature. The next chapter will explain in brief these hypotheses, how they sit together, and how the social and educational benefits that libraries provide feed into these hypotheses.

The subsequent chapters then provide more details on the available evidence identified for each of these three hypotheses.

In order to review how libraries may provide indirect economic impacts via their social and educational benefits, **five impact areas** have been looked at in detail:

- Children's and young people's education and personal development
- Adult education, skills and employability
- Health and wellbeing
- Community support and cohesion
- Digital provision

For each of these areas, a **logic model** was developed which details the 'chain' of how libraries' offer is purported to deliver social and educational, and ultimately economic, benefits. The literature review then demonstrates where in these logic models the evidence is strongest, and which of the links are currently weakest in terms of available evidence.

The review concludes with an overview of where the main gaps are in the current evidence, before providing some first suggestions as to how the evidence may be improved going forward.

⁴ BOP, 2009

2. Three key “hypotheses”

The central challenge in placing a value on the contribution of public libraries to the economy is that library services are provided either entirely free at the point of use or for minimal cost. This means that the typical economic valuation methods for a sector or organisation – i.e. the financial value of their output (using a measure such as Gross Value Added (GVA)) – does not provide a realistic value as libraries’ output consists overwhelmingly of non-market goods. All of the economic valuation methods that have been applied to libraries start from this same challenge. But they diverge in terms of:

- the degree to which they try to compensate for the inability to use consumer spending as an accurate proxy of value
- the assumptions on where (and how) economic value is created
- the methods that they deploy to measure the economic contribution of libraries

As stated above, the review has looked at studies in English, as well as in Spanish, German, Portuguese and French. The review finds that, despite widening the search out to include non-English language research, the vast bulk of existing studies is produced in the anglophone world, and much of it in the US. The studies fall into three broadly defined categories. Each category represents a different hypothesis as to how libraries create economic value in communities.

- **Hypothesis 1:** Financial impact – a simple assertion that libraries are important actors in the local economy: they employ a significant number of people, they purchase goods and services in the local economy and they attract visitors who make other expenditures as part of their trip to the library. Methodologies concentrate on quantifying the financial flows of expenditure made by libraries and their visitors.

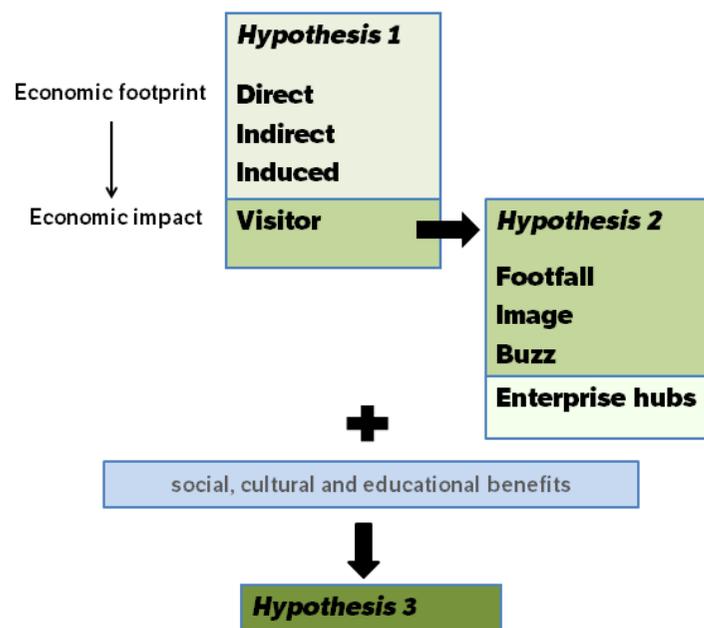
- **Hypothesis 2:** Place-based impact – public library buildings of sufficient scale and interest can be catalysts within wider area regeneration or physical development programmes because of the visitors that they draw to the location and the enhancement to the image of the area that they can bring. Libraries can also contribute further to local economic development by supporting business and enterprise through specialist library services. This element of libraries’ economic contribution is the least studied within the literature.
- **Hypothesis 3:** Benefit-cost analyses and ‘total economic value’ approaches – depending on what method is chosen and in which study, these accounts are founded upon the premise that libraries deliver a variety of services to individuals that have value even though these are not paid-for (as they bring a range of social, educational and cultural benefits). These studies often extend to the premise that there is a residual value in a library/library service as an institution that exists even for individuals that make no use of them (so-called ‘non-use’ value). In this way, these studies attempt to measure the total economic value that libraries bring, usually in comparison to the costs that are incurred in providing the same services. More limited benefit-cost methods simply look at this ratio for only the users of library services.

These three hypotheses cannot be made consistent nor comparable with one another and the resulting studies measure different things using different approaches. Adding to the challenges of understanding the various approaches, some studies use a mix of methodologies, particularly by combining economic impact with a total economic value approach.

In attempting to capture both library use value and the residual non-use value of a library in a community, we suggest that the total economic value approach may encompass some of the benefits that both financial impact and place-based impact approaches seek to capture (albeit via very different methodological means). That is, part of the non-use value that people assign to libraries may be related to libraries spending money in the local economy and providing jobs that enable library employees’ wages to be spent locally. Equally, some of

the non-use value that people assign to libraries could stem from a recognition of their general importance to the fabric of a town or city (for instance, in driving footfall that helps other businesses in the immediate vicinity to thrive), or for the business support services that they provide but are not used by many in the population.

Figure 1 How the three key “hypotheses” link up



Source: BOP Consulting, 2014

Our depiction in Figure 1 above of how Hypothesis 3 is linked to 1 and 2 is theoretical at present. This is because within studies that attempt to derive a global figure for the total economic value of a particular library or library service, it is not possible to breakdown what ‘use value’ or ‘non-use’ value consists of in any level of detail due to the constraints and complications of the methodologies.

This lack of specific knowledge is indicative of a more general limitation with studies that use economic valuation techniques to

quantify the value of public libraries. What they produce is an empirical result, a figure of £Xm (or more often \$Xm). This tends to make the outcome a bit of a ‘black box’ – in that it provides some measure of output/performance, but without really knowing the constituent parts that create this value. Of course, a global figure of £Xm might be useful for headline lobbying or fundraising purposes, but it is hard to understand the *specific* impact of *specific* library services using these methods. They are therefore only of limited use within service planning and when entering into budget negotiations against competing public services at the local authority level.

For this reason, the next three sections of the report cover the literature under each of the three hypotheses in more detail, before the literature is opened out to look at how libraries contribute to the economy through the impact of specific library service areas.

3. Hypothesis 1: Economic impact

Studies that seek to quantify the expenditure streams made by public libraries are overwhelmingly US-based and conceptually the simplest in terms of what they are trying to capture. Studies look at the turnover of library organisations and the number of people they employ⁵ – their economic ‘footprint’. In addition to looking at libraries own expenditure, these studies also use ‘multipliers’ to assess the value of the subsequent rounds of expenditure in a local economy as a result of the existence of the library. These take account of two streams of expenditure in particular:

- indirect impacts: the expenditure made by the suppliers of public libraries in order to fulfil their library contracts
- induced impacts: the wage expenditures made by public library employees and those in its supplier firms

Studies typically extend beyond the rounds of expenditure associated with the library or library service itself to also look at ancillary visitor expenditure triggered as a result of visiting a library. This could be library users visiting local cafés and shops, taking a taxi or even staying overnight as part of a trip. Multipliers are then applied to visitor expenditure to estimate the knock-on effects of these ancillary expenditures.

The US studies show that libraries are significant agents in their local economies. For instance:

- *The economic impact of Libraries in Indiana* (2007)⁶ calculates that an additional \$216 million in economic activity was generated through public library expenditure
- *The economic contribution of Wisconsin Public Libraries* (2008)⁷ reports local libraries’ contribution at \$753 million
- *National Welfare & Economic Contributions of Public Libraries*⁸ for the Australian Library and Information Association (2013) estimates economic benefits of AUD \$3, 180 million
- *The Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh Economic Impact Study* (2006)⁹ estimates an economic output of \$63 million plus \$28 million in services to the population.

A similar approach for the UK was used in:

- *The economic value of library services* (2013)¹⁰ found that libraries supported 1,296 jobs in Scotland, 596 in Wales and 327 in Northern Ireland (in addition to direct employment)
- *Birmingham Library Economic Appraisal* (2009)¹¹ estimated £84.4 million in benefits and £10.9 million in costs for a 30-year period (in this particular reference case)

However, these non-UK studies have only a limited applicability within a UK public policy context. This is because the methodologies they use are generally too simple to pass the quality threshold expected in the UK, where best practice guidelines in economic impact appraisal, such as that contained with the Treasury’s *Green Book*, are now widely adhered to in most sectors. This means that it would not be sufficient to take turnover figures and apply multipliers to this amount (as happens in most of the US studies). Any assessment of direct, indirect, induced and visitor impact within a UK public policy context must instead be subjected to an ‘additionality’ assessment, which tries to estimate what is actually attributable to the intervention being assessed and what would have happened in any case (the ‘reference case’). The outturn of

⁵For example, see: Indiana Business Research Centre, 2007, NorthStar Economics, 2008, Arup, 2009

⁶Indiana Business Research Centre, 2007

⁷NorthStar Economics, 2008

⁸SGS Economics and Planning, 2013

⁹Carnegie Mellon University, 2006

¹⁰ERS, 2012

¹¹Arup Economics+Planning, 2009

an additionality assessment is a smaller 'net' impact from a larger gross economic impact. There are a number of factors that have to be taken into account to produce a gross to net conversion, but it is pertinent to highlight two in this context.

First, money received from public funding, such as a local authority, counts as an input and therefore has to be subtracted from the calculation of organisational expenditure. As public libraries' revenues in the UK consist almost solely of public funding, this leaves very little remaining as the *net* calculation of direct organisational expenditure, and therefore only very small sums will be generated in the calculation of indirect and induced impact.

Second, the assessment of the value of ancillary visitor expenditure made as a result of visiting a library should also only count that which is genuinely additional expenditure. What this means in practice is that virtually all expenditure made by local residents on a trip to the library would have to be discounted from the calculations, as this expenditure would have been made elsewhere in the local economy if the library did not exist. Thus visitor expenditure is only likely to be significant if the library attracts a significant number of people from outside the local area, who are travelling specifically to come to the library (a set of circumstances that is rare in the UK).

As this explication suggests, an economic impact approach is only likely to be useful in the UK context for a very small number of large libraries. For instance, BOP was commissioned by Birmingham City Council to estimate the likely economic impact of the new £50 million central library¹². The new library was expected to support the creation of 6,000 jobs over the first 10 years, which in turn will add £6 million in value to local businesses. But the economic impact approach offers very little for the smaller public libraries in the UK, which serve a limited catchment area.

¹² BOP, 2011

4. Hypothesis 2: Place-based economic development

As noted in section two, the second hypothesis regarding how libraries generate economic value is rooted in geography and place. That is, public libraries – particularly large, new, well-equipped ones and/or those housed in iconic buildings – often attract significant visitor numbers, increasing footfall in the neighbouring area, meaning that:

- other economic activities that rely on passing trade, such as shops and restaurants, receive a boost
- surrounding urban spaces feel more safe and animated, leading to a greater buzz in the area

New, iconic or newly refurbished buildings may also provide a more intangible benefit to the neighbourhood in which they are housed, by helping to enhance the profile and image of the area. The stability and longevity of public libraries means that having a library as a tenant as part of a private-public development partnership can reduce some of the financial risk associated with mixed use schemes. Lastly, some larger libraries' can play an additional role in local economic development by directly providing small and medium sized businesses with a range of dedicated business support resources and services

In all of these ways, then, new/large/iconic public libraries can be key assets in wider place-based economic development strategies. However, the literature that seeks to demonstrate the effectiveness of libraries' place-based impact is relatively slim and focused on case studies or general treatises on the theme.

For instance, the 2007 study *Making Cities Stronger: Public library Contributions to Local Economic Development* discusses ways in which public libraries in the US have a place-based impact on urban centres. Highlighting the amenity value they bring to a neighbourhood or development site, the report provides anecdotal illustrations of how libraries have been key assets within mixed-use development schemes, shopping malls and area-based regeneration. The latter, for instance, is highlighted by using the example of the relocation of the Memphis Public Library's South Branch from a quiet residential location to a rundown ex-industrial area. The impact of the relocation is described as follows:

The eight storefronts were vacant when the library moved in. Now, four years later, the shopping strip is completely full. Though the South Branch library is not the only factor in the revitalization of the South Mall commercial strip, it is reasonable to conclude that local businesses reap a 'spin-off' benefit from the 100,000 visitors that stop by the library each year.¹³

A UK example from the literature is provided by BOP's study on the anticipated economic benefits that the new £50 million Birmingham Library would bring to the city¹⁴. The report drew on a series of international case studies of major new capital projects, including new library buildings and major galleries and museums. It looked at projects like Seattle's public library, opened in 2004 at a cost of \$165.9 million, an iconic project that led to an increase of 55 per cent in library usage during the first 10 years. Figures for the first year suggested that net new spending associated with the library amounted to \$16 million. The study also covered national libraries, like the Singapore National Library, opened in 2005 at a cost of £266 million. The library attracted 2.6 million visitors in the first year, a 300 per cent increase.

The contribution of public libraries to area based redevelopment and regeneration is once again skewed towards large, new and/or newly refurbished libraries as they are most likely to have a catalytic role in

¹³ Majarrez *et al*, 2007, quote on p.24.

¹⁴ BOP, 2011

terms of enhanced attractiveness and increased visitor numbers (whether these are locals or tourists).

This hypothesis needs more data support, as noted above. At present, case studies provide strong local stories, but they are not easily transferable and generally lack a longitudinal analysis and provide little consideration of other contributory factors to neighbourhood regeneration/development. It is therefore difficult within this research to assess how attributable any measurable change is to the library investment as opposed to other factors.

Libraries are not unique in this regard, as there is a general lack of studies that address these issues within the wider literature on cultural capital projects and area-based development – one must go back to 2003 to find a well-known example. This study, undertaken by Artscape and Ryerson University¹⁵, compared three neighbourhoods over time – one in Vancouver (near a newly renovated theatre) and two in Toronto (with artists live-work space) – matched with two similar neighbourhoods in Toronto that had no specific arts and cultural capital investment. The study used geomatics and a variety of socioeconomic indicators to (i) establish more accurately what economic and social change took place in each neighbourhood and then (ii) to assess what was most likely the result of the cultural capital projects as opposed to what would have happened in any case.

There is a lack of studies in England into libraries provision of resources and services to support small businesses and entrepreneurs. In part, this is because dedicated, specialist services for businesses have never been part of the universal offer of public libraries. Building on the model of the British Library's Business and IP Centre and its national network in core city libraries, the recent Arts Council England programme to provide dedicated business centres in a small number of branch libraries across England (the Enterprising Libraries programme), is clearly seeking to enhance libraries' offer in this area. The forthcoming

evaluation of the programme should provide some evidence of how effective this has been to-date.

In lieu of evidence from the UK, literature from the US provides some evidence for the potential of libraries activities to support local enterprise, if not quite 'impact' of the same. Urban libraries in the US regularly provide business planning and start-up support, which even stretches to a start-up competition (complete with access to seed funding), in the case of the Brooklyn Business Library¹⁶. Evidence from the 2008 *Public Libraries and Community Economic Development* report by Christine Hamilton-Pennell¹⁷, which looks at public libraries in rural areas in the US, suggests that supporting small businesses and entrepreneurs is more a core part of a local library's offer than in the UK. For example, in the small town of Greeley in Colorado, this support even extended to reference librarians undertaking market research studies for some companies.

As this example shows, even in the US the evidence for how libraries support local economic development via enterprise support is based on case studies. Even given this – and the fact that local libraries' business and enterprise support seems more advanced than in the UK – the Hamilton-Pennell report still points to abiding challenges, such as a general lack of awareness among the business community of the services and resources offered by libraries, and the need to upskill librarians to properly engage with this agenda.

¹⁵ Jones *et al*, 2003

¹⁶ Majorrez *et al*, 2007

¹⁷ Hamilton-Pennell, 2008

5. Hypothesis 3: Benefit-cost and total economic value

The third hypothesis regarding libraries' economic benefits is the most holistic and contains the most methodologically complex approaches. Rather than look specifically at the financial flows of library expenditure and related expenditures in the visitor economy (as in hypothesis 1), or at how libraries directly and indirectly support other economic actors and activities in their immediate neighbourhood (hypothesis 2), the third approach attempts to assess the economic value of public libraries by looking at how people themselves value libraries. At the heart of this is the value they derive from using library services, but some approaches also go beyond individuals' own use values and look to quantify the wider value that libraries have for society.

Ordinarily this valuation would be derived through how much people pay for library services, but as the price mechanism is largely absent from public libraries this is done mainly through two economic valuation methods.

- Revealed preference (RP): these studies look at actual library user behaviour in terms of their direct consumption of library services. In lieu of accurate price information regarding these services, proxy values are estimated for this consumption. Most commonly, a price value is placed on the use of library services based on what it would cost to consume the same amount of goods if these were sourced on the open market, and this cost is assigned as a proxy value for the prices of the services offered by libraries. This market substitute method produces economic estimates that are either expressed as the aggregate value of the total consumption of library services, or the cost savings that individuals benefit from by consuming library services rather than by buying them on the open market. The other

most commonly used revealed preference method is to value library services via the travel costs that users incur in visiting a library.

- Stated preference: in the absence of individuals' preferences being revealed through a market value, people are instead asked through surveys to state hypothetically how much they would be willing to pay (WTP) for a given public library service. This is termed a contingent valuation (CV) method and is also sometimes presented to people the other way around – as a hypothetical willingness to accept (WTA) figure, in terms of how much compensation they would be prepared to accept for the closure of a library. An important difference to revealed preference methods is that – in theory more than in practice (see below) – CV studies seek to establish a value beyond that derived by existing users, to include the wider value to society (by surveying non-users).

These methods are often used in combination and can also blur into one another. For instance, travel cost estimation methods often use not only the monetary cost of getting to the library but also the opportunity cost of the time spent there (which has to be established by survey means). For this reason, this method is sometimes referred to as 'contingent travel cost behaviour'. Similarly, instead of using market substitutes to price users' revealed preferences, users can also be asked to state a value for the services they use. Unlike classic CV studies, these are not based on a hypothetical WTP/WTA, but on asking users to state the value of the time that they have saved through using library services or the value of the costs that they think they have saved through using the library. They also differ from classic CV WTP/WTA studies by being limited to the users of the library and not the non-users.

What is common across all of these methods is that, having arrived at some valuation of the benefits, the studies then compare this with the costs of their provision to arrive at benefit-cost estimates. These are expressed as a ratio between the money invested in provision versus the money gained as benefits, and for this reason the ratio is sometimes described as a return on investment (ROI) ratio.

To a lay person, classic CV WTP/WTA methods may seem particularly abstract and divorced from the everyday work and impact of library services. However, they have evolved from a branch of

economics that has historically concerned itself with how to value non-market goods, such as the natural environment. Importantly for the UK context, their use has also been validated by the update of the Treasury's *Green Book* in 2011, including in relation to culture and heritage, following earlier work that suggested that these methods might be applied to the cultural sector¹⁸.

A characteristic of stated preference CV WTP/WTA methods that distinguishes them from other economic valuation methods is that they usually have the ambition to derive a monetary figure for the total economic value of a good or service. This means developing a monetary value for the non-use value in addition to the more obvious use value). General, non CV-based surveys that ask people more simply about the importance they attach to libraries suggest that non-use values are significant for libraries¹⁹. Non-use value can be sub-divided into:

- indirect value: for instance, residents living close to a library may benefit from proximity to the library even if they do not use it directly (eg other people value the facility such that it generates a small premium on all houses that are close by)
- option value: people may not presently use a library but still value it nonetheless as they want to be able to exercise the option to use it at some future time
- existence value: people may not presently use a library but still value its existence, either because they are aware that other people in the community derive benefit from it or because they wish the library to still be there for future generations ('bequest value').

The total economic value of a good or service therefore equals use value + indirect value + option value + existence value. However, this comprehensive and exhaustive macro approach – to measure all kinds of both non-use as well as use value – is very much the gold

standard of benefit-cost approaches. In reality, very few studies in the libraries field have sought to be this comprehensive. This is driven by the difficulty of access, increased cost and complexity of studying non-use values²⁰.

The earliest benefit-cost study identified through the review dates from 1998. The St Louis Public Library (SLPL) Services Valuation Study uses a market substitute and two types of CV technique to establish the value of libraries in St Louis²¹. This included:

- a telephone survey of a stratified sample of general users, teachers and business users (322+75+25 respectively)
- the survey asked respondents for their WTP and WTA, as well as establishing a separate valuation through the revealed preference of the opportunity cost of the time spent by teachers and business users
- a price list/matrix of market substitutes that was developed to assess the value provided (consumer surplus) by the libraries (eg price of a book \$14, magazine \$2.95).

Using a range of methods provided a range of different overall valuations. For instance, the aggregate value derived when different library users were asked for their willingness to accept the closure of the library service was very high (\$136 million). It was far lower when the question was phrased in terms of a willingness to pay increased taxes to keep open the service (\$15 million). This shows that stated preference techniques have some inherent cognitive biases that need to be carefully accounted for within studies – which takes both a high degree of specialist expertise as well as a large research budget. When modelled through the opportunity cost of the time spent by teachers and business users, the eventual valuation (\$110 million) was closer to the WTA sum.

¹⁸ O'Brien (2010)

¹⁹ For instance, the majority of non-users (57 per cent) surveyed for the MLA research in 2010 think that public libraries in England are either 'essential' or 'very important' to communities.

²⁰ For instance, in order to derive separate values for indirect value, option value, and existence value, one would ideally require separate survey cohorts: indirect value and option value would require individuals who live in the same general town or city but who do

not currently visit the library. Existence value would require a cohort who not just do not use the library but also ideally do not live local to the library service in question. These separate groups would then each produce a distinct value – in addition to the more obvious survey cohort of library users (Alberini, A and Kahn, J, 2006, *A Handbook on Contingent Evaluation*). The unintended consequences, however, are that the cost and complexity escalates with the introduction of multiple survey cohorts.

²¹ Holt *et al*, 1998.

The St Louis study has been followed by many more benefit-cost studies in the US, such as:

- *Taxpayer Return on Investment in Florida Public Libraries* (2004)²² – the study reported that Florida’s public libraries returned \$6.54 for every \$1 invested from all sources. Valuations were derived from several methods: market substitutes; monetisation of time saved through use of libraries, and an economic impact analysis.
- *Value for Money: Southwestern Ohio’s Return from Investment in Public Libraries* (2006)²³ – this report used a market substitution approach to estimate that for every dollar invested in library operations the public received about \$2.56 in directly quantifiable benefits. However, the method is questionable as the figures derived through the market substitute calculation then had an ‘economic impact’-style multiplier applied to them.
- *The economic impact of Libraries in Indiana* (2007)²⁴, which combined an economic impact analysis on the local economy with a benefit-cost estimate of the services provided, including a CV study of users that valued their book lending.

The earliest benefit-cost study of libraries in the UK seems to be Morris *et al* in 2002, which sought to place a value on library book lending in the UK. The study used a WTP method to establish that, compared with a cost to public libraries of £724 million to provide the service, library book borrowers valued the service at £814 million, representing a consumer surplus of £91.4 million²⁵. However, the study is seriously undermined by having a very small sample size (100 responses from book borrowers at just four libraries in England) on which to base such a large aggregate calculation.

The British Library is more commonly thought to have pioneered the use of CV methods in the UK library context with the study it

commissioned in 2004 that was published academically in 2007²⁶. It demonstrated that the library generated a value of £363 million, which was approximately 4.4 times the level of its annual public funding of £83 million. The study included non-use value and provided estimates that were designed to cover the value to the UK as a whole. In many ways the study is a benchmark as it was ambitious and methodologically sound and featured a good sample size for the geography it was seeking to cover (2,459, consisting of 429 users and 2,030 non-users from the general population). Interestingly the British Library repeated a CV study in 2013, which identified a net benefit of £419 million, approximately 4.9 times the level of its annual public funding in 2011/12, and again based on a large sample (1,742)²⁷.

Around the same time, the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) commissioned a study of Bolton’s three museums, 15 libraries and its central archive²⁸. The study also included non-use value and the total economic value was estimated to be £10.4 million (£4.4 million by library users, £2.8 million by museum users, £200,000 by archive users, and £3 million by local non-users of any of the services). Given total costs of £6.5 million, this provided a benefit-cost ratio of 1.6:1. While the sample size was adequate for users (325), unfortunately it was small for non-users (68).

More recently, research consultancy ERS undertook a 2012 study for the Archives, Libraries, and Museums Alliance (ALMA) UK on the economic value of library services in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. This used a mixed method approach: economic impact and a benefit-cost analysis that was driven by the value of the cost savings that respondents identified they made by using library services. Although the study does not seek to establish a figure for non-use value, the research is based on a large sample size of users (4,000) across the three territories. The study identified values of £24.10 by users per visit in Scotland, £26.38 in Wales and £27.27 in Northern Ireland, which

²² Griffiths et al, 2004

²³ Levin et al, 2006

²⁴ Indiana Business Research Centre, 2007

²⁵ Consumer surplus is a monetary gain that exists if consumers are able to consume a product for a price that is less than the highest price that they would be willing to pay for it – it is a commonly used measure within CV studies and welfare economics more generally.

While people do not pay for libraries at the point of consumption, they pay socially through taxes.

²⁶ Pung *et al*, 2007.

²⁷ Tessler, 2013

²⁸ Jura Consultants (2005)

translates into a value per visit of 5.5 times, 7.5 times and six times above cost respectively.

CV studies have also been undertaken in Europe. Scandinavia is relatively well represented in the field, principally due to the work of Svanhild Aabø. From her doctoral thesis, she has published two papers that use different data sets from her research. The second of these papers²⁹ estimated a benefit of four Norwegian krone (NOK) for each one NOK invested in Norwegian public libraries, though as with several other studies, it is based on a limited sample of users (242). The data set used in her 2005 paper on libraries in Norway again has a small sample size (250), but suggests some interesting findings regarding how WTP varies according to some key characteristics³⁰:

- distance to the library was found to be directly related to the WTP, with WTP increasing with proximity
- library users have a higher WTP than non-users
- city residents have a lower WTP than those in rural areas
- people who used libraries as children have a higher WTP than those who did not

Aabø later also undertook a meta analysis of 38 different benefit-cost studies of public libraries, which overwhelmingly covered the US (30) and then the UK (two), Australia (two), New Zealand (one) and Norway (two)³¹. Her review covered market substitute and various types of CV approaches, as well as providing median and mean ROI at several geographical scales: national, state, county and individual level. The reported mean ROI ratios are:

- 3.5:1 for studies that estimated the benefits at the national level (of which there were five studies)
- 5:1 for studies that estimated the benefits at the state level (six studies)

- 4.6:1 for studies that estimated the benefits at the county level (seven studies)
- 4.2:1 for studies that estimated the benefits at the individual library level (18 studies).

She then deepens the analysis by undertaking a regression analysis on the studies and finds that CV methods tend to produce a lower valuation than market substitute approaches.

Elsewhere in Europe:

- Two student theses in German have looked at city libraries in Berlin Mitte and Melle, Lower Saxony. The first estimated a benefit-cost of €5.60 return for each euro invested, based on a combination of market substitutes and WTP methods³², while the Melle study estimated annual benefits from the city library of €3 million per year³³.
- A 2014 study in Spanish³⁴ ambitiously provides estimates for 19 regional areas covering the whole of Spain and two Spanish territories in Africa. It finds that the ROI is between €2.8-3.83 per euro invested. Unfortunately the study is again compromised by being based on a survey sample of 1,500, which is too small to be able to generate robust estimates for so many different territories.
- Also this year, a study on the Municipal Library of Prague³⁵ was published, which uses both WTP and WTA in studying the value of the library via a survey of 2,200 people. The research finds that what people are willing to accept for the loss of the library (4,000 Czech koruna (CZK)) is higher than the average willingness to pay (642CZK). The study also looks at how individual WTP depends on economic and socio-demographic variables. However, the survey is undermined by having an unrepresentative sample (eg three quarters of the respondents are women and non-users are not represented as all respondents are drawn from the library's database of users).

²⁹ Aabø, 2005 (a)

³⁰ Aabø, 2005 (b)

³¹ Aabø, 2009

³² Blanck *et al*, 2006

³³ Koop, 2009

³⁴ Yanez, 2014

³⁵ Stekskal, 2014

There is a clear interest and a practice in applying benefit-cost approaches to public libraries in Korea. In 2011 Giyeong Kim published a critical review of valuation studies. It identifies CV method and RP method as the most common strategies and looks at 15 studies in detail. Most of the studies (10) are drawn from the US and include some that are also reviewed by Aabø in her 2009 review (eg the St Louis Library), as well as two from Australia and the first British Library study. It was also able to include one existing local CV study in Korea of the Jungang Public Library that was conducted by Chung and published in 2008.

The results covered by Kim's review range widely in terms of benefit-cost estimates: from \$0.84 to \$10.33 of benefit per \$1 invested. Echoing Aabø's review finding, Kim also finds that CV methods produce lower estimates of the benefit-cost of libraries than revealed preference methods:

- the median result across the CV studies was \$3.79 of benefit per \$1 invested (six studies), compared with
- a median result across the revealed preference studies of \$4.46 of benefit per \$1 invested (nine studies).

Interestingly the one study which contained a negative benefit-cost ratio of \$0.84 of benefit per \$1 invested was the local Korean study which applied a dissonance minimizing (DM) format to its initial CV results. The application of the DM format was intended to control for cognitive biases that are a feature of CV methods. Before applying the DM format to the results, Chung's study had a much higher and positive ratio of \$2.95 of benefit per \$1 invested³⁶.

The third Korean article details an empirical CV study that sought to measure the ROI for 22 Korean libraries, based on responses from 1,220 questionnaires; a small sample for so many libraries. WTP estimates were separately derived from users' use of materials, their use of space and their use of programs. The overall ROI was estimated at 3.66 per one Korean won (KRW) invested. However, the ROI differed according to the

different type of libraries: 3.58 KRW for large libraries, 4.06 KRW for medium sized libraries, and 3.9 KRW for small libraries.

5.1 Summary

Benefit-cost approaches, whether based on market substitutes, time and cost savings, or contingent WTP/WTA methods show near universal consistency in reporting positive benefit-cost ratios for public libraries, across multiple countries. However, there is little agreement between studies as to how big the benefit-cost ratios are, with estimates ranging from 1:1 to almost 10 times the amount invested. The disparities may, in part, be explained by the different scale at which the studies are being conducted (see Aabø's meta review). But they are also likely to be heavily influenced by the different methods, assumptions and quality standards used across the studies.

Broadly, the evidence from two literature reviews of these approaches suggests that it is revealed preference studies that are most likely to produce benefit-cost ratios at the upper end of the spectrum. In turn, this is likely to be related to the fact that in pricing market substitutes to value library lending, the studies set lending at anything from five per cent to 100 per cent of the buy-to-own price.

The range of assumptions and methods, and in particular the multiple combinations that are often used within one study, is at times confusing and hinders the development of a cumulative evidence base which would be able to make greater use of sector-wide benchmarks and standardisation.

The CV method requires such large samples that many studies are undermined at this first stage. Further, one of the main theoretical advantages of CV studies – that they can cover 'total economic value' – is rarely realised in practice across the library studies as non-use value is often excluded for pragmatic and cost reasons. The environmental economics literature has also shown that there are a lot of potential cognitive biases in how people respond to CV survey questionnaires. Some of these can be overcome or avoided with careful survey design

³⁶ Chung (2008), cited in Kim (2011).

and large sample sizes. However, the consistently higher values obtained by studies that compare WTA with WTP demonstrate that there are some cognitive biases hardwired into the method. It is also interesting to note that the one reported study that explicitly tried to correct for potential cognitive biases at the post-results stage (i.e. beyond addressing standard issues of survey design and sampling) led to a significantly reduced (and negative) benefit-cost ratio. This is only one of two examples that we found that produced an overall negative benefit-cost ratio³⁷, both of which are CV studies.

While benefit-cost approaches provide ratios and financial figures that may have a particular use in some case making scenarios, they provide only scant information on what it is that actually creates this value. This is especially true of WTP and WTA methods, which generally result in just one or two calculations. While there is more indication of how users value individual services within revealed preference studies that use market substitutes, these estimations tend to be heavily concentrated on book and media lending, where market substitutes are easier to identify.

The range of individual and community development opportunities that are now regularly provided by libraries in the UK – services for young children and parents, adult and employability skills, health information and services, and digital inclusion initiatives, and so on – are poorly covered, if at all, by revealed preference approaches. This is despite the fact that these social, cultural and educational benefits are clearly key to the usage of today's libraries. As the next chapters will demonstrate, the personal and community development activities provided by libraries are also key to the *long term* economic contribution that libraries make to society.

³⁷ The other negative ratio is contained within an Australian study that uses three different methodologies to value the Hutt City Libraries: travel cost, WTP, and financial cost savings. The aggregate figure provided for the value of the libraries is AUD \$10.9m, which translates

into AUD \$1.44 of benefit per AUD \$1 invested. However, this is an average taken from across the three different methods. The WTP method actually produced a negative benefit-cost ratio of AUD \$0.69 per AUD \$1 invested.

6. Libraries' social and educational benefits

As an indicative guide, the different levels of evidence are represented in the colour gradient of the arrows within the logic models, which range from dark blue (strongest evidence) to light blue (weakest evidence).

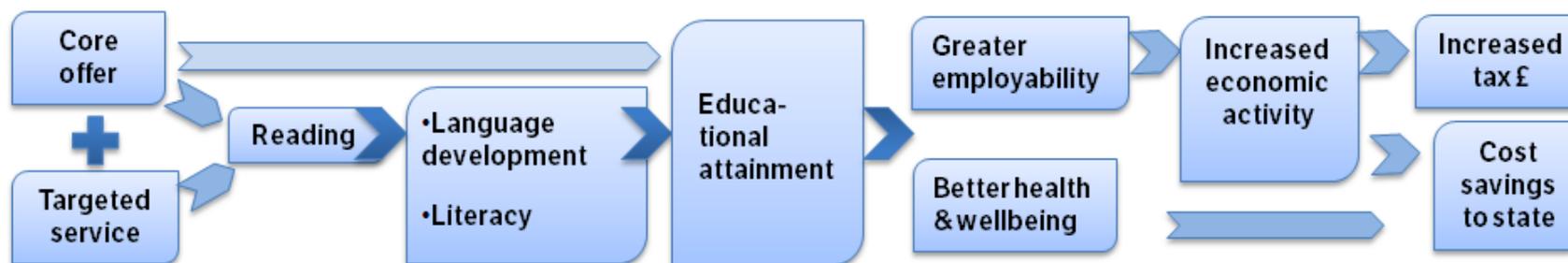
In order to review how public libraries may provide social and educational benefits, and how these in turn create economic benefits (i.e. feed into the total economic value of libraries), five impact areas have been looked at in detail. These were chosen to cover the main activities across the library service:

- Children's and young people's education and personal development
- Adult education, skills and employability
- Health and wellbeing
- Community support and cohesion
- Digital provision

For each area, a logic model has been developed detailing the 'chain' of how libraries' offer is purported to deliver social and educational and ultimately economic benefits. This offer includes libraries' core offer (books and media lending, ICT provision and provision of freely accessible space) as well as the targeted services libraries provide within each impact area (eg national programmes such as the Summer Reading Challenge or Books on Prescription, and local projects and activities such health information provision and ICT courses, etc)

The following sections then consider the available evidence for each 'link' in this chain. They begin by looking at usage and uptake, and then consider the subsequent impacts as presented in the logic model, highlighting which links are supported by the strongest evidence, and where the evidence is weakest. Each step takes us further away from direct impact of libraries, as the influence of other factors on these later outcomes increases. However the logic models serve to demonstrate clearly how, and in how far, libraries are seen to contribute to each of the subsequent outcome in the chain.

6.1 Children's and young people's education and personal development



The logic model

Via their core offer and targeted services (i.e. activities and programmes for children and young people), libraries promote reading, which in turn supports language development and literacy and thereby, overall educational attainment. In parallel, libraries, in terms of their space and the behavioural norms it embodies, are also suggested to directly support educational attainment. Increased educational attainment then leads to greater employability and better health and wellbeing for children and young people as they grow up. Greater employability in turn generates increased economic activity and thus increased tax revenues for the public purse as well as cost savings to the state through lower welfare payments. Cost savings to the state are also a benefit of having a healthier population.

Usage

This chain can only function if we know that children and young people visit public libraries and attend their targeted services. In terms of libraries' core offer, a number of recent large-sample surveys from the UK and US demonstrate that this is indeed the case. These are generally based on self-defined usage where participants are requested to rate their own library usage behaviour, or parents are asked to rate attendance in the case of small children. The 2012/13 Taking Part survey³⁸ found that 69 per cent of those aged 5-10 (based on adult respondents) and 77 per cent of those aged 11-15 years had been to a library in the previous year. Comparison with previous years found that 'the overall result has remained steady since 2008/09', though pointed to significant changes between 2008/09 and 2010/11 which had since been reversed.

A survey of 17,089 pupils aged 8-16 across 112 schools in England conducted in 2009³⁹ found that 44 per cent said they use public libraries⁴⁰. While this figure is considerably smaller than that of the Taking Part survey, this divergence may be explained by the fact that the former asked about attendance within the last 12 months, whereas the

³⁸ DCMS, 2013 (a), quote on p.15

³⁹ Clark and Hawkins, 2011

⁴⁰ With girls "marginally but significantly" more likely to use the public library compared with boys (38.7 per cent vs 49.2 per cent) and higher usage for school libraries than for public libraries.

latter asked more generally about ‘using libraries’, which may arguably imply a stronger usage (as the former could be affirmed by those who have been to a library once in the past 12 months, but who would do not generally consider themselves as ‘using libraries’). The researchers, Christina Clark and Lucy Hawkins, also found that public libraries attract children and young people from across society, including those from more or less affluent backgrounds and children from different ethnic backgrounds⁴¹.

Conversely, research based on the Millennium Cohort Survey, a nationally representative sample of 12,644 British children, found that by comparing the poorest to the richest children, the former were ‘considerably less likely to visit the library’ and other places of interest such as museums, plays and concerts⁴²: 45 per cent within the high income group were taken to the library at least once a month at age three, compared to 38 per cent in the middle income group and only 24 per cent in the low income group. A similar pattern emerges at age five, where 41 per cent in the high income group were taken to the library at least once a month, 36 per cent in the middle income group and 30 per cent in the low income group. The study indicates the importance of parents as key determinants in whether children will be library users or not. This is supported by Clark and Hawkins’ findings among 8-16 year olds: the most common reason that young people did not go to their public libraries, cited by over 50 per cent of the non-users of all ages, was that their family did not go. The authors concluded that ‘it appears that the role that the child’s family plays is both a key positive feature of library use, and the major barrier to library access’⁴³.

The surveys also suggest that in the UK, public library usage drops as young people grow older. Clark and Hawkins’ survey showed that public library use declined ‘drastically and significantly with age’ – 63.1 per cent of KS2 pupils said they use public libraries, compared to 24.5 per cent of KS4 pupils. A survey of 1,102 adults in England

conducted by the MLA in 2010⁴⁴ also found that younger adults (aged 18-24) were the least likely to define themselves as current users, although they still found that 45 per cent did so. By contrast, a US-based survey conducted in 2012⁴⁵ found that within the age groups 16-17, 72 per cent had used a library in the past year, by far the most likely age group to have done so, and that 60 per cent of Americans under 30 (claimed they had) used a library in the past year (although it is not clear whether this study differentiated between public and school libraries).

Available evidence of the take-up of targeted services focuses largely on a few national programmes: for example, the annual Summer Reading Challenge had the highest recorded participation levels in 2013, reaching 800,000 UK children aged 4-11 across the UK⁴⁶; the Boys into Books project engaged over 13,000 schools and reached 330,000 children⁴⁷. Evidence of the take up of the day-by-day activities within individual library services is patchier – while figures exist for individual case studies, no aggregate figures are available to provide a picture of uptake across the country.

The impact of library usage on children and young people’s reading habits

A 2010 study by Rachana Bhatt found that ‘there is no quantitative estimate of how much reading results from having access to low cost reading material’ and that ‘it is difficult to estimate the causal effect of library use on reading’⁴⁸. This study itself attempted to fill this evidence gap, and a number of studies have since provided further indications that library usage is linked to reading levels among children (including being read to by their parents) and young people.

Based on multiple regression analysis of data from the US’s Current Population Survey, American Time Use Survey and National Household Education Survey, Bhatt found that overall, ‘library use

⁴¹ Usage from both pupils with and without free school meals ranged between 46 per cent and 48 per cent and usage by pupils from white, Asian, Black and Mixed backgrounds all ranged between 41 per cent and 62 per cent, with those of White background indicating lowest usage.

⁴² Waldfogel and Washbrook, 2010, p.26 and p.50

⁴³ Clark and Hawkins, 2011, quote on p.17

⁴⁴ MLA, 2010

⁴⁵ Zickuhr *et al*, 2012

⁴⁶ DCMS, 2014

⁴⁷ ERS, 2009

⁴⁸ Bhatt, 2010, quote on p.149

increases the amount of time an individual spends reading by approximately 27 minutes on an average day⁴⁹. For children too young to read themselves, Bhatt's findings also suggest that 'library usage increases the probability of reading to a household child by 12.5 per cent points'.

A recent US-based survey of 2,252 Americans aged 16+⁵⁰ provides indications that parents strongly believe that libraries increase their children's reading habits: 94 per cent of parents said libraries are important or very important for their children, and 84 per cent of these said that a major reason they want their children to have access to libraries is because they help children develop a love of reading and books.

Clark and Hawkins' survey⁵¹ indicates that library usage encourages reading among young people. They found that 'interesting reading material' was given as the most common reason (by 51.5 per cent) why young people used public libraries, ahead of other reasons such as 'friendly space' and availability of computers⁵². Public library users were nearly twice as likely to say they read outside of class and enjoy reading, while non-library users were almost three times as likely as users to rate themselves as 'not very good readers'. The authors concluded that while 'these links are not necessarily causal; [...] they suggest that public libraries [...] have a role to play in the reading patterns of those pupils who use them'.

The impact of reading habits and library usage on literacy and educational attainment

Following on from the above research which suggests that libraries encourage reading among children and young people, there is also, according to the 2009 literature review for DCMS⁵³, 'strong research evidence [that] shows that pre-school language and literacy

experiences are accurate predictors of later educational attainment'. Similarly, a 2008 literature review by Judy McLean, conducted for a graduate certificate programme at a US-based college of education, claimed that 'research has also shown that there is a 90 per cent probability that a child will remain a poor reader at the end of the fourth grade if the child is a poor reader at the end of the first grade. Therefore, children who start school behind typically stay behind'. The author concluded that 'there is evidence to support that meaningful literacy activities, such as reading, singing and playing with children, can impact a child's brain development and subsequently help provide them with the pre-reading skills they need to start school.'⁵⁴

These findings suggest that from early on, an engagement with books and reading provides children with increased literacy skills, and they provide compelling indications of a positive link between children and young people's literacy skills and their (future) educational attainment. Clark and Hawkins' survey suggests that young people themselves recognise this – it showed that reading was seen as important to succeeding in life by the vast majority of young library users (95 per cent) and non-users (86 per cent)⁵⁵. Therefore it can be argued that by encouraging children and young people to read more, libraries contribute to their educational attainment.

Evidence of a direct link between library use and activities and educational attainment has until recently been less clear. The 2009 literature review for DCMS⁵⁶ noted that the research evidence on the impact of library-based pre-school language and literacy activities was limited, and a 2007 study for MLA North East⁵⁷ found that

Bookstart, Summer Reading Challenge and other national programmes have a research base to provide underpinning evidence of their impact. Other activities however, do not

⁴⁹ These figures are not specific to children and young people; Bhatt provides only one figure across age groups.

⁵⁰ Miller *et al*, 2013

⁵¹ Clark and Hawkins, 2011, quote on p.18

⁵² Research in the USA showed similar results – of the 60 per cent of Americans under 30 who used the library in the past year, 46 per cent did so for research, 38 per cent to borrow books and 23 per cent to borrow newspapers, magazines or journals (Zickuhr *et al*, 2012)

⁵³ BOP, 2009, p.21

⁵⁴ MacLean, 2008, quotes on p.5 and p.3

⁵⁵ Clark and Hawkins, 2011

⁵⁶ BOP, 2009

⁵⁷ ERS, 2008

necessarily have learning outcomes defined, or measured beyond participation.

More recent surveys do point directly to a link between library usage and educational attainment.

The research based on the Millennium Cohort Survey found that children who were taken to the library at least once a month (alongside five other measures of “parenting and the home environment”, including reading to children) showed significantly better results in a number of tests assessing their cognitive development, including vocabulary tests. The authors added that ‘it is well known that early cognitive ability is a strong predictor of final educational attainment (Galindo-Rueda and Vignoles 2005)⁵⁸.

Another recent study, which analysed the reading behaviour of around 6,000 young people followed by the 1970 British Cohort Study, found that children who read for pleasure made more progress in maths, vocabulary and spelling between the ages of 10-16 than those who rarely read. The authors concluded that the combined effect on children’s progress of reading books often, going to the library regularly and reading newspapers at 16 was four times greater than the advantage children gained from having a parent with a degree⁵⁹.

A study commissioned by MLA North East in 2008, which included a survey among schools, revealed that nearly 80 per cent of respondents considered pupils more likely to visit a library independently as a result of use of library resources/ services with the schools. Between 35 per cent and 65 per cent also agreed that library services and resources had a range of other learning impacts on pupils, including ‘deeper knowledge and understanding of subject areas’ (around 62 per cent), practical skills, creative thinking, social skills and opportunities for personal achievement. The authors however also concluded that with regard to targeted library activities, ‘by far the most common finding is that activity is perceived to have an impact on learning, but the impact is not measured’⁶⁰. Interestingly, Clark and

Hawkins found that young people themselves also seem to see this link – they found that a substantial number of young people considered library usage as having an impact on their educational attainment. Of those surveyed who were library users, 38 per cent believed that library usage will ‘help them to do better at school’⁶¹.

Such findings are also supported by programmes taking place in or supported by libraries. For example, the Bookstart National Impact Evaluation, though a relatively small sample size, found that a comparison of the ‘Bookstart children’ with a control group provided ‘longitudinal evidence that involvement in the programme gave children a significant and sustained advantage over their counterparts’, based on evidence suggesting that it gave a significant and lasting boost to their language and literacy skills.⁶²

The impact of the quality of the space in public libraries

A number of studies also point to the conducive learning environment at libraries, although these do not necessarily distinguish between age groups. A 2008 report for the MLA⁶³ highlighted the importance of libraries as informal learning environments in achieving learning outcomes, quoting previous project reports/evaluations which found that ‘the informal atmosphere in which libraries and museums provide learning appears to be a key factor in building confidence and enthusiasm of learners and can ease the transition between informal and formal learning’. Similarly, it quoted another study which ‘[...] identifies libraries as safe, neutral spaces already used by communities as a place to get information and knowledge, which therefore have a natural role as community learning hubs’ and concluded that libraries ‘provide opportunities for people to try out new experiences with minimal risk. The accessibility of libraries, especially for the “harder to reach”, together with the opportunities they provide for ‘opportunistic’ learning, is

⁵⁸ Waldfogel and Washbrook, 2010, p.5

⁵⁹ Sullivan and Brown, 2013

⁶⁰ ERS, 2008, quotes on p.27 and p.37

⁶¹ Clark and Hawkins, 2011

⁶² Bookstart, 2008

⁶³ City University, 2008, p.7

proposed as a natural fit with the requirements and aspirations of adult learning funders’.

A small number of studies suggest that the quality of the space of public libraries may have an impact on children’s and young people’s education attainment by providing a quiet, accessible and safe place for learning. In their 2010 report *What does the public want from libraries*⁶⁴, the MLA conducted a number of focus groups and found that virtually all participants thought libraries have a key role to play in children’s education, and ‘parents often used libraries to help their children learn’. More specifically, Bhatt’s econometric study found that ‘library use significantly increases probability of homework completion and good behaviour among school-aged children’⁶⁵. An Australian study also made a link between library activities and children’s behaviour, suggesting that library sessions helped to teach young children how to orientate towards an adult and behave as a member of a collective. This in turn would mean that these children will ‘find behaving as a class member in school more familiar than those who do not’⁶⁶ – arguably an important skill in supporting their educational attainment.

A study commissioned by MLA North East in 2008, which was based on a documentation review, interviews with librarians and teachers and a survey of schools, suggests that teachers also value libraries’ benefits for children and young people. The study suggests that libraries provide an environment filled with reading and ICT resources, in which young people ‘can hang around and have exposure to books and learning materials outside the classroom’. While the authors stated that this did not have a recorded impact, they nevertheless claimed that it had an ‘experiential effect that impacts on their learning’⁶⁷. Clark and Hawkins found that young people also value the space provided by libraries – of the young people they surveyed who were library users, 40 per cent said they valued libraries as a friendly space⁶⁸.

The impact on health and wellbeing

The benefits of libraries on people’s health and wellbeing are addressed in detail in Section 6.3 of this report.

The impact of literacy and educational attainment on employability and public and personal economic returns

There is no evidence of the direct financial benefits of libraries’ impact on literacy and educational attainment but a number of recent studies demonstrate the potential cost savings of addressing illiteracy and low education levels, and there is also a well-established literature on both the private and public economic returns to education. As summarised in the 2009 literature review⁶⁹, ‘there is strong research evidence that reading and literacy are key to academic success and strongly correlated with a wide range of positive socioeconomic outcomes’. Following on the above evidence of libraries’ contribution to literacy and education among children and young people, this provides a strong indication that libraries make a contribution to reducing the public and personal costs of illiteracy and low educational achievement.

The Every Child a Reader Evaluation in 2010⁷⁰ summarised that:

Literacy difficulties have been associated with costs both for the individual and for the public purse including special needs provision, truancy, exclusion, reduced employment opportunities, increased health risks and a greatly increased risk of involvement with the criminal justice system. The risks are in addition to those associated with disadvantage and lack of qualifications.

It referenced a previous evaluation estimating the return on every pound spent on Every Child a Reader at £11 to £17, but acknowledged that these findings were contested. The findings of the evaluation are backed up by a recent study for Booktrust, which found that ‘whilst there is little

⁶⁴ MLA, 2010, p.24

⁶⁵ Bhatt, 2010, p.149

⁶⁶ Nichols, 2011, p.187

⁶⁷ ERS, 2008, quotes on p.37

⁶⁸ Clark and Hawkins, 2011

⁶⁹ BOP, 2009, p.19

⁷⁰ Tanner *et al*, 2010, quote on p.15

evidence to suggest a direct link between positive attitudes towards literacy and social mobility, there are strong indicators of the importance of reading, writing and 'literacy' in contributing to positive social mobility'. Indeed, 'it seems that without a capacity to read and write [...], social mobility is less likely', and clear links were identified between employability and reading and writing abilities, as a 'limited ability to read and write remains a concern of employers and government to this day'⁷¹.

Trying to put a price on such claims, a recent report⁷² estimated that 'if the UK had taken action to close the achievement gap at 11, this would have led to a more skilled workforce and higher economic growth'. Based on work from Stanford University and an approach developed by McKinsey, analysis for the report showed that GDP in 2020 would be around two per cent or £30 billion higher if the UK had taken action to close the achievement gap at 11 'so that the poorest pupils achieved the same levels as others by the end of primary school'. A recent report for the World Literacy Foundation (WLF)⁷³ claimed that illiteracy in the UK (which accounts for 20 per cent of the UK's adult population) was estimated to cost the UK economy approximately £81 billion per year. Both these figures have been contested, with fact checking organisation Full Fact highlighting a number of methodological issues and pointing to a previous, and more conservative figure provided in the 2006 Treasury report The Leitch Review of Skills. The latter report nevertheless still estimated that around 14 per cent (five million) are not functionally literate, and recommended that 'the UK should dramatically 'raise its game' when it came to literacy'⁷⁴.

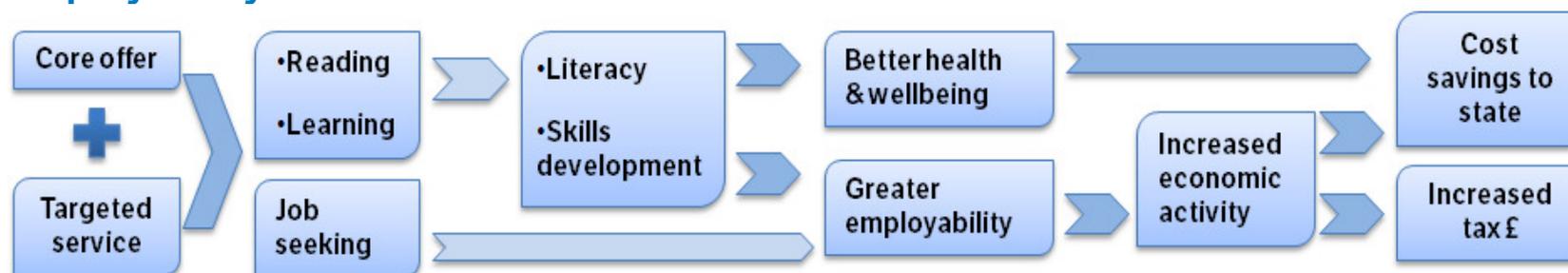
⁷¹ Levy *et al.*, 2014, quotes on p.2 and p.3

⁷² Warren and Paxton, 2013, quotes on p.vi and p.9

⁷³ Cree *et al.*, 2012

⁷⁴ Full Fact, 2012

6.2 Adult education, skills and employability



Logic model

Via their core offer and targeted activities for adults, it is suggested that libraries promote reading and learning among adults and support adults in job seeking. Reading and learning lead to increased adult literacy and skills development, which in turn leads to better health and wellbeing and greater employability. At the same time, job seeking also directly supports greater employability. Greater employability then leads to increased economic activity, resulting in cost savings to the state and increased tax income. In parallel, better health and wellbeing can also lead to cost savings to the state.

Usage

Recent statistics released by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA)⁷⁵ show that the total number of visits to public libraries in England in 2012/13 was at around 240 million visits per year (making no distinction between age groups). While this represents a

decline of six per cent on 2010/11, when the total number of visits was at around 264 million, this is a substantial figure when compared to England's total population of around 53 million (2011).

Backing this up, several recent UK-based surveys demonstrate that libraries' core offer is used by a large part of the adult population. Based on a nationally representative sample of 1,102 adults across England, the MLA in 2010⁷⁶ found that 57 per cent considered themselves library users. More recently, the Taking Part Survey for 2012/13 Quarter 4⁷⁷ of 9,383 adults in England found that 37 per cent had used a library in the 12 months prior to being interviewed, a significant decrease from 48 per cent in 2005/06 and 39 per cent in 2011/12. A survey conducted for the Carnegie UK Trust of 1,301 adults in England (with the same survey carried out in all four UK jurisdictions and the Republic of Ireland)⁷⁸ registered slightly higher figures for England alone, finding that half of those surveyed in England had used a public library in the previous 12 month. Breaking this down into further detail shows that libraries are used across society:

- All three surveys found that usage was higher amongst women than men: the Taking Part survey found that library attendance was at 42.3 per cent among women and 31.4 per cent among men; the Carnegie

⁷⁵ CIPFA, 2013

⁷⁶ MLA, 2010

⁷⁷ DCMS, 2013 (b)

⁷⁸ Macdonald, 2012

survey found that 53 per cent of women had used the library service within the past 12 months compared to 46 per cent of men.

- The MLA survey and the Taking Part survey both registered higher usage among people of BME background than among those from a white background: according to the MLA, in 2009/10, 38 per cent from a white background and 51 per cent from a BME background said they had used the library in the past year. The Taking Part Survey in turn found that attendance was 45.1 per cent among adults from BME groups and 35.9 per cent among adults from the white ethnic group.
- All three surveys found that those not working used the service more than those who were working: the MLA survey found that in 09/10 42 per cent of those not working and 37 per cent of those working used a library and the Taking Part survey found that attendance among adults who were not working was at 41 per cent, compared to 34 per cent among those who were working. The Carnegie survey also concluded that 'people who work part-time or who are not working use the service more than those who are in full-time work'.

While the MLA survey noted that a greater proportion of highly educated people use libraries, they found that the difference in usage between more or less educated people was smaller than for arts, museums and galleries. The authors concluded that 'libraries are a social leveller ... [They] reach a much broader range of age groups, genders, and ethnic and social backgrounds'⁷⁹. However, evidence from the other two more recent and considerably larger surveys does not corroborate this. The Carnegie survey found that 71 per cent of senior managers and professionals had visited a library, compared to 42 per cent of those in semi-skilled or unskilled occupations. They also found that the number of those who thought libraries were 'not very' or 'not at all' important to communities were higher in the lowest socioeconomic grouping (six per cent), compared with senior managers or professionals (two per cent)⁸⁰. This is echoed by the Taking Part survey, which found that adults in upper socioeconomic groups had a higher rate of library attendance

(39.7 per cent) than people in lower socioeconomic groups (33 per cent)⁸¹.

Interestingly, the Carnegie survey also revealed that 52 per cent of those who said they had used a library in the previous year were frequent users, using the library at least once a month. The findings suggest that it may be difficult to change non-users into users – given a list of suggested improvements to the library service, the authors found that 42 per cent of non-users said that none of these suggested changes would encourage them to make use of the service. The MLA 2010 similarly found that while libraries 'may well be able to broaden their appeal to some current non-users', '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'. Of the non-users surveyed, only eight per cent said that improving the range and quality of books would encourage them to make more use of libraries, and on 14 per cent said longer opening hours would do so. The authors concluded that 'proactive marketing would be important to draw non-users in, as they would be unlikely to seek libraries out'⁸².

In contrast to the core offer, only anecdotal figures are available to indicate the usage of the range of library-based learning activities targeted at adults. John Crawford and Christine Irving⁸³ refer to data from the Caerphilly County Borough Council library service, which played a key part in a learning project involving 56 libraries from the public and educational sectors, and which attracted 2,000 participants to its information literacy training sessions. A 2009 MLA report included information on an initiative across the Suffolk library service, which embedded financial learning within its IT learning opportunities, concluding that 'support is provided and uptake among older people has been high'⁸⁴. Similar figures exist for other activities at local level but there are no aggregate figures to provide a picture of provision and usage of such activities across England.

⁷⁹ MLA, 2010, quote on p.vi

⁸⁰ Macdonald, 2012

⁸¹ DCMS, 2013 (b)

⁸² MLA, 2010, quotes on p.vii and p.49

⁸³ Crawford and Irving, 2012

⁸⁴ Aldridge and Dutton, 2009, p.10

The impact of library usage on adult reading and literacy

Only a few recent studies attempt to demonstrate a link between library usage and adult reading habits, and it remains difficult to confirm the direction of causation— i.e. whether prolific readers tend to use libraries more, or whether libraries encourage prolific reading. Perhaps most convincingly, Rachana Bhatt found that proximity to a library was strongly associated with higher rates of library use, and, as mentioned before, that this in turn increased time spent reading by an average of 27 minutes per day⁸⁵. Adult library users recognise this link—a US-based survey⁸⁶ of nearly 3,000 people aged 16+ found that 95 per cent thought public libraries were important because they promote literacy and a love of reading. In the UK, the 2012 Carnegie Trust survey⁸⁷ found a clear relationship between how many books people read and how often they use a library across all UK jurisdictions, and that the most common reason for using a library was to borrow or return books. However, they concluded: ‘our research shows quite clearly that it is people’s reading status which has the most direct bearing on whether they use the public library service and how frequently they use it’, rather than the opposite.

Evidence of the benefits of library usage and frequent reading on adult *literacy* levels remain patchy and anecdotal, with research currently much better at providing evidence of activity rather than evidence of impact. In one study, Carla McLoughlin and Anne Morris⁸⁸ in 2004 claimed that ‘it has long been recognised that libraries offer, in addition to a rich collection of resources, anonymity and a friendly, open environment well suited to adults with poor literacy who may be experiencing social exclusion’. Based on interviews with eight senior librarians, representing eight public library local authority services in the UK – and reports provided by these libraries themselves to explain how they were addressing adult literacy – the authors concluded that their research revealed, ‘an important role for public libraries in introducing and promoting the pleasure of reading to adults with poor literacy’.

The impact on learning and skills development

A number of recent surveys demonstrate that users value and use libraries as places to support their learning. A US-based survey from 2013 tell us that 95 per cent of Americans aged 16+ agree that the materials and resources available at public libraries play an important role in ‘giving everyone a chance to succeed’, 72 per cent consider the available research resources at libraries as very important or somewhat important and 81 per cent say that public libraries provide many services people would have a hard time finding elsewhere⁸⁹. Based on a representative telephone survey of 1,000+ respondents, Usherwood *et al*/found that ‘the fact that museums, libraries and archives can cater to a variety of learning styles and needs is highly valued’⁹⁰. The 2010 MLA survey found that access to reference books was given as an important reason for visiting libraries – 44 per cent of respondents said they used libraries to access books for study. Some users from BME backgrounds and younger adults also said they used the library as a place to study (21 per cent, compared to four per cent from white ethnic backgrounds; 17 per cent within the 18-24 age bracket compared to six per cent for users overall). Based on a number of focus groups, the authors summarised that ‘for those studying (of all ages), access to reference books was an important reason to visit the library’ and ‘that libraries also offer something unique in relation to learning opportunities as they provide an informal environment for learning’⁹¹.

Less evidence is available on the *impact* of libraries’ core offer and learning activities on adult learning and skills development. A 2008 report by City University for MLA⁹² cited a previous study from 2004, based on a survey of 1,000 learners in libraries, museums and other venues in London, which found that learning in libraries made learners more confident (88 per cent), encouraged learners to get more qualifications (76 per cent) and put learners in a stronger position to get a job (51 per cent). Other than that the evidence remains largely anecdotal and focused on smaller-scale local studies. The same study

⁸⁵ Bhatt, 2010

⁸⁶ Zickuhr *et al*, 2013

⁸⁷ Macdonald, 2012, quotes on p.32

⁸⁸ McLoughlin and Morris, 2004, p.37

⁸⁹ Zickuhr *et al*, 2013 (a)

⁹⁰ Usherwood *et al*, 2006, p.4

⁹¹ MLA, 2010, p.21 and p.22

⁹² City University, 2008, quote on p.6

by City University for example also mentioned the evaluation of a project in Wandsworth in 2007, which worked with over 200 learners who were 'not ready to engage in more formal college', and which resulted in 154 City and Guilds qualifications and nearly 25 per cent reported progression to further training, work experience, or employment.

The impact on health and wellbeing

The benefits of libraries on people's health and wellbeing are addressed in detail in Section 6.3 of this report.

The impact on adult job seeking, employability and economic activity

Surveys show that libraries' ICT provision is considered useful – and used by library visitors – for job searches, CV writing etc. The US-based survey conducted by PEW in 2013 found that libraries are particularly valued by those who are unemployed or searching for a job, with 49 per cent of unemployed respondents considering librarian assistance in finding information to be very important and 47 per cent of job seekers saying help finding or applying for a job was very important to them and their families⁹³. A further US-based study from 2010 based on a national telephone survey of 3,176 public access computing users and non-users, 44,881 online surveys at public libraries, and 280 interviews with users, library staff and community stakeholders at four public libraries confirms this. It found that of 169 million library users, 77 million (45 per cent) were library internet users. Among these users, the three most common reasons were using the internet for a variety of education purposes (an estimated 32.5 million, 42 per cent), for employment or career purposes (30 million 40 per cent), and for health and wellness issues (28 million 37 per cent). Of the 32.5 million using library internet for education purposes, nearly 37 per cent used it to learn about college degrees or certificate programmes. Among the 30 million using library computers/internet access for employment/ career purposes, 76 per

cent used it to search for job opportunities and 68 per cent who searched for a job submitted an application online⁹⁴.

No evidence on the usage by those searching for employment exists from the UK, although research shows that support to job seekers is provided at UK libraries, and suggests that the library authorities believe their online provision to be used for such purposes. A study for the MLA in 2010 found that at least 86 per cent of library authorities provided support to the unemployed to get online, and that this support was delivered through services including support with job-searching online (76 per cent), support with CV writing (71 per cent) and short courses to improve ICT skills (63 per cent). When asking the library authorities about their views on the motivations for library users to access the internet in a library setting, 'using the internet to find employment, i.e. job search activities (35 per cent) and writing CVs (28 per cent) were also mentioned with frequency'⁹⁵.

Other than this, evidence of the impact of libraries on job seeking and employability is largely provided through case studies based on only small numbers, and thus not generalisable. For example, a 2012 project between Derby City Libraries and a local arts centre using theatre skills to help build self-esteem and confidence in jobseekers found that all participants reported an increase in their personal confidence, with respondents describing the project as 'so helpful' and saying that the courses 'really helped my confidence and helped me remain positive'. Of the 33 jobseekers who attended, 40 per cent gained either temporary or permanent employment (although it was also conceded that the main challenge was to retain jobseekers for three sessions of the workshop)⁹⁶.

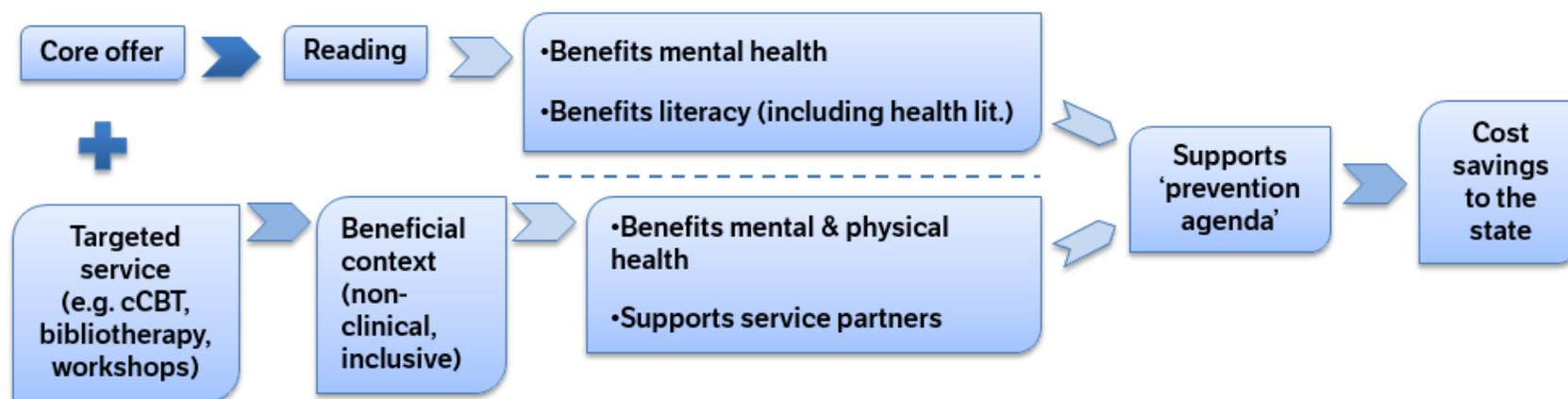
⁹³ Zickuhr *et al.*, 2013 (a)

⁹⁴ Becker *et al.*, 2010, p.5-7

⁹⁵ CFE, 2010, p.29

⁹⁶ Arts Council England, 2013

6.3 Health and wellbeing



Logic model

By contributing to increased reading levels among the population, as well as through targeted activities such as therapeutic reading groups, health workshops etc, libraries contribute to the mental and physical health of the population and support health service partners in delivering their services. It is suggested that this in turn contributes to the 'prevention agenda' – i.e. improving and protecting the health and wellbeing of all through health protection, health improvement and the prevention of ill health (eg through promoting more physical activity, healthier diets, better knowledge of the causes of ill health etc)⁹⁷. This ultimately leads to cost savings to the state.

Provision and usage

As already suggested in the 2009 literature review⁹⁸, 'a baseline of activity regarding health and wellbeing activities is not known with any consistency'. However, the report suggests that such activities increasingly seem to be part of the core public library offer, and this is supported by a number of recent studies and surveys. Some data also exists on the usage of such services, although this remains largely anecdotal beyond the existing national programmes.

Olivia Walwyn and Jennifer Rowley in 2011⁹⁹ found that 'this emphasis on reader development, partnership, and patient empowerment in both the library and health sectors is epitomized in the expansion of bibliotherapy, the use of books to improve individuals' health. By the end of 2006 about half the library services in England provided bibliotherapy schemes (or programs), and it was decided to extend them to all 22 library authorities in Wales'. Based on existing studies, they highlighted the diverse activities covered by the term 'bibliotherapy', which may include practices such as:

⁹⁷ CLOA, 2014

⁹⁸ BOP, 2009, p.26

⁹⁹ Walwyn and Rowley, 2011, p.302

- Books-on-Prescription (where patients are prescribed medical information books which they pick up at their library)
- creative bibliotherapy (eg therapeutic reading groups; the discussion of fiction and poetry through reading groups)
- one-to-one ‘book-chat’ sessions (eg set up through referral by a health worker)

The authors found that currently, ‘the majority of these programmes consisted of books-on-prescription schemes’ but that over the past 20 years, ‘more intentionally therapeutic reading groups have developed, inspired by significant growth in the popularity of reading groups (Hartley, 2001), and the expansion of the self-help movement’.¹⁰⁰

A 2010 study for the MLA¹⁰¹ concluded that there was ‘evidence of a wide range and diversity of health and wellbeing activity in public libraries’. The research found the current library offer ‘diverse and varied’, with its core elements, such as health information and signposting and health promotion, available ‘in most places’. Based on a survey of local authorities, it found that 87 per cent of authorities offered reading groups with therapeutic purpose and 63 per cent delivered creative bibliotherapy. Twenty-one per cent of library authorities were at that point offering computerised cognitive behavioural therapy services (cCBT). The study suggests that this is an aspect of libraries’ provision that is still emerging, but is seeing a rapid increase. The authors Debbie Hicks *et al*/found that over half of those offering cCBT services had only been doing so for one to two years, and that a further 10 per cent of library services were preparing to introduce cCBT.

Data on usage seems most detailed with regard to the Books on Prescription scheme – an evaluation of the scheme in Wales from 2008 found that 70 per cent of community mental health teams reported issuing prescriptions¹⁰², and a recent DCMS report¹⁰³ claimed that the

Reading Well Books on Prescription programme (which is part of the Society of Chief Librarian’s Universal Health Offer) was used by six million people ‘with anxiety, depression and other mild to moderate mental health illnesses in England’ and was continuing to grow. The report found that borrowing of the 30 core titles has increased by 145 per cent since the launch of the programme in June 2013.

Surveys show that 81 per cent of library authorities provide access to e-information on health and wellbeing¹⁰⁴. Overall, however, while a large number of examples of the provision and usage of workshops/ health information activities can be found across different studies, evidence of this remains anecdotal. An MLA report in 2009¹⁰⁵ for example mentioned activities such as an ‘Over-50s Roadshow’ that had been run across libraries in North Yorkshire for several years and which included information stands by health providers and health checks. Across seven events held in March 2009, over 2,000 people attended, with one library attracting 500 people. The report also mentioned a Skilled for Health¹⁰⁶ pilot project run across five London library authorities, in which ‘a wide range of local people participated with different ethnic backgrounds, languages and aged from 22 to 75’. Silvia Anton¹⁰⁷ and Debbie Hicks *et al*¹⁰⁸ both highlighted the example of a partnership between the Manchester library service and the charity Macmillan Cancer Support, which provided cancer information, support and health promotion across three community libraries.

Benefits to mental and physical health

While some recent studies provide indications of benefits of library-based therapeutic reading groups and health literacy, these are largely based on small samples. Indeed, several reports highlight the lack of quantitative information on the take-up and benefits of these services, and point to a lack of consensus on a national baseline as well as on standardised evaluation methodology across studies¹⁰⁹. A particular

¹⁰⁰ Walwyn and Rowley, 2011, p.303

¹⁰¹ Hicks *et al*, 2010, quote on p.3

¹⁰² McKenna *et al*, 2010

¹⁰³ DCMS, 2014

¹⁰⁴ CFE, 2010

¹⁰⁵ Aldridge and Dutton, 2009, quote on p.15

¹⁰⁶ A national initiative designed to tackle health inequalities by improving health literacy in disadvantaged communities and “equip people with the skills and knowledge needed to make informed decisions about their health and wellbeing”.

¹⁰⁷ Anton, 2010

¹⁰⁸ Hicks *et al*, 2010

¹⁰⁹ Hicks *et al*, 2010; BOP, 2009

issue appears to lie in the fact that ‘research that has been carried out has tended to be dismissed by medical professionals because of its qualitative nature’¹¹⁰. Hicks *et al*/similarly concluded that ‘libraries’ evidence collection is focused on anecdotal and usage data rather than impact evaluation’, and that ‘libraries need robust evidence of impact, delivered in a language that commissioners and other partners [eg from the health sector] understand’.¹¹¹

Despite this overall observation, existing studies provide some insight into the impact of reading, literacy and library-based activities on mental and physical health. What perhaps underpins their success is the reference to the beneficial context of libraries for patients. The Skilled for Health pilot project for example found that a large majority of the participants particularly valued the library setting of the activities - 88 per cent said the library was a good place for learning and all said they would like to continue learning in the library¹¹². Hicks *et al*¹¹³ quote a service user as ‘describing the library as “a happy place” where you can be anonymous and where “all you have to do is go up the road and you can get yourself back on track again”’. Similarly, Anton quotes another library user: ‘anybody uses the library ... you could be there for any reason ... it’s a bit anonymous I suppose’¹¹⁴.

The health benefits of literacy and reading

As noted in the 2009 literature review¹¹⁵, ‘there is now a wealth of research that demonstrates strong correlations between literacy levels and a variety of physical and mental health and wellbeing outcomes’. A number of studies have also linked *adult learning* to mental wellbeing, as well as the indirect economic benefits gained from higher skills levels and strengthened social support networks. The 2009 review concludes that ‘provided libraries can robustly evidence the impact of their services and resources in terms of literacy and learning outcomes, it is reasonable to posit that this will generate additional health and wellbeing benefits’.

In addition, a few recent surveys also provide indications of the beneficial effects of reading (rather than literacy) on adult’s life satisfaction – in the 2014 Booktrust Reading Habits survey¹¹⁶, 76 per cent of respondents said they felt reading improved their life, and the same number said it helped to make them feel good. The authors also found that ‘people who read books regularly are on average more satisfied with life, happier, and more likely to feel that the things they do in life are worthwhile’.

The benefits of health literacy

It may also be argued that libraries have a role to play in promoting health literacy – improving people’s access to health information and their capacity to use it effectively – which in turn may be associated with improved health outcomes more generally.

There is some suggestion that overall literacy skills play a role in people’s health literacy levels (i.e. impacting on their capacity to access and use information). A 2009 systematic literature review of health literacy and child health¹¹⁷ found that ‘child and parent literacy seems associated with important health outcomes’, including health knowledge and health-influencing behaviour. The authors also found that studies indicated that people with lower literacy had less knowledge about health outcomes, behaviours and health services, and that this related to worse health outcomes particularly for younger children. Although conceding that more research was necessary to better understand the causality of this relationship, they suggested that ‘practitioners should consider the role of literacy and interventions that can improve health behaviours and health outcomes’. Given the role of libraries in promoting general literacy in children and adults as discussed above, this strongly suggests a role for libraries’ core offer in contributing to users’ capacity to access and use health information effectively.

¹¹⁰ Walwyn and Rowley, 2011, p.303

¹¹¹ Hicks *et al*, 2010, p.5

¹¹² Aldridge and Dutton, 2009

¹¹³ Hicks *et al*, 2010, p.50

¹¹⁴ Anton, 2010, p.108

¹¹⁵ BOP, 2009, quotes on p.29

¹¹⁶ Gleed, 2014, quote on p.2

¹¹⁷ DeWalt and Hink, 2009, quotes on p.265 and p.273

A US-based study by Ruth Parker in 2005 suggested that low health literacy limited the effective dissemination of relevant health information in society, especially to vulnerable populations where health literacy challenges are particularly pervasive.¹¹⁸ Parker concluded that 'library professionals have a unique opportunity to help overcome health literacy challenges through developing effective communications strategies for disseminating relevant health information to audiences with differing levels of health literacy.'¹¹⁹

This suggestion of using libraries to disseminate health information is given further support by evidence demonstrating that libraries are already being used as a source of information on health and wellness issues. A US study from 2010¹²⁰, based on large-scale surveying, found that of 77 million library computer users, 37 per cent (around 28 million users) used the computers to find out about health and wellness issues, including learning about medical conditions, finding health care providers, and assessing health insurance options. Of these, 84 per cent reported doing research about a disease, illness, or medical condition, 60 per cent logged on to learn about diet and nutrition, and 53 per cent used the library computers to learn about a medical procedure.

Evidence on the effectiveness of using libraries to disseminate health information and promote people's understanding of such information from the UK is predominantly based on case studies of library-based health information activities. For example, the Skilled for Health pilot project in London (mentioned above) found that 64 per cent of participants felt they knew more about using health services after completing the course¹²¹. In another example, a project based in Suffolk Libraries to address bad diet and food poverty via Health and Wellbeing Workshops resulted in 84 per cent participants saying they would change their diet, 84 per cent saying they would take up more regular physical exercise, and 89 per cent saying they understood the effect food and exercise has on good mental health. The survey also found that

feedback from mental health service was particularly positive, with 93 per cent finding the activity 'useful and inspiring'¹²².

Bibliotherapy & cCBT

Based on a review of selected studies and case studies, the Reading Agency¹²³ concluded that there was 'strong evidence that self-help reading can help people with common mental health conditions, such as anxiety and depression, sometimes on its own or with other forms of treatment'. It also found evidence to suggest that 'the Books on Prescription model is an effective method of delivering self-help reading' and concluded that 'whilst support and guidance increases the effectiveness of self-help, books alone are also helpful'. A 2010 study on bibliotherapy¹²⁴ (focusing on books on prescription-type activity), based on interviews with 11 users and five practitioners, supports this. It found that bibliotherapy was perceived as a way to bring books to individuals who would not normally have the resources or inclination to engage in therapeutic reading, and as promoting inclusion. It seems ease of access to literature was particularly important for the success of the scheme – the prescription procedure was considered user-friendly, helping to 'overcome previous failed attempts to find informative literature'. A full evaluation of the Books on Prescription scheme is due for publication later this year, and should provide further insight into the benefits of the scheme¹²⁵.

Liz Brewster *et al* also point to the fact that the National Institute of Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) recommends the use of guided self-help treatments for certain conditions, and that the evidence provided by the institute is frequently used to champion such schemes. She quotes one interviewee: 'The National Institute for Clinical Excellence published guidelines on treatment for anxiety and depression and eating disorders, and in all of these they suggested that

¹¹⁸ Parker, 2005

¹¹⁹ Parker, 2005, p.84

¹²⁰ Becker *et al.*, 2010

¹²¹ Aldridge and Dutton, 2009

¹²² CLOA, 2014

¹²³ Reading Agency, accessed 2014 (b)

¹²⁴ McKenna *et al.*, 2010, quote on p.501

¹²⁵ DCMS, 2014

bibliotherapy was something to be considered ... that GPs should consider books before considering medication'¹²⁶.

Walwyn and Rowley in 2011 in turn found that, based on interviews with 14 members of three library-based therapeutic reading groups, various benefits were described including emotional relief and insight (eg from identification with the characters), sparking an interest, companionship and boosting self-esteem and confidence, and that 'groups were successfully targeting those who needed them most'. They concluded that 'from a participant perspective, therapeutic reading groups offer individuals a distinctive range of benefits, deriving from their unique structure and combination of reading and conversation' and that these benefits 'dramatically improve individuals' personal lives, but also enable them to make positive contributions to society'¹²⁷. Certainly, these claims to the beneficial effects of reading are backed up by the Booktrust Reading Habits survey¹²⁸ mentioned in Section 6.2, which showed that 76 per cent of respondents said they felt reading improved their life and helped to make them feel good, and led the authors to conclude that 'people who read books regularly are on average more satisfied with life, happier, and more likely to feel that the things they do in life are worthwhile'.

cCBT service provision in libraries remains at a relatively early stage of development and there is therefore no conclusive evidence yet of its impact. Silvia Anton in 2010 pointed to one programme endorsed by the National Institute of Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE), and which 'has been shown to be successful for individuals experiencing symptoms of mild to moderate depression.' She goes on to suggest that this endorsement, 'combined with MLA's recent evidence of libraries being perceived as safe spaces by both patients and partners, is an encouraging sign for the future development of this service'¹²⁹.

Benefits for health service providers

Existing studies show that a large number of library-based health-related activities take place in partnership with health providers. Based on their survey of library authorities in 2010, Debbie Hicks *et al* found that around three quarters (733) of all schemes in the areas of health and wellbeing were operated in partnership (with various agencies, from the public, private and third sectors), and although they found that interviewees felt many partnerships were not strong or well-established, the survey also indicated that one third of all partnerships were longstanding¹³⁰. The Community Libraries Programme Evaluation in 2010 in turn found 'various examples of local health and social organisations making use of libraries following the Community Libraries Programme'. This included organisations such as Age Concern and Harrogate and Ripon Centres for Voluntary Service, who were 'committed to utilising spaces at the new library building', with Age Concern 'trailing approaches in the new facility by running weekly sessions'¹³¹.

There is only a little evidence to suggest why service providers value libraries as a space to deliver health activities, or what benefits it may have for them. Hicks *et al*¹³² found that case study evidence suggested libraries were valued for their 'neutral, non-stigmatised, non-clinical community space' and that they were considered as having a 'huge asset in the community space that they provide'. One case study also found that the partners considered the library workforce as a 'huge asset' due to their community knowledge and outreach potential. Similarly, the researchers found that library-based cCBT services were considered the 'best bet' for health partners, as they provided a low-cost, neutral community venue and they felt the public liked using the library for cCBT. The report mentioned the project between the Manchester library service and the Macmillan Cancer Charity, quoting Macmillan as saying they felt 'the library was playing an important role in normalising the view of cancer as a health issue and normalising the process of diagnosing and dealing with the disease'.

¹²⁶ Brewster *et al*, 2010, p.197

¹²⁷ Walwyn and Rowley, 2011, p.309 and p.311

¹²⁸ Gleed, 2014, quote on p.2

¹²⁹ Anton, 2010, p.108

¹³⁰ Hicks *et al*, 2010,

¹³¹ ERS, 2010, quotes on p.22

¹³² Hicks *et al*, 2010, quotes p.4, p.23 and p.34

Grainne McKenna *et al*¹³³ in 2010 also found that GPs provided the majority of referrals to bibliotherapy schemes, with the remaining referrals coming from psychologists and psychiatrists. Based on interviews with five GPs, she found that the majority of GPs expressed enthusiasm towards bibliotherapy, but that ‘the extent to which each practitioner implemented it varied considerably.’

The prevention agenda and generating cost savings

A small number of recent studies have highlighted the benefits of library-based health provision in contributing to the ‘prevention agenda’, and the potential savings that this may bring.

Ruth Parker in 2005 claimed that limited health literacy (in the US) may lead to billions of dollars in avoidable health care costs¹³⁴. In the UK, Hicks *et al*¹³⁵ highlighted the need to cut costs and broaden the health and social care provision, and suggested that this will be a key driver in developing the partnership structures that support libraries’ health and wellbeing offer. While not referring specifically to partnerships in the area of health and wellbeing, Anne Goulding¹³⁶ supports this suggestion. Based on a number of interviews, she found these revealed that ‘public libraries are increasingly sharing premises with a range of other services ... and there are undoubtedly sound financial, strategic and community engagement advantages to this’.

More recently, the 2014 Chief Cultural & Leisure Officers Association (CLOA) report points out that such measures will become increasingly important, in particular with the drive to extend local government duties to include more responsibility for the health and wellbeing of local residents, and with the renewed focus on prevention and the involvement of communities in response to pressures on the NHS. The authors suggest that ‘the new funding landscape provides an incentive to reduce costs, minimise hospital admissions and support the prevention agenda’ and that libraries will have a role to play in this development: ‘key services that can contribute to this prevention

agenda include cultural services covering arts, heritage, libraries and archives, sports and recreation, parks and open spaces’.¹³⁷

Finally, to illustrate the importance of the prevention agenda, it is worth pointing to the high costs that are currently incurred due to ill health in Great Britain overall:

- According to the NHS, the wider economic cost of mental illness in England has been estimated at £105.2 billion each year, including costs of services, lost productivity at work, and reduced quality of life. In 2008/09, the NHS spent around £10.4 billion (10.8 per cent of its annual secondary healthcare budget) on mental health services¹³⁸.
- According to a 2011 study published in the Journal of Public Health, in 2006–07, poor diet-related ill health cost the NHS in the UK £5.8 billion, the cost of physical inactivity was £900 million, smoking cost was £3.3 billion, alcohol cost £3.3 billion and overweight and obesity cost £5.1 billion¹³⁹.

¹³³ McKenna *et al*, 2010, quote on p.500

¹³⁴ Parker, 2005

¹³⁵ Hicks *et al*, 2010

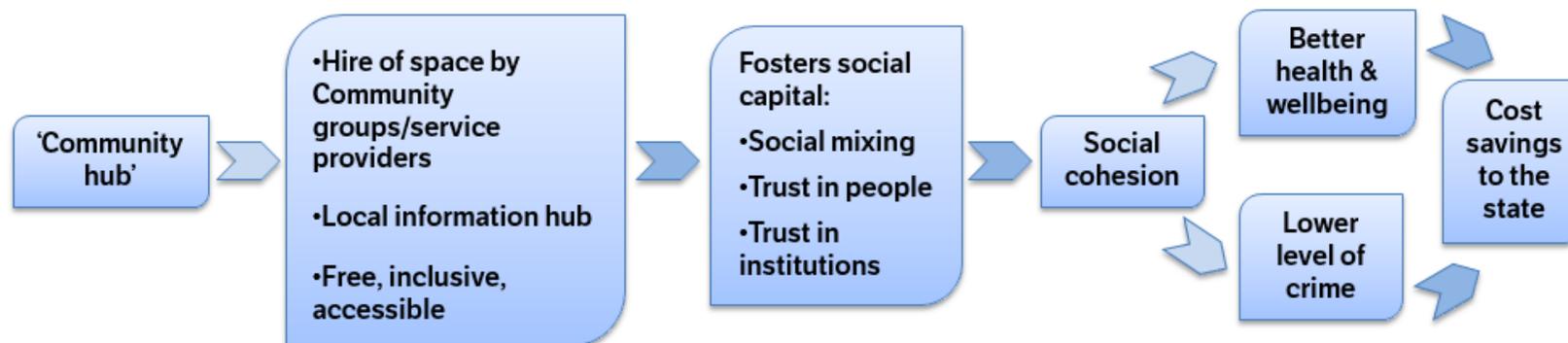
¹³⁶ Goulding, 2008, p.44

¹³⁷ CLOA, 2014, quotes on p.10 and p.5

¹³⁸ NHS, accessed 2013

¹³⁹ Scarborough *et al*, 2011

6.4 Community support and cohesion



Logic model

As community hubs, libraries are free, inclusive and accessible, providing space for community groups and service providers alike, as well as providing local information for the community. It is suggested that this fosters social capital, as libraries' accessibility supports greater social mixing within the population and libraries promote increased trust in people and institutions. This in turn leads to stronger communities as a whole.

Usage of libraries as 'community hubs'

In a 2009 report for the MLA on the benefits of museums, libraries and archives for older people, Fiona Aldridge and Yanina Dutton concluded that libraries (along with museums and archives) 'are uniquely placed in providing public spaces within local communities'¹⁴⁰. Similarly, Anne Goulding in 2008 claimed that based on an analysis of selected literature, 'it could be argued that public libraries have long had a community focus, but recently the role that public libraries play in

enabling community involvement, cohesion and capacity building has been emphasised by public library managers and policymakers', and suggested that the public library is being positioned as a key community resource¹⁴¹.

Recent surveys certainly indicate the high value that users and non-users place on libraries as venues for the community. The MLA in 2010¹⁴² found that 90 per cent of users and 59 per cent of non-users considered libraries as essential or very important to communities. The survey conducted by the Carnegie Trust¹⁴³ revealed that 74 per cent of those surveyed in England felt libraries were 'very important' or 'essential' for communities, while only 44 per cent said that they were very important or essential for them personally. Kathryn Zickuhr *et al* noticed a similar pattern in the US, finding that 'even as their reliance on their local public library dips, adults in their late 20s start to express a greater appreciation for libraries in general', with almost three quarters saying that the library is important to them and their families¹⁴⁴. Carolyn Miller *et al* found that, based on their survey of nearly 3,000 people aged 16+, 94 per cent of Americans said that having a public library improved the quality of life in a community, and 90 per cent say that closing their public library would have an impact on their community¹⁴⁵.

¹⁴⁰ Aldridge and Dutton, 2009, p.7

¹⁴¹ Goulding, 2008, p.39

¹⁴² MLA, 2010

¹⁴³ Macdonald, 2012

¹⁴⁴ Zickur *et al*, 2012, p.4

¹⁴⁵ Miller *et al*, 2013

While this provides a clear indication of the value that people place on the availability of libraries' *core offer* (of space, books and ICT) for the community, evidence of the provision and uptake of library-based community activities and library usage by community groups is largely case study based. Referring to a 2006 report for the MLA, Goulding claimed that the 'evidence of community and voluntary groups using the public library space is widespread, as is that of the library publicising services available to the community'. However, she also pointed out that 'examples of more complex partnership work in public libraries are less common'. Aldridge and Dutton in 2009¹⁴⁶ found that 'while the research shows that facilities are increasingly being opened up to local groups and organisations, there is more potential for these spaces to be used well, for a variety of purposes, by a wider range of stakeholders'. Perhaps echoing this, the MLA in 2010 found that despite the increasing offer of other activities, books are still the main reason why most people use libraries and that beyond reading and learning (particularly for children), 'detailed knowledge of the range of services on offer is not high, even amongst some user groups'¹⁴⁷.

Libraries foster social capital

Social capital is a concept that was developed to examine the value of social networks. It refers to the collective value of all 'social networks' (i.e. who it is that people know) and the inclinations that arise from these networks to do things for other people (i.e. the norms of reciprocity and trust). Links can be between individuals, between individuals and groups, or between individuals, groups and institutions. Connections to other people thus become an asset that can benefit individuals and communities.

Literature shows that libraries may contribute to developing social capital in particular through their promotion of social mixing (i.e. by drawing in and bringing together people from across society) and the trust they inspire among people and in institutions.

Supporting social mixing

As demonstrated by recent survey data outlined in sections 6.1 and 6.2, libraries' core offer is valued and used by people across society. As Rachel Smithies summarised in a 2011 research and literature review for Arts Council England, based on DCMS Data for 2010/11 and a summary report for DCMS's CASE programme in 2010:

...people who are older and with higher education levels are more likely to visit a library – though this pattern is less marked than for other forms of cultural engagement ... Differences in socioeconomic status do not affect the likelihood of people using a library. Similarly, illness or having a disability does not reduce the likelihood of engaging. People from minority ethnic backgrounds are generally more likely to visit than white people¹⁴⁸.

Based on their survey of 2013 in the USA, Zickuhr *et al*¹⁴⁹ similarly concluded that 'women, African-Americans and Hispanics, adults who live in lower-income households, and adults with lower levels of educational attainment are more likely than other groups to declare all the library services we asked about as very important'.

Certainly, this implies that libraries have the potential to contribute to social mixing among the local community. The 2010 MLA survey found that the opportunity for social contact at libraries was seen as a very important motivation for some user groups, particularly older people, parents and people in rural areas¹⁵⁰. Similarly, a 2006 study¹⁵¹ based on a telephone survey of 1,000 respondents found that 'museums, libraries and archives are seen as social, recreational places [with] the opportunity to mix with fellow users and receive professional advice'. The key to this seems to lie in libraries functioning as community meeting places. Gunnar Svendsen points out that libraries are a place where all people can gather in a relaxed and informal atmosphere and on a voluntary basis, 'for a multitude of individual and social purposes' and cites library and information science studies which show that 'public

¹⁴⁶ Aldridge and Dutton, 2009, p.7

¹⁴⁷ MLA, 2010, p.57

¹⁴⁸ Smithies, 2011, p.22

¹⁴⁹ Zickuhr *et al*, 2013 (a), quote on website

¹⁵⁰ MLA, 2010

¹⁵¹ Usherwood *et al*, 2006, quote on p.3

libraries are open meeting places, which function as important providers of a long row of individual and collective benefits in local communities¹⁵².

Such findings are supported by several studies which provide more detailed examples of library-based social mixing. Most of these take a case study approach or have relatively small sample sizes.

The Community Libraries Programme evaluation, for example, revealed that 'the library has become a venue for young people from different ethnic backgrounds, participating in positive activities, mixing and building a rapport amongst groups who did not previously socialise'. One case study of a library-based Conversation Class 'appeared to contribute to social inclusion'. Participants particularly appreciated being given the opportunity to communicate with native English speakers and reported the fact that they had made new friends since coming to class. The authors also found that young people appreciated having a facility 'similar to a youth club' at the library, and that this brought different social, ethnic and age groups together.¹⁵³

Several studies also suggest the importance of local libraries in promoting the integration of immigrants, in particular Scandinavian studies. Based on telephone surveys with 250 people, Svanhild Aabø *et al* in 2009 concluded that the library is a meeting place and place for joint activities, where people learn something about those different from themselves. 'The library appears to be a place, where in a safe environment and in an unobtrusive way, people are exposed to the complexity of the digital and multicultural society and learn something about multiculturalism'¹⁵⁴. Although writing that there is limited published research on the role of public libraries in the lives of immigrants, Ragnar Audonson *et al* in 2011¹⁵⁵ in turn mentioned a previous study of public libraries in New York, which found that they had the potential for being an important information ground for immigrants. A further study he cites, from Denmark, found that 'immigrants, to a

higher degree than ethnic Norwegians, used the library for purposes other than borrowing books, in particular, as a meeting place', and a Swedish report concluded that local branch libraries were important meeting places, with librarians often representing the first connection immigrants made with Swedish people. Audonson *et al*/themselves conducted interviews with nine female immigrants to Norway. Findings suggested that libraries helped immigrants to cope with their new environments in particular in the early stages of immigration. Mothers felt 'they could live out their needs for social contact' and nearly all respondents reported that the library played a vital role in helping them learn Norwegian (by providing literature for different skill levels) and about Norwegian society in general.

Volunteering at libraries may also be a pathway into supporting social mixing. A 2005 survey¹⁵⁶ found that 67 per cent of libraries involved volunteers. Although the survey found that volunteers were predominantly white and 73 per cent were aged 55+, Anne Goulding made the point that volunteers can help libraries reach hard to reach groups. She referred to an example where boys from an exclusive local school offered ICT taster sessions to local people, which were also taken up by a local project for asylum seekers, '[initiating] a dialogue between these two groups ... who otherwise ... almost certainly would not have spent time talking together'¹⁵⁷. Encouragingly, recent CIPFA data also shows that the number of volunteers in libraries has been on the increase in the past years, from 20,473 in 2010/11 to 32,029 in 2012/13 (with an increase of 44 per cent between 2011/12 and 2012/13)¹⁵⁸.

It seems volunteers may be particularly helpful in attracting older people to the library – Aldridge and Dutton found that 'using older people as volunteers has proved an extremely successful approach to [delivering IT training] to older people'¹⁵⁹ and that such volunteering opportunities may meet in particular the needs of a range of older people, including the most vulnerable and isolated. Another example the authors included, of activities for older people in libraries (as an

¹⁵² Svendsen, 2013, p. quotes on p.56 and p.53

¹⁵³ ERS, 2010, p.15

¹⁵⁴ Aabø *et al*, 2009, p.25

¹⁵⁵ Audonson *et al*, 2011, quotes on p.221 and 224

¹⁵⁶ Howlett *et al*, 2005

¹⁵⁷ Goulding, 2008, p.45

¹⁵⁸ CIPFA, 2013

¹⁵⁹ Aldridge and Dutton, 2009, p.7

alternative to using day care centres, and to provide enjoyable activities), suggests that these activities present:

....an opportunity to mix socially and find out about local services and learning opportunities. This project contributes to improving the citizenship and health literacy of older people. The events have led to a book group and a theatre group forming.¹⁶⁰

Increasing trust in people

There is some evidence to suggest that the contribution by libraries to social mixing further leads to increased trust among people, thereby again contributing to the creation of social capital.

Andreas Vårheim *et al*¹⁶¹ in 2008 quoted a previous study by Cox *et al* in 2000 ('the only comprehensive study of public libraries and social capital to date'), which demonstrated that different groups meet in the library and that 'libraries function to enhance social interaction and trust, and that they foster equal access and a sense of equity'. Based on a small number of interviews with library professionals in the US and Norway, Vårheim *et al* concluded that public libraries, 'by being an institution where everybody is welcome regardless of social status', and which 'meet its patrons as equals and on their own terms more than most other public service institutions', are likely to be a generator of 'generalised trust' (defined by Vårheim *et al* as situation where individuals trust most people, not only their own kind). The authors suggested that by making themselves more accessible to new and diverse groups of users, libraries could counteract the fact that 'racially and ethnically diverse populations drive down trust', and concluded that 'public libraries seem the most important factor in creating generalised trust in the OECD area'¹⁶².

The authors suggested that Cox *et al*'s findings indicate that 'as both a meeting place and a universal service institution, the public library seems to be a creator of social capital', and went on to suggest that 'contacts made on an equal footing in a public space like the library

could have more positive consequences for social capital than more asymmetrical meetings in commercial spaces, where buying power is crucial.' Interestingly, the study also identified a correlation between high spending on public libraries and high levels of social trust (in OECD countries), although conceding a problem of causal direction (i.e. high trusting countries may prioritise public libraries). The authors concluded that by increasing generalised trust, 'libraries probably matter for the creation of social capital', but more findings that replicate those in their study were needed¹⁶³.

Based on the review of several studies, Catherine Johnson more recently concluded that 'research supports claims made about public library's role in contributing to the social capital of communities'¹⁶⁴ (although she argued that at that point little evidence existed of exactly how this social capital was built). Based on data analysis, Johnson herself suggested that the concepts that emerge as linking libraries to social capital formation include the relationships and trust between workers and patrons, workers linking patrons to resources, special help provided by library workers, and libraries as safe places to visit, to connect with others and to reduce social isolation. She argues that communities need accessible gathering spaces where people can interact and feel part of the community in order to be able to thrive.

Similarly, Gunnar Svendsen in 2013 summarised existing studies which had stressed the capability of public libraries to promote community building, function as a social meeting place, correlate with local community involvement, relieve social isolation, enhance social integration, create trust between diverse people and foster civic discourse, social responsibility and tolerance. Based on his questionnaire of rural branch libraries in Denmark, Svendsen found that library-based cultural events and libraries' 'social meeting-place functions' seem to be the most likely to engender social capital. This is so, he argues, because they benefit not only the participants individually, but the whole community, due to their ability to foster networks, trust and shared norms.'¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁰ Aldridge and Dutton, 2009, p.13

¹⁶¹ Vårheim *et al*, 2008, quotes on p.881

¹⁶² Vårheim, 2008, quotes on p.889, p.877 and p.890

¹⁶³ Vårheim, 2008, quotes on p.886 and p.889

¹⁶⁴ Johnson, 2012, quote on p.61

¹⁶⁵ Svendsen, 2013, quotes on p.63

Increasing trust in libraries and other institutions

A number of studies also highlight the level of trust people have in libraries. The 2009 literature¹⁶⁶ review found that literature suggests that libraries themselves are trusted institutions as ‘users and non-users identify libraries as inclusive, non-market, non-threatening, non-judgmental spaces’. Similarly, the above-mentioned 2006 survey-based study¹⁶⁷ found that information provided by ‘traditional repositories’ (i.e. libraries, archives and museums) is highly trusted ‘because of their higher levels of authenticity and neutrality; lack of editorial bias or manipulation; the professional assistance and ... the availability of a variety of authoritative published sources’. Importantly, this seems to go against a general trend of (occasionally quite significant) declining trust in political and other key institutions in the UK and internationally¹⁶⁸.

While it could be suggested that this trust in libraries in turn contributes to wider trust in institutions, there is currently little evidence of this. Some evidence does exist that public libraries may contribute to better ties between people, groups and institutions within a local area, thus leading to increased ‘institutional social capital’. Based on his survey of branch libraries in 62 rural Danish municipalities, Svendsen pointed out the importance of libraries in creating effective partnerships within the local area. He argued that as public and voluntary institutions collaborate on local core and non-core library services, public libraries are breeding grounds for ‘institutional social capital’.¹⁶⁹

Community cohesion and healthier communities with less crime – and the potential cost savings to the state

In summary, a number of studies demonstrate a link between libraries and the social capital of communities, based on their availability as safe social gathering places for all, their ability to foster relationships and trust between employees, visitors, groups and local institutions, and their ability to relieve social isolation and promote integration, social and

civic responsibility. As Svendsen goes on to suggest, the networks, trusts and norms fostered by libraries contribute to strengthening social (or community) cohesion, communication and integration within the community – ‘goods, which no citizen is excluded from enjoying’¹⁷⁰.

Backing this up, a 2005 report for the MLA¹⁷¹ defined community cohesion as the ‘quality and character of relationships between residents of a given locality’, pointing out that this was particularly salient in social policy due to the concern over the lack of integration between people from different backgrounds within certain localities. The authors suggested that ‘numerous public library project and partnership activities can be said to contribute to this theme’ and identified four attributes of the public library that contribute to community cohesion:

- library as resource, by providing resources that people can use to explore and learn about differences, heritage etc
- librarians as expertise, by providing support in information seeking
- library as place, by providing a civic building that people are encouraged to enter at no cost, and with few expectations
- library as symbol, by being perceived as a public resource providing a public good

Arguably then, this is a sign of stronger communities as a whole – Johnson suggests that ‘because social capital is associated with more cohesive and healthy communities, organisations that foster social capital should be considered valuable community assets’.¹⁷² Indeed, some research suggests specifically that community cohesion may contribute to people’s health (and thus to the ‘prevention agenda’ as outlined in Section 6.3 above), as well as to reduced levels of crime.

In its *Better Together* guide for people in the health sector, the Coventry University Institute of Community Cohesion¹⁷³ suggests that health and community cohesion are ‘inextricably linked’, arguing that in

¹⁶⁶ BOP, 2009, p.1

¹⁶⁷ Usherwood *et al.*, 2006, p.6

¹⁶⁸ See Duffy *et al.*, 2003 and Park *et al.*, 2013

¹⁶⁹ Svendsen, 2013, quotes on p.53

¹⁷⁰ Svendsen, 2013, quotes on p.63

¹⁷¹ Harris and Dudley, 2005, quotes on p.7 and p.3

¹⁷² Johnson, 2012, p.52. Johnson also suggests that in particular new library buildings, by creating civic pride and motivating community members to improve other aspects of their neighbourhood, may increase the level of social capital in a community.

¹⁷³ Lawrence, 2009, p.15-16

more cohesive communities, it is easier for public services to engage with the local community and tailor their services to local health needs. The author, Andrew Lawrence, cites several studies, including Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone: the collapse and rise of American community*, in which Putnam suggests that in cohesive communities, social capital increases, and so does the state of people's health. Lawrence also mentions research in Britain:

- Petrou and Kupek in 2007 'found a strong relationship between high stocks of social capital and improved health outcomes'
- research by the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit for the Audit Commission suggested that 'there is a correlation between a lack of cohesion and inequality in life chances at the local level', with lack of community cohesion associated with economic inequality, poor mental health, higher levels of crime and antisocial behaviour

However, a 2007 report by Asif Afridi for the Commission on Integration and Cohesion¹⁷⁴ found that there is 'relative paucity of evidence' on the effect of cohesion on deprivation and 'only very limited evidence to support the idea that cohesion can actually reduce deprivation and inequality'. Afridi found some 'relevant research in the areas of mental health and criminal justice', citing:

- a 2007 academic study by Fone which concluded that 'in areas where deprivation is marked but social cohesion is high, ... the effects of deprivation on mental health are ameliorated'
- the above mentioned work by Robert Putnam, in which Putnam also argued that 'higher levels of social capital, all else being equal, translate[s] into lower levels of crime'
- a 2006 Home Office report which 'suggests that strong community cohesion can transcend factors of public disorganisation [...] which have traditionally been seen as the strongest predictors of crime'.

This belief in the value of community cohesion for strong, healthy communities is reflected in the fact that government and a variety of

public agencies have identified social capital as a crucial factor in the success of public policies, from improving health outcomes to strengthening local democracy. In a discussion paper prepared by the Performance and Innovation Unit of the Cabinet Office in 2002¹⁷⁵, it was argued that social capital made citizens more community-orientated, law abiding and co-operative with the state, as well as being 'more sophisticated consumers of politics'.

As suggested in Section 6.3, a small number of recent studies have highlighted the potential cost savings that may be gained through measures contributing to the health 'prevention agenda', while studies show the high costs faced by Britain due to physical and mental ill health. Similarly, research has been undertaken to put a value on the costs of crime. A Home Office Research Study from 2000 found that 'the total cost of crime to England and Wales in 1999/2000 is estimated at around £60 billion, although this figure is still far from comprehensive, as it does not include important costs such as fear of crime or quality of life impacts'. As part of this overall figure, the authors found that the response to crime by the criminal justice system alone constituted around 20 per cent of the total cost of crime, at around £12 billion¹⁷⁶. While not suggesting any potential measures to reduce costs themselves, such figures clearly illustrate the potential cost savings that may be made through promoting healthier communities less at risk of crime.

¹⁷⁴ Afridi, 2007, p.6-7

¹⁷⁵ Aldridge *et al*, 2002

¹⁷⁶ Brand and Price, 2000

6.5 Digital inclusion



Logic model

Libraries support digital inclusion across their communities through providing basic access to computer terminals and the internet, and through targeted ICT training. This provision helps breach the digital divide by providing access to online public services and welfare provision for all, as well as by giving everyone a chance to participate in online-based public and civic life. This in turn leads to cost savings for the state.

Breaching the digital divide: provision and usage

A number of recent publications highlight the existing lack of internet access and digital skills in the UK, and raise concerns over the (increasingly urgent) emergence of digital exclusion and a digital divide in the population.

According to recent findings by Catherine McDonald for the Tinder Foundation, 11 million people in the UK have poor digital skills¹⁷⁷. She predicts that if current trends are not addressed, 6.2 million people could remain without basic online skills by 2020. ONS data for 2012¹⁷⁸

also shows that 7.42 million in the UK had never accessed the internet – leading to the assumption that a large proportion of these people may also have no computer (let alone internet) access at home. This ‘digital exclusion’ is concentrated in certain key groups within society: the ONS data reveals that internet use is linked to socioeconomic and demographic characteristics, such as age, sex, disability, geographical location and weekly earnings: ‘adults who are less likely to have used the internet include the elderly and the disabled.’¹⁷⁹ The divergence seems particularly strong with regard to disability. Some 3.8 million (33 per cent) of those who were disabled had never used the internet, representing 50 per cent of the 7.4 million adults who had never used the internet. Of those adults who reported no disability, only nine per cent (3.5 million adults) had never used the internet. Income results in a smaller difference – six per cent of those earning less than £200 per week had never used the internet compared with only two per cent of those earning above £500 per week.

Alongside this, studies demonstrate the existing level of available ICT provision across the public library networks. In 2004, the People’s Network evaluation found that almost all of the UK’s 4,000 libraries were connected to the internet and concluded that ‘citizens can now go into any library and be confident of gaining [internet] access’¹⁸⁰. The number

¹⁷⁷ McDonald, 2014

¹⁷⁸ ONS, 2013

¹⁷⁹ ONS, 2013, p.5

¹⁸⁰ Big Lottery Fund, 2004, p.4

has increased rapidly - recent CIPFA figures¹⁸¹ show that in 2012/13, there were 34,075 terminals with library catalogues and internet access in England alone, while the Reading Agency¹⁸² published figures saying that there are now 42,914 computer terminals (with internet access) in libraries across the UK. The MLA in 2010¹⁸³ also found that libraries are already well suited to providing support to get visitors online. Eighty per cent of English library authorities had received funding to train frontline library staff in digital skills, and 91 per cent offered support to library users to get online via one-to-one and group support. 76 per cent claimed they offered specific support for older people and 86 per cent offered support to the unemployed to get online, eg for job searching (76 per cent) and CV writing (71 per cent). All libraries are now UKOnline centres and they account for around half of the 6,000 UKOnline centres in the country¹⁸⁴, meaning that 'libraries provide free internet access to people of all age, supported by trained staff'¹⁸⁵.

Several large-scale surveys also demonstrate the high usage of this provision, although this focuses on the core offer (the availability of computer terminals and access) rather than the take-up of courses. The People's Network evaluation¹⁸⁶ cited earlier studies which found that 10 per cent of all internet users in the UK recently accessed the internet from a public library (2003 UK online report) and that 16 per cent of those aged 16+ used the internet at the public library (MORI survey 2004), although this figure may well have decreased over time as internet access in other public spaces (eg cafés) and via smartphones has become more ubiquitous. Still, more recent surveys suggest that ICT provision remains a major draw for young people, with 39 per cent of those surveyed by Christina Clark and Lucy Hawkins in 2011¹⁸⁷ reporting that they used libraries because they have computers.

The MLA's survey¹⁸⁸ of English adults in 2010 in turn showed that of the 57 per cent who considered themselves library users, 20 per cent said their main reason to use the library was to use computers with an internet connection. This is echoed by findings in the US: a 2010 study based on large-scale surveying for the Institute of Museum and Library Services found that 'internet access is now one of the most sought after public library services, used by nearly half of all visitors'¹⁸⁹. More recently, research for the Pew Research Centre based on a national survey of 2,252 Americans aged 16 in 2012¹⁹⁰ found that 77 per cent of those they surveyed said free access to computers and internet was a very important service of libraries, and that 26 per cent of those aged 16+ used computers and wifi at libraries to go online.

Studies also seem to indicate that this service is indeed used by those at risk of digital exclusion, rather than those who are already 'digitally included'. Although the 2010 US-based study¹⁹¹ found that of those who used the internet at libraries, 75 per cent had internet access at home, work or elsewhere, it also found that 44 per cent of people beneath the federal poverty line used public libraries' ICT facilities, and stressed that 'but for libraries, millions of Americans would not have reliable internet access in a digital age when a connection is often needed to complete school assignments, apply for jobs, or secure government services'. Similarly, reports have suggested that libraries' ICT offer in the UK is a 'real incentive for those who didn't have this at home, who include those in lower income groups, older people and the unemployed'¹⁹², and that libraries are a key delivery mechanism to support the delivery of the national plan for digital participation¹⁹³.

More recent studies provide firmer evidence for the use of ICT provision in libraries in the UK by those who need it the most. Citing a previous report from the DCMS in 2010, Macdonald¹⁹⁴ concluded that

¹⁸¹ CIPFA, 2013

¹⁸² Reading Agency, accessed 2014 (a), citing The Reading Agency survey August 2013, Taking Part statistical release, DCMS 2013 and CIPFA, Public Library Statistics, December 2013 as sources for a number of library 'headline statistics'

¹⁸³ CFE, 2010

¹⁸⁴ CFE, 2010

¹⁸⁵ Aldridge and Dutton, 2009, p.11

¹⁸⁶ Big Lottery Fund, 2004

¹⁸⁷ Clark and Hawkins, 2011

¹⁸⁸ MLA, 2010

¹⁸⁹ Becker *et al*, 2010

¹⁹⁰ Miller *et al*, 2013

¹⁹¹ Becker *et al*, 2010, p.2

¹⁹² MLA, 2010, p.21

¹⁹³ CFE, 2010

¹⁹⁴ Macdonald, 2012, p.20

'there is evidence from England that half of those who do not have access to the internet at home, but use the internet in public places, do so in a public library'. During a recent presentation at the 2014 Libraries and Welfare Reform Conference¹⁹⁵, Janene Cox, the president of the Society of Chief Librarians claims that during 2012, around 1.5 million people were supported to go online for the first time within their library (although the source of this figure is unclear). Drawing on figures of the Staffordshire library service, Cox also noted that the service hosted 2,900 IT learning events during 2012/13 and supported on average 230 people per day to get online for the first time in Staffordshire alone.

Evidence suggests that libraries may be more successful in attracting people to use such services than other venues: research has found that library-based UKOnline centres have considerably higher footfall than in other community-based centres, with an average of 300 drop-in users per week in library-based centres as opposed to 40 per week in the community-based ones. Of the two million users annually, 'three-quarters are counted as being socially excluded, and around half have no formal qualifications when they start using a centre'¹⁹⁶.

Personal benefits of digital inclusion

As demonstrated above, libraries regularly support people in 'getting online for the first time' and gaining basic IT skills. Recent surveys also show that library ICT is frequently used by visitors to gain information important to their everyday life, and to support their education and work.

The 2004 evaluation of the People's Network programme¹⁹⁷ found that libraries were increasingly 'using ICT as a means to supporting learning around customers' interests', and mentioned a range of value-added services, such as information finding, content creation and facilitating interactive learning. Looking at the survey returns of the Pew Research Centre survey mentioned previously, Zickuhr *et al*/found that of the 26 per cent of those who used computers and wifi at libraries to go online, many do so to gain information important to their everyday life, or

to support their education or work: 66 per cent said they used the library ICT provision for research for school or work¹⁹⁸, 47 per cent said they got health information, 41 per cent said they visited government websites or got information about government services, 36 per cent said they looked for jobs or applied for jobs online, 16 per cent said they paid bills or did online banking and 16 per cent said they took an online class or completed an online certification program. A 2010 USA study¹⁹⁹ similarly found that 32 million library visitors (42 per cent of library computer users) reported using library computers for educational activities, 30 million (40 per cent) for employment and career purposes and 28 million (37 per cent) used them to support health and wellness issues. The authors found that:

Patrons relied on library computers to take fundamental steps in their lives. For example, they used these resources to find work, apply to college, secure government benefits, and learn about critical medical treatments. They also used library computers to connect with family and friends, plan family outings, manage bank accounts, apply for permits, start local clubs, and read the daily newspaper.

Several recent studies highlight the personal and public benefits of digital inclusion, although these do not necessarily link specifically to libraries. Among these benefits, gaining basic IT skills, the support of education and work, help in accessing health and other important information, accessing online services, and help in staying connected with family and friends stand out in particular.

Citing a number of previous studies, a study by Douglas White for the Carnegie UK Trust in 2013 suggested that the 'advantages offered by online access are well documented', including benefits such as improved educational attainment and job prospects, better access to public services and advice and enhanced civil participation²⁰⁰. Similarly, as quoted by Crawford and Irving²⁰¹,

¹⁹⁵ Cox, 2014

¹⁹⁶ CFE, 2010, p.9

¹⁹⁷ 2004 People's Network evaluation

¹⁹⁸ Zickuhr *et al*, 2013 (b)

¹⁹⁹ Becker *et al*, 2010, quote on p.3

²⁰⁰ White, 2013, p.3

²⁰¹ Crawford and Irving, 2012, p.87

The *Digital Britain* interim report (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2009: 63–64) states that digital life skills are needed by all; digital work skills are needed by most and digital economy skills are needed by some: ‘education and training for digital technologies ... underpins everything we do in the 21st century’.

Indeed, Catherine McDonald references a 2012 survey which found that 72 per cent of employers say they would not interview an entry level candidate without basic IT skills, and suggested that ‘getting online could really benefit the 75,000 Jobseeker’s Allowance claimants who currently have never been online’²⁰².

Although not a research study, Helen Milner, chief executive of the Tinder Foundation, in a recent article for *Guardian Professional*²⁰³ also suggested that technology helps people to ‘think more intelligently’ about their lifestyle and health, in addition to allowing people to complete health transactions online. This becomes particularly pertinent when considering that existing surveys demonstrate an important overlap between the digitally excluded and those who suffer from disabilities.

In addition to the above, everyday services including government and private services will increasingly be provided online, and it is highly likely that this will include aspects of welfare services and health care services under the government’s ‘digital by default’ agenda²⁰⁴. Highlighting this, Janene Cox in the above-mentioned presentation at the Libraries and Welfare Reform Conference 2014 referred to eight pilot projects across 61 public library authorities (funded by Arts Council England), which showed that libraries ‘have a fundamental role to play in supporting people to use online public services as part of the shift to digital by default for online government services’ (although no further detail was provided on the source for this)²⁰⁵.

Finally, studies also show that libraries’ ICT provision can be an important tool in helping people to stay connected to their social networks. Milner summarised that ‘digital inclusion has had a huge impact on wellbeing, helping people connect with friends and family, find jobs, feel less isolated, save money and access education’.²⁰⁶ The MLA in 2010 suggested that the ‘ability to provide assisted access to online services enables libraries to effectively bridge the digital divide reinforcing the social inclusion implications of their community outreach role’.²⁰⁷ This is supported by recent surveys – for example, Zickuhr *et al*²⁰⁸ found that of the 26 per cent who went online at libraries, 54 per cent said they used email and 35 per cent said they visited social networking sites. Similarly, CFE in their report for MLA found that when asking English library authorities what motivated library users to access the internet in a library setting, 89 per cent said ‘to send email’ and 41 per cent said ‘to access a social networking site’²⁰⁹.

Economic benefits of digital inclusion

Several recent studies highlight (potential) cost savings to the state through promoting digital inclusion, in particular by supporting and making feasible the increasing shift of government services to online provision.

The UK government in 2013 calculated that by shifting the transactional services offered by central government departments from offline to digital channels – by going ‘digital by default’ – it could make an estimated £1.7 billion to £1.8 billion total annual savings²¹⁰. Echoing this, McDonald²¹¹ cited an earlier Tinder Foundation study, which suggested that the NHS could save £108 million if only one per cent of its face-to-face visits were converted to online services, and that the government saves around £194 per person through online transactions. The author concluded that:

²⁰² McDonald, 2014, p.7

²⁰³ Milner, 2013

²⁰⁴ See McDonald, 2014, p.11, Cabinet Office, 2013 (a) and Cabinet Office, 2013 (b)

²⁰⁵ Cox, 2014

²⁰⁶ Milner, 2013

²⁰⁷ Hicks *et al*, 2010, p.49/50

²⁰⁸ Zickuhr *et al*, 2013 (b)

²⁰⁹ CFE, 2010

²¹⁰ Cabinet Office, 2013 (a) and Cabinet Office, 2013 (b)

²¹¹ McDonald, 2014, quote on p.7

We recognise that helping everyone to have the skills to use the internet proficiently will not alone deliver £63 billion. But we anticipate that if every adult used the internet by default for their everyday transactions, it would go a significant way towards delivering these economic benefits.

A US-based report in 2010²¹² attempted to place a figure on the full cost of exclusion in the US. By developing and looking at different categories in which digital inclusion is becoming increasingly important, including, among others, health care, education, economic opportunity and e-government, they provided a conservative approximation of the annual costs of digital exclusion of around \$55.2 billion²¹³.

Finally looking at the personal economic benefits to digital inclusion, a 2009 PricewaterhouseCoopers study for the government-appointed Champion of Digital Inclusion Task Force claimed that people with good IT skills earn between three per cent and 10 per cent more than those without. Based on this, it calculated that 'if the currently digitally excluded employed people got online, each of them would increase their earnings by an average of over £8,300 in their lifetime and deliver between £560 million and £1,680 million of overall economic benefit'²¹⁴.

²¹² Digital Impact Group and Econsult Corporation, 2010

²¹³ Following the American English definition, where one billion equals 1,000,000,000

²¹⁴ PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP, 2009, p.2

7. Conclusion

Economic valuation studies of public libraries

As the traditional metrics for measuring the economic contribution of an industry are not appropriate in a public library context, researchers have used a number of different methods for quantifying the economic value of libraries. We identify three different hypotheses across the literature as to how public libraries make a contribution to the economy:

- as economic actors in their own right (economic impact)
- as institutions that facilitate the creation of economic value in the adjacent area and local economy (place-based economic development)
- as organisations that deliver a wide range of services, which are valued by users and non-users value when set against their cost of provision (benefit-cost/total economic value approaches).

All of the three hypotheses require empirical methods based on the collection of primary data, which makes them both bespoke and relatively expensive. They have not been designed to produce an aggregate picture of the economic value of public libraries in England nor for their results to be comparable.

As the early sections of this report demonstrate, the economic impact literature shows that public libraries employ people and make expenditures that have knock-on effects in the local economy, through supply chain expenditures and the wage expenditure of employees. A few large library facilities may also trigger significant ancillary spending in the local economy by visitors who are drawn to the area by the library.

However, while economic impact assessment is well tried and tested within other industry contexts in the UK and in other country contexts with regards to libraries (specifically the US), it has unfortunately few merits for libraries within a UK public policy context. Libraries simply do not have the characteristics to perform well when assessed using the additionality requirements that are embedded in public policy economic impact appraisals.

Libraries' contribution to wider place-based economic development is an area which suggests greater promise, based on the existing current case studies both in the UK and internationally. Libraries can be anchor tenants in mixed use physical developments and regeneration initiatives, potentially boosting the footfall, buzz, image and profile of a neighbourhood or area – particularly if the library is new, large and/or housed in an iconic building. Finally, where specialist services are provided, they can also support local economic development through business advice and support for individuals, micro businesses and SMEs.

The evidence base on libraries contribution to wider place-based economic development is, however, under developed. It is based on only a small number of case studies (which vary greatly in detail), and that lack longitudinal analysis and attempts to account for other factors that may also have contributed to identifiable regeneration and local economic development.

Benefit-cost studies are the most numerous and, in the case of CV methods, have the potential to gain the most traction with national government stakeholders. They are also the only economic valuation method that enables non-use value to be properly assessed, which surveys of attitudes across the general public in the UK suggests is significant with regard to libraries. The British Library's two CV studies are illustrative of what can be achieved when these studies are done well, but the British Library is a very specific case.

There is also near universal consistency in reporting positive benefit-cost ratios for public libraries across the studies – whether using stated or revealed preference methods – across multiple countries and institutional contexts (eg studies at different geographic scales and for institutions of differing sizes). This demonstrates that societies value public libraries over and above what they pay for them collectively.

But benefit-cost approaches, particularly CV methods, are also very expensive and complex to undertake to a credible standard. The robustness of many CV studies within the libraries field is compromised because of insufficient sample sizes for the geography of the library service(s) that they are seeking to capture. Further, the wide differences in method, assumptions and quality standards, and the combination of

different revealed and stated preference methods within the overall benefit-cost literature somewhat undermines the cumulative value of the evidence base.

So while we know that the benefit-cost of public libraries is positive, we do not know whether this is one-and-a-half, twice or ten times the cost of provision. Clearly, the choice of methods and assumptions has a consistent bearing on benefit-cost ratios:

- CV studies are more likely to produce lower benefit-cost ratios than revealed preference studies
- studies that ascertain WTP (willingness to pay) are likely to produce lower benefit-cost ratios than those that only assess WTA (willingness to accept)
- CV studies that use WTP and attempt to correct for the range of cognitive biases that are embedded in the CV approach are likely to produce the lowest benefit-cost ratios.

Finally, there are arguably three structural weaknesses that are characteristic of studies that use economic valuation techniques to measure the value of public libraries.

1. The various estimation techniques are all focused on producing an overall figure for impact, value, or return on investment. They pay little attention to how the constituent library services, resources and buildings generate this value (aside from some revealed preference studies that look at one or two services only, such as book and media lending).
2. This emphasis on the aggregate quantification of value can also seem somewhat abstract. For instance, it does not generate the kind of evidence that facilitates detailed decision-making and therefore it can seem remote from the day-to-day reality of service planning and budget setting. Relatedly, using economic valuation methods alone means that it can be hard to communicate the benefits of libraries to non-economist audiences. All the methods require some degree of technical knowledge to properly understand, with CV studies being particularly complicated and specialist.

3. Lastly, studies really only measure the short term economic value of library services. In theory, through attempting to capture the total economic value of library services, CV methods should provide a broad brush quantification of all of the possible social, educational, and cultural benefits that society gains from public libraries, including extending into the future by measuring 'existence value'. In practice, very few CV library studies actually measure non-use values, due to practical and cost constraints. This means that the wider value to society in the present is not captured and neither is the value of these in the future.

These structural weaknesses in economic valuation approaches mean that literature from disciplines other than economics is required in order to understand in more detail, and more holistically, how public libraries make an economic contribution to society.

Studies on libraries' educational and social impact

With regard to children's and young people's education and personal development, recent large-scale research provides compelling evidence that library usage is linked to reading levels among children and young people. There is also strong research evidence showing that library usage and reading are important factors in literacy skill levels and general educational attainment, while some research also suggests that the quality of the space provided by public libraries is conducive to children and young people's educational attainment. Finally, while there is no evidence of the direct financial benefits of libraries' impact on literacy and educational attainment, some recent studies indicate the private and public economic benefits of addressing illiteracy and low education levels.

With regard to adult education, skills and employability, there is only limited available evidence of the link between library usage, adult reading habits and their benefits on adult literacy levels. While some surveys have established a link between adult reading habits and library usage, it remains difficult to confirm the direction of causation between the two. Recent large-scale US-based surveys demonstrate that libraries' ICT provision in particular is used by adults to support their learning, as well as being used for job searches, CV writing and submitting job

applications. UK literature demonstrates evidence of activity in terms of the provision of job support services, if not evidence of impact. Research in the UK on adult learning, skills development and library-based employment support remains largely focused on local, smaller-scale studies.

Turning to health and wellbeing, while there is no consistent data on the overall provision of dedicated health and wellbeing activities in libraries, the research that does exist suggests that such activities are increasingly becoming a core part of the public library offer in the UK.

In terms of evidence of impact, there are strong correlations between reading and mental health benefits (and library usage is linked to better reading levels). Literacy is also closely aligned with health literacy – people’s ability to access health information and their capacity to use it effectively. Bibliotherapy is now widely available across public libraries in the UK, particularly related to self-help ‘books on prescription’ schemes, but also more socially-focused therapeutic reading groups. Computer-based cognitive behavioural therapy (cCBT) activities are also beginning to be made available through public libraries.

For all of these reasons libraries contribute to the health prevention agenda. However, the evidence base is currently lagging behind practice in terms of robustly demonstrating what benefits service providers may get from using libraries as a space to deliver health activities. Several UK-based case studies indicate that libraries appeal and value by health service providers resides in their non-clinical atmosphere and their community knowledge and reach.

Overall, several reports highlight the lack of quantitative information on the take-up and benefits of libraries’ health services and the need to use standardised methodologies across studies, specifically those that will be recognised by the medical sector.

A small number of recent studies also suggest that library-based health provision could result in cost savings by supporting the health ‘prevention agenda’ and contributing to reducing the high costs currently incurred due to ill health in the UK.

With regard to community support and cohesion, current survey evidence demonstrates that a majority of users and non-users consider libraries as important for their community. Research also suggests that libraries may play an important role in contributing to the social capital of communities. Evidence exists in particular for libraries’ contribution to social capital formation through supporting social contact and mixing within local communities, as well as through increasing levels of trust among people. Research demonstrates that people place a high trust in libraries themselves as institutions. While it might be argued that this may contribute to wider trust in institutions in general – a further marker of social capital – there is currently only little evidence to support this.

Several studies suggest that through increasing social capital, libraries contribute to enhanced community cohesion and thereby to healthier, safer communities. Although evidence of the impact of cohesion on reducing deprivation is limited, current statistics on the high costs of ill health and crime within communities illustrate the potential cost savings that could be realised through healthier and safer communities.

Finally, studies demonstrate the high level of available ICT provision across the public library networks, as well as the high usage of this provision by library users and the role libraries thus play in increasing digital inclusion. Existing survey-based evidence also shows that library ICT provision is frequently used by visitors to gain information important to their everyday life, including education, work, and to access social networks. In addition, several recent studies highlight the personal benefits of digital inclusion by increasingly employability. These are in addition to the cost savings to the state related to government and private services increasingly being provided online under the ‘digital by default’ agenda.

Summary of the evidence

The existing literature on the educational and social benefits of libraries naturally contains limitations and weaknesses (see below). But it is already sufficient to conclude that public libraries provide positive outcomes for people and communities in many areas – far exceeding the traditional perception of libraries as just places from which to borrow

books. What the available evidence shows is that public libraries, first and foremost, contribute to *long term* processes of human capital formation, the maintenance of mental and physical wellbeing, social inclusivity and the cohesion of communities. This is the real economic contribution that public libraries make to the UK. The fact that these processes are long term, that the financial benefits arise downstream from libraries' activities, that libraries make only a contribution to what are multi-dimensional, complex processes of human and social development, suggests that attempting to derive a realistic and accurate overall monetary valuation for this is akin to the search for the Holy Grail. What it does show is that measuring libraries' short term economic impact provides only a very thin, diminished account of their true value.

Generic gaps and weaknesses in the literature

Based on the findings of the above literature review, the following table provides a very basic summary of the available evidence in all areas²¹⁵, in terms of whether the evidence base is:

- **Promising:** with encouraging findings from a number of different studies that corroborate the contribution that libraries can make in these areas; main weaknesses lie in the comprehensiveness of the data re lack of baselines/statistical significance re sample sizes
- **Emerging:** with evidence from a number of studies that libraries make a contribution, but the studies are less robust – for instance, less use of control groups, fewer longitudinal studies, and so on
- **Limited:** with some evidence of impact but only from a handful of studies and/or less consistency across study

| | Children & Young People | Adults | Communities |
|------------------------------------|--|---|--|
| Reading frequency | Promising | Emerging (lack of causality) | <i>Not applicable</i> |
| Literacy skill (= health literacy) | Promising | Limited (attitudinal/ anecdotal) | <i>Not applicable</i> |
| Skills development | ---- | Limited (lack of empirical data on take-up and benefits of lifelong learning offer) | <i>Not applicable</i> |
| Employability | Emerging (not specific to libraries) | Emerging (more evidence of take-up than long term benefits) | <i>Not applicable</i> |
| Physical wellbeing | ---- | Limited (lack of evidence of offer, need for research aimed at medical profession) | <i>Not applicable</i> |
| Mental wellbeing | ---- | Emerging (need for research aimed at medical profession) | <i>Not applicable</i> |
| Community trust & cohesion | <i>Not applicable</i> | <i>Not applicable</i> | Limited (lack of empirical data on take up (other than core offer) and impact) |
| Digital inclusion | ---- | Limited (lack of demographics and impact of usage) | <i>Not applicable</i> |

A number of further observations can be made across the literature on social and educational impact.

- Across the impact areas, there is a general lack of longitudinal studies and surveys/studies with large sample sizes – a challenge that is not uncommon in public policy research in general. However, a number of recent quantitative studies based on large survey samples were found, particularly in the area of children and young people's and adults' library use and reading habits.
- Many of the existing studies take a 'case study' approach or are largely anecdotal – this is also mentioned by a number of reviews

²¹⁵ In the table, "not applicable" means that the theme (eg Skills Development) is not applicable to the group (eg Communities), as the two are conceptually distinct (eg skills development takes place at the individual level). The "----" refers to combinations of theme and group that may be logically compatible (eg the benefits of digital inclusion specifically

for children and young people), but do not feature in the literature reviewed for this study. This does not mean definitively that there is no research in this area; simply that this was not discovered nor specifically sought after.

across the literature. This raises some quality issues with regard to previous studies in the area. Issues lie in particular with: studies that rely on very short case studies; ones that focus on a particular library or library service only or on a particular (small) group of users or otherwise small samples; and ones that rely solely on information provided by service providers themselves.

- The lack of empirical evidence has been pointed out as a particular problem with regard to the impact of libraries' health services on the physical and mental health and wellbeing of library users. Several studies state the need for further research that is aimed at, and fulfils the requirements not only of the cultural sector, but also of the medical sector, in order to gain recognition of the service within the medical sector.
- Other than for large, national programmes based in libraries, there is currently a lack of aggregatable management and impact data on libraries' various local services and their users and partners. CIPFA provides annual management data for general usage, but this is not publically available and does not cover/differentiate between the full range of services libraries provide. Existing evidence is largely based on studies of individual activities, making it difficult to establish a picture as a whole – that is, the provision, take-up and impact of the many activities that take place in libraries today.
- Several studies point out the difficulty of establishing causality between library usage and a range of outcomes, eg reading habits, literacy skills and wider social and personal benefits. This is a common problem within social research – for example within education and health care – and requires large-scale and/or sophisticated research to address²¹⁶.
- Little research has been done to date to quantify savings to the state generated by libraries regarding the downstream outcomes that libraries contribute towards (eg greater literacy, digital inclusion).

²¹⁶ For instance, the use of instrumental variables (IV) to estimate causal relationships when controlled experiments are not feasible or when a treatment is not successfully delivered to every unit in a randomised experiment. Using an instrumental variable method enables the

direction of causality to be established when the explanatory variables (covariates) are correlated with the error terms of a regression relationship.

8. Improving the evidence base

As highlighted in the Introduction, this literature review is part of Arts Council England's efforts to plug some of the evidence gaps that currently exist around the 'wider benefits of art and culture to people and society', and, as such, this is a first step in further researching the direct and indirect economic contribution of libraries.

Developing detailed proposals for improving the evidence base is not within the scope of this review. However, we offer the following brief remarks that provide some pointers and questions that may help in developing this next step.

Most obviously, this review (as with many others in the cultural sector) has identified some general methodological weaknesses and limitations of the literature. These include the need to undertake more longitudinal research, to try and achieve larger sample sizes and to undertake case studies with more depth and rigour. To this could be added the need to undertake research and evaluation of core services, as opposed to 'one-off' project-based evaluations.

In addition, there are a number of inter-related questions that can help Arts Council England and its partners to identify additional priorities for future research. Namely,

- Purpose: What is the aim of the research – is its main aim to improve performance management and service delivery, or is it to support advocacy or case making to government and other stakeholders (eg service partners)?
- Geography: Should new research look at specific local services or activities, or attempt to provide a wider, national picture?
- Population: Libraries are a universal public service so should the aim of research be to discover what benefits the whole population derives from public libraries? Or, given that much of the 'new' public library offer has been developed to help tackle various forms of economic

and social disadvantage, should research look instead at the impact of library services on certain target groups (eg job seekers, people on low incomes, migrants)?

- Public service outcomes: This review has demonstrated that public libraries services are now wide and varied, making a contribution across a similarly diverse set of socioeconomic agendas. Is there a case to prioritise particular policy areas? Here, we note in passing that in education, health and the area of policy that used to be referred to as 'communities', public libraries have a contribution to make in achieving outcomes, but they will always be much smaller than the contribution made by other public services (i.e. schools and colleges, hospitals and GPs, and local authorities respectively). In the area of digital inclusion, however, libraries have become the single most important public intervention, either by chance or design.

Finally, it should also be remembered that it is not necessary nor advisable to try and create an evidence base for *all* activities that take place across *all* libraries. Requirements for evidence that reach too far or are too time-consuming to undertake can quickly hamper innovation and responsiveness. The need for evidence therefore needs to be balanced with the need for flexibility and open-mindedness, in order to encourage new ideas and maintain a service that can quickly adapt to new or local needs.

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ISBN: 978-0-7287-1546-2

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