

MUSEUMS LIBRARIES ARCHIVES

Increasing the attractiveness of libraries for adult learners

Final report

Catherine Shovlin, Customer Interpreter Ltd

Museums, Libraries and Archives Council
16 Queen Anne's Gate
London SW1H 9AA

© MLA 2005

MLA is the national development agency for museums, archives and libraries, advising the government on policy and priorities for the sector. Our mission is to enable the collections and services of museums, archives and libraries to touch the lives of everyone. MLA is a Non-Departmental Public Body sponsored by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

Customer Interpreter Ltd is an independent marketing consultancy offering market research, customer insight and strategic advice. Further information from www.customerinterpreter.com

A CIP catalogue record of this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 1-903743-87-7

MLA is not responsible for views expressed by consultants or those cited from other sources.

Contents

1	Executive summary	1
1.1	The current situation	1
1.2	The opportunity	2
1.3	Recommendations	2
2	Customer Interpreter	5
2.1	Relevant experience	5
2.2	Our approach	6
2.3	Our research base	6
3	Adult learners	8
3.1	Who are they?	8
3.2	What do they think?	8
3.3	Segmenting adult learners	9
4	Attitude to libraries	12
4.1	What a library is	12
4.2	How a library is	14
4.3	The desired library	16
4.4	Product range	17
5	Library staff	19
5.1	The opportunity	19
5.2	Constraints	19
5.3	What staff would like more of	20

Contents

6	Libraries for learning	22
6.1	Current situation	22
6.2	Future situation	22
7	Influencing adult learners	24
7.1	Overcoming the barriers	24
7.2	Communications	24
7.3	The customer value proposition	26
8	The LaB profile	27
8.1	Direction of motivation	28
8.2	Comfort Zone	28
8.3	Style of decision making	29
8.4	Motivation level	30
8.5	Example communications	30
9	Next steps	32
9.1	Internal: sharing and corporate culture	32
9.2	External: working together and customer led	32
9.3	Recommendations	33
9.4	Conclusion	34

1 Executive summary

1.1 The current situation

So what's the problem with libraries?

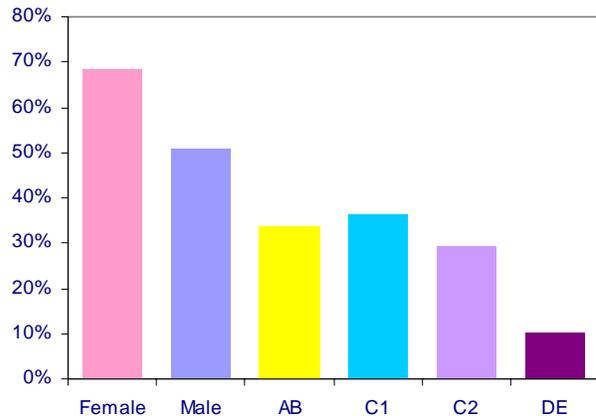
Everybody knows they exist. Lots of people know they're free. Everybody at least occasionally uses at least one of books, magazines, newspapers, CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, computers, internet, archives...

And yet large numbers of people, especially those of lower social classes or lower education / skills levels have not crossed the threshold of their local library for years.

What is going on?

Low awareness

In this study, the number one barrier we find is that non-users have simply FORGOTTEN about libraries. From our research there seems to be a high correlation between low skilled adults and low use of libraries. Many libraries are off the High Street or not in the town centre. Wherever libraries are they tend to be modest about their assets and signage is low-key. There are few "shop windows" to entice anybody in, and there is no advertising in many areas to remind people about libraries.



This low awareness is particularly likely for lower socio-economic groups and varies by ethnicity.

Low understanding

Once reminded of the existence of libraries, the second barrier is that since many potential adult learners have not visited a library for decades, their view of libraries is out of synch with reality.

"Libraries – they're just books and Sshh!!! Aren't they?"

"They're for clever people really aren't they?"

"I suppose they might have changed – I haven't been in one for years"



Aversion to risk

In this and other studies we also find a resistance to change and low levels of self esteem among the people we talk to. This makes the likelihood of trying something new, or for the first time, rather low. They talk a lot about "them" – *they* should do something about it, and much less about I or we. They may feel disempowered about their jobs, their unsafe neighbourhoods, the education system

and their health. They concentrate on those areas of life they can control and afford – eg TV, food, some clothing / consumer goods.

High loyalty

There is a loyal group of existing customers who are keen to support libraries.

Unusually, non-customers who have forgotten about libraries also become loyal in the course of discussion. At the end of every focus group, the non-users made comments like:

“You’ve got to tell them what they have to do! We must help libraries survive.”

“If they don’t sort them out they’ll disappear and that would be terrible.”

Both non-customers and staff are adamant about **the need for advertising**:

“They need to publicise themselves and what they can offer”

1.2 The opportunity

We all love to learn

A universal human need is to improve and progress in life. Nobody wants to think their life will be worse tomorrow than it is today. Within that concept is our hunger to learn.

The disconnection that we observe with unskilled adults is that “Learning” for them is school and training courses. Their experiences of formal learning are often painful memories of humiliation, boredom and failure. They have decided that Learning is not for them.

However, in the course of their lives, they recognise that they have learnt many things – to drive, to raise children, to cook, to use a mobile phone – maybe even to program the video recorder. They like to learn by doing, and to learn things of personal interest (eg card making) or obvious relevance (eg driving, essential job related courses). The certificates at the end are interesting if they have some currency (eg driving licence) but less so if they are not understood or recognised – for example Basic Skills qualifications may be seen as more of a negative than a positive to include on a job application.

As the motivation to learn is a combination of expectancy of success plus relevance of learning when balanced against the restraining forces of practical, emotional and social barriers, then for many of these adults, getting a skill, or reducing a problem is an easier sell than “Learning” per se.

1.3 Recommendations

Role of libraries

- Reinforce to staff the core role of libraries (education, inspiration, entertainment etc) over and above medium (books vs tape / pc etc)
- Work with staff to create culture of empowerment to enhance service
- Training for staff to learn to build rapport with a range of library users so that conversation / enquiry is possible

Increasing the attractiveness of libraries for adult learners

Increase awareness

- Advertising – posters on buses, leaflets in GP surgeries, flyers in newsagents, cards on supermarket notice boards
- Increase consistency (by use of shared brand values, messages, colour palette and templates) in order to increase recognition and impact
- Community outreach – encouraging staff to connect with local groups and explore ways the library can help them
- Member get member – use existing library base to encourage new visits – come with a friend so it's an easier thing to do

Increase trial

- Library buddies in the workplace, trades union, children's primary school
- Satellite libraries in supermarket cafes, clinics, primary schools, fitness clubs
- Staff - allow them to give the service they want to¹. Unleash their passion for serving their users and help them develop skills required for more proactive service giving.

Improve environment

- Aromatherapy to overcome the "library smell"
- More and better lighting
- Good use of colour psychology (colours that stimulate appetite and learning, Group III colours to be in tune with majority of UK population²)
- Safe seating
- Coffee
- Easy processes
- Joining procedures
- Manageable choice
- Clear and accurate signage (pictures as well as words)
- Library guides

Fit for purpose product

- New books prominently displayed
- Older stock removed or in storage in case it is requested
- Local papers (and national)
- Teenagers books / magazines / music / listening posts

1 See Section 5 below on staff for more detail.

2 Colour psychology is covered in more detail in the Section 4.3.

Increasing the attractiveness of libraries for adult learners

Spreading the word

- Discussions of this report with key stakeholders
- Share this story with front line library staff, library managers and policy makers
- Tips for library staff in relevant websites eg communications in Inspiring Learning for All
- Encourage staff empowerment

Marketing

- Explore possible links with existing marketing activity
- Including: role of libraries, template adverts / posters / flyers
- Build into future development

Any future national offer to include

- Clear labelling
- Easy choice at entrance
- Quick reads displayed as such
- Sofas

Liaison with Vital Link, LearnDirect, local college / community learning → snack-sized courses

2 Customer Interpreter

2.1 Relevant experience

Since Customer Interpreter was set up our work has focused on using in-depth customer research to understand what is working and what is not from the customer (or non-customer) viewpoint. We have specialised in skills development in adults and teenagers, working with organisations such as LSC, DfES, regional development organisations, schools, colleges, universities, Connexions, learndirect to improve the attractiveness of learning for those currently less inclined to take it up.

We have used that customer insight to develop strategies, communication materials and train IAG staff to influence with their audiences. This work has included Customer Interpreter conducting over 50 focus groups and 220 in-depth interviews with individuals (adult learners, professionals, decision makers and influencers).

Specific projects have included:

Adult learning

- Basic Skills research review (national)
- Level 2 Entitlement market research → marketing strategy → marketing materials (covering 10 counties)
- Stimulating Demand for Learning – integrated approach for all agencies in Shropshire and then Staffordshire

14-19s options

- Developing a brand for learning (national)
- Stimulating Demand for Learning - integrated approach for all agencies in Shropshire and then Staffordshire
- Marketing materials for learning pathways – for 14-19s and for their parents

Other

We have also worked on projects that do not relate directly to adult learning, but do inform our views of the relevant groups. These include

- Building a sustainable brand: green / ethical products and services
- Extended school company: board director of first such company to be formed in England)
- GP surgeries: improving the patient experience
- High Street Retailers: matching stock and ambience to target customer
- Career advancement: business to business services for head-hunters
- Discount shopping: improving communications internally and externally
- Staff communication: translating complex strategies into motivating messages

2.2 Our approach

We believe that every individual does what they do for a reason. It may not be a reason that we agree with, but they are acting to the best of their understanding, skills, circumstances and personality traits when they choose how to spend their time and money.

In some cases, for example adult learning, there can be a considerable gap between the life experiences of the decision makers (eg successful, educated, self determining) and the people for whom policies and products are designed. In such cases it is of particular importance to experience the world through the eyes and ears – and maybe even the hearts and minds – of those who are choosing to learn or not to learn.

Furthermore, by using tried and tested processes to understand how language and behaviour reflects subconscious motivation and decision making patterns we can increase the relevance of communications to these audiences, so they are more likely to notice them and take notice of them.

We discover this customer insight in focus groups and interviews by a combination of techniques including LaB³ profiling, colour psychology⁴, ethnography, projection and role play.

2.3 Our research base

For this project we built on existing research provided by MLA and carried out some new research focused around the specific objectives.

Review

A range of documents and existing research were reviewed including those listed below. Full details are given in Appendix 1:

- Stage 1 report for this project
- Framework for the Future
- Skills for Life
- Mosaic (lifestyle) data
- Library usage statistics
- Resource websites from MLA and partner organisations eg Inspiring Learning for All, National Literacy Trust

In depth research

This was carried out via three 100 minute focus groups of non-users and light users of libraries. Two of these focused on those for whom learning is often job related - 30-45 year old men and women. The third was for the key target market of 55-65 year olds. Further details are given in Appendix 2.1.

3 Language and Behaviour profiling was first developed in the 70s by Rodger Bailey based on neuro linguistic programming research originated by Noam Chomsky,

4 We work with the Colour Affects system developed by Angela Wright during the last 30 years and currently being developed by her with Adobe as a tool in their design software

Increasing the attractiveness of libraries for adult learners

We also spoke to a range of professionals who work in connection with libraries.

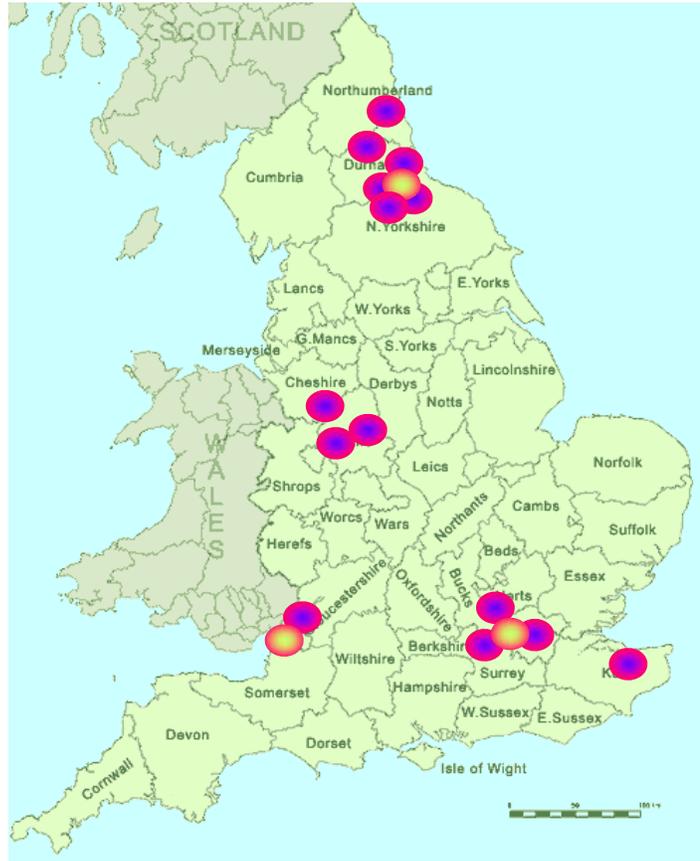
Observe behaviour in libraries

The following libraries were visited to give a range of geography, socio-economic profile, urban/rural and size.

- London (Lewisham, Peckham, Stanmore, Bushey, New Cross, Wimbledon, Tooting, Crofton Park, Deptford)
- Tyne and Wear (Newcastle, Blaydon)
- Durham (Durham, Consett, Lanchester, Darlington)
- North Yorks (Catterick Garrison, Northallerton, Richmond, Colburn)
- Kent (Margate)
- Gloucestershire (Gloucester)
- Staffs (Cannock, Stafford, Stoke-on-Trent)

In each of these visits we

- Observed customer behaviour
- Reviewed facilities, building, atmosphere
- Interviewed staff (formally in a selection of libraries).



For more information see Appendix 6

Analysis

As well as analysing all the new research information generated by this project, we cross referenced with previous work adult learner research to increase robustness of our conclusions.

3 Adult learners

3.1 Who are they?

The usual definition of potential adult learners in the UK is a vast target group.

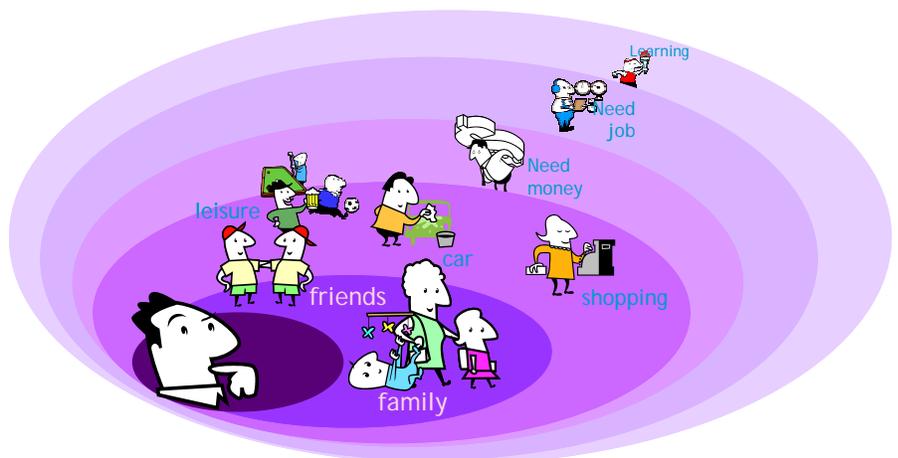
- 50% of the UK is below level 2 (vs 25% in most OECD countries)
- There are 7 Million adults in the UK with basic literacy problems
- Older adults may have a learning need because of skills mismatches eg heavy engineering / manufacturing employees now retraining for service industries

When communicating with this group and trying to influence them to consider taking up learning, we first consider where they are currently in relation to learning. The traffic light segmentation, a concept initially developed with DfES, is based on attitude to learning and described below in Section 3.3. An influencing factor on the traffic light is what is happening in their life and we use the life cycle trigger points also explained in Section 3.3.

3.2 What do they think?

Consistent observations we can make on the way this group perceive their lives include:

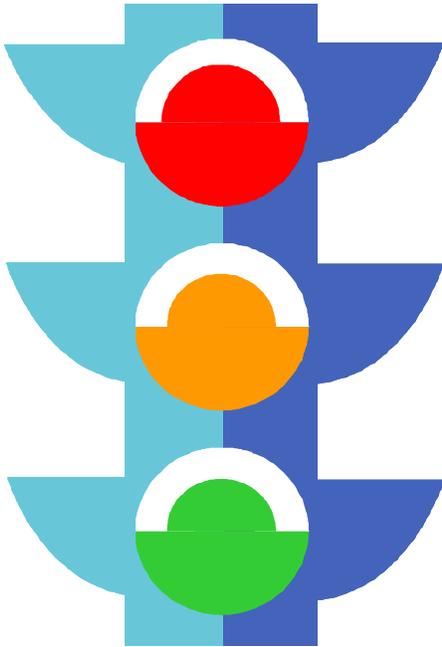
- Time horizons tend to be short – so investing in learning for the long term is hard
- Life is local so sources of information and opportunities to learn must be local too
- Learning is low on the agenda
- Their social group (parents, spouses, and friends) often share their low aspirations and there is a group interest in maintaining the status quo.



- Learning may be avoided because of fear of the “Not good enough for you are we not?” reaction.
- Fear is a major deterrent to learning and includes fear of failure, of choosing the wrong course, of not understanding the processes, of not understanding the course, of not sticking with it, of not being able to afford it, of meeting new people, of going to new places or of opening up new choices in life.
- Practical barriers can always be brought in to give a “rational” reason to not learn – the bus doesn’t go that way, no childcare, no money to pay course fees etc. We tend to find that where the motivation is sufficiently high, then most people get over the practical barriers, but where motivation is lower, they seem insurmountable.

3.3 Segmenting adult learners

Traffic light segmentation

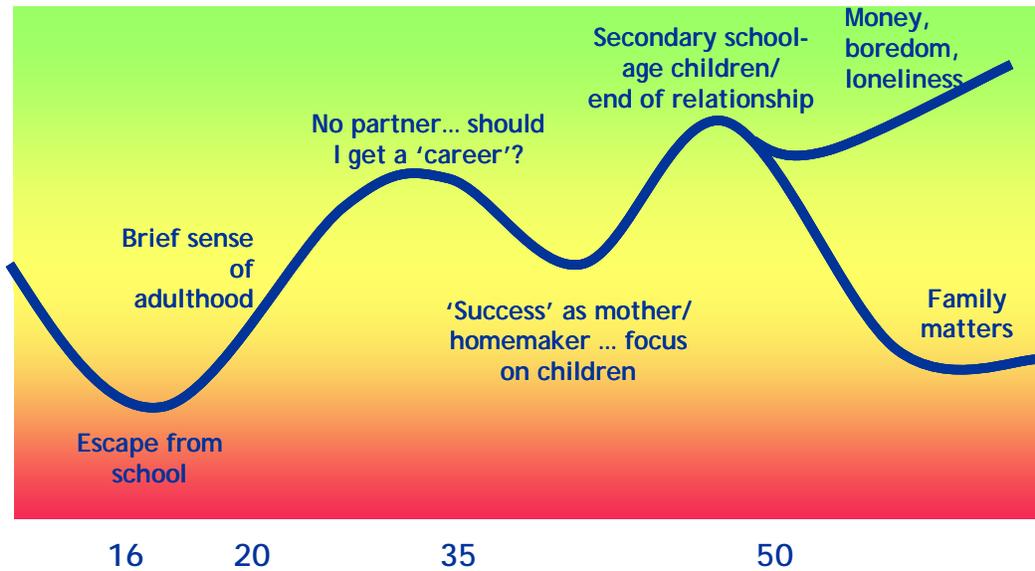


- **STOPs**
This group feel unable to learn, uninspired, demotivated, trapped. They are a long way from deciding to take up learning and need nurturing towards that decision
"The main barrier to learning is not wanting to do it"
- **WAITs**
The floating voter could be persuaded or could drift back to the STOP crowd. Which way they go will depend on the relative influence of the STOPs and GOs as well as the messages they hear.
"I'd like to learn something but I never seem to get round to it"
- **GOs**
This group are keen to learn but need IA⁵ support to choose the right track. Even though they want to learn they still may not do it if they cannot find the right information or opportunity.
"I'd love to learn something new"

Lifestyle effect

The status of any individual on this segmentation model depends partly on their life-stage. At some points in life learning is more attractive and this has been summarised into these generalised lifestyle curves for males and females. Clearly there will always be individual variation – everybody's life is different, but these graphs do help allocate limited resources to those messages / media most likely to impact on individuals when they are more likely to respond - ie when they are nearer the top of the chart than the bottom.

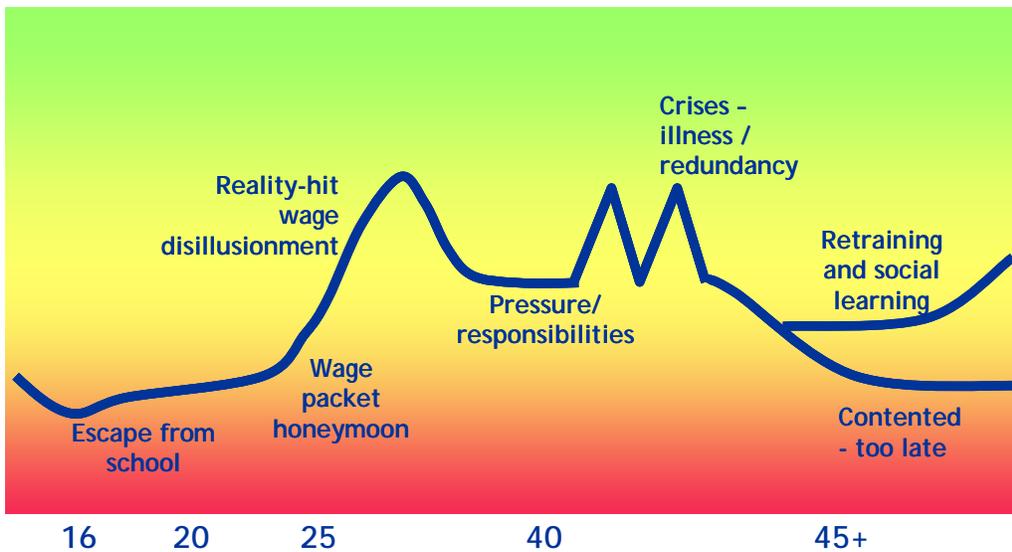
Female trigger points



Based on research carried out by Customer Interpreter and other agencies working for the LSC, women’s lives are subject to moments when they step back and rethink. Life events such as pregnancy, taking care of young children or elderly relatives, divorce or becoming an empty nester are all moments when a female may re-evaluate her options. Some of those events tend to reduce their likelihood of formal learning.

Male trigger points

Overall, the male curve is lower than the female one. Even high achieving males are less likely than women to elect to learn something new.



Lifestyle factors

Where you live, how much you earn, what you read / watch and who you socialise with all affect attitude to learning. The profile of many Basic Skills learners reflects need – other groups with high levels of need are less likely to get involved with learning because of lifestyle issues. Each group

Increasing the attractiveness of libraries for adult learners

represents 1-3% of overall population so figures higher than that show that group to be heavily represented. Their lifestyles and preferences can be used to identify new ways to reach them and postcode analysis can increase targeting for mail drops or local outdoor advertising.

- **Bohemian melting pot:** 5% of Basic Skills learners, 12% of ESOL learners. 94% of this group live in London
Life: Diverse, arty, non-conformist, low kids, multi ethnic
Places: Arts, campaigning, convenience stores
Media: Guardian
- **Asian heartlands:** 4% of Basic skills learners, 11% of ESOL learners. 54% of this group live in West Midlands /London
Life: Overcrowding, low income, ESOL
Places: Family, festivals, discount stores
Media: Asian TV
- **Rejuvenated terrace:** 4% of Basic skills learners, 5% of ESOL learners. 20% of this group live in Manchester/Yorks
Life: Young families, modern, cosmopolitan, on their way
Places: Loans, home improvement, IKEA
Media: Daily Mail, informal radio
- **Low rise subsistence:** 5% of Basic skills learners, 3% of ESOL learners. 70% of this group live in main conurbations
Life: Benefits, apathy, sickness
Places: Post Office, bingo, video rental, dogs
Media: Local paper, Sun, Mirror, News of the World, TV, radio
- **Smokestack shiftwork:** 4% of Basic skills learners, 2% of ESOL learners. This group live in largely in the Pennines
Life: Proud, strong community, industrious
Places: Pubs, betting, bingo, fish and chips, Chinese
Media: Mirror, News of the World
- **Peripheral poverty:**
4% of Basic skills learners, 1% of ESOL learners.
This group live in council estates on the edge of town
Life: Single mums, unemployed, sickness
Places: Catalogue shopping, bingo, betting
Media: TV, Sun



4 Attitude to libraries

As well as views on learning, these individuals have a view of libraries – usually based on no recent experience, a fear of books / learning and the clichéd way in which libraries are portrayed in popular media.

These views may not be fair or accurate – however perceptions count for more than facts when individuals are choosing whether or not they want to do something. And unless those perceptions are challenged by new messages or personal experience, then they will persist.



4.1 What a library is

In many ways, the role of libraries is the same as it always was. Staff and users see libraries as

- Educating
- Informing
- Entertaining
- Inspiring
- Empowering
- Inclusive
- Safe

For non-users there is much lower awareness or perception of some of these attributes.

For users and non-users it is clear that the WAY this role is carried out needs to be sensitive to and take advantage of changes in technology and society. Computers for example, are not changing the role of libraries, they are only changing the way that role is carried out. Making libraries more appealing to the increasingly diverse UK population, and offering new services in a world where books are much more accessible and affordable makes sense and is recognised by many of the staff we spoke to.

The building

NON-USERS' view	USERS' view	STAFF view
 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distant • Not part of my life <i>Like I said, I don't go to libraries</i> • Daunting <i>If they made it a more welcoming place, people would probably go in</i> • Inconvenient <i>You've got to pay to park</i> 	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friendly • Local <i>I'd rather go to X where it is smaller and more neighbourly. This one is too much</i> • "For me" • Manageable <i>Our library is quite straightforward compared to the big one</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dingy / outdated <i>I wish they'd brighten it up a bit I'm a bit ashamed of it really</i> • Not customer driven <i>I ask every year for coffee facilities but they won't let me have them. I know they'd be popular</i> • Poor merchandising <i>Some of the displays look terrible It's confusing isn't it?</i> • Improving <i>Now people can see in they're more likely to come and have a look It's such a lovely little library now they've revamped it.</i>

The offer



Depending on an individual's attitude to and experience of libraries they either have a sense of an old fashioned book based facility which has little to do with their lives, or a much more dynamic and people focused range of useful services.

Increasing the attractiveness of libraries for adult learners

NON-USERS' view	USERS' view	STAFF view
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I never thought of it It is a dying thing now, libraries</i> • Silence <i>Ssh!!</i> • Too many (old) books <i>It would be easier if they had fewer books</i> • Serious • Confusing <i>I don't know where to start</i> • Usually closed <i>They've cut the hours so much that it's discouraged people from going</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Computers • Music, DVDs, Videos • Activities • Books out of date <i>Don't have the books I'd need for a course</i> • Limited opening hours <i>Never open when I can get there</i> • Toilets 	<p>POSITIVE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Anything can go in a library, really, it just depends on how the managers decide to use the space in terms of providing education type facilities, running courses</i> • <i>Libraries generally do have high levels of customer satisfaction</i> <p>COULD IMPROVE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>A lot of people come in just to use the computers – they don't get interested in the books</i> • <i>There is space for developing community support services, to bring people who don't come in.</i> • <i>People who expect more guidance don't come in</i>

4.2 How a library is

Customer service



When we searched photo libraries for pictures of librarians, the majority were the clichéd picture of a scary librarian telling people to be quiet. Unfortunately this image is so strong in media that unless an individual has been in a library in recent years they can have a much distorted view of how they will be treated if they dare to enter a library.

Increasing the attractiveness of libraries for adult learners

NON-USERS' view	USERS' view	STAFF view
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scary librarians <i>You get told to shut up</i> • Unfriendly <i>I haven't been in there for 20 years, it might be friendly now</i> • Daunting <i>I'd be worried that they'd be looking at my books and thinking "what an idiot"</i> • Confusing <i>A help desk would be good, someone who could point you in the right direction</i> • Self-service would be good • <i>What they really need to do is to let people know what services they offer</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help and support <i>I couldn't find what I needed, but when I asked they showed me</i> • Confusing <i>It's hard to find things. They are not always where they are supposed to be</i> • <i>They need to advertise more what they do in there, the services available</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>We need to burn our blue cardigans – for too long we've had this fuddy-duddy image</i> • <i>I need good dynamic staff in lending</i> • <i>Senior mgmt focus on the wrong things - too long away from the coalface to know what the real issues are</i> • <i>We need to change our image. Simple things – smiling at the customer, eye contact and being proactive about helping</i> • <i>Too many staff are very blinkered. They don't see the big picture</i> • <i>Some librarians haven't realised libraries have changed - you can be in a system for too long</i> • <i>Customers won't use the self service machine in case it puts us out of a job. The kids would but they can't reach it.</i>

Look and feel

NON-USERS' view	USERS' view	STAFF view
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dull <i>Some of them are very old and dull, aren't they?</i> • Dark <i>They need more or better lighting</i> • Smelly <i>It smells weird</i> • Outdated <i>They're kind of old fashioned aren't they?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving <i>I like the new lower shelves with gaps so you can see through</i> • Conflict of interest <i>Too many noisy school-kids 4-6pm They should have specific times for specific age groups</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smelly <i>We have to let everyone in and some of them smell bad The carpets need a good clean</i> • <i>That Basic Skills section is awful, I wish we could change it</i> • <i>Oh dear, it says "Easy Reads" – sorry about that. We're just about to change it to Essential Skills.</i> • <i>It's silly having videos, no-one takes them out, they only want DVDs. We can't compete with the video shop over the road.</i>

In the focus groups we talked to non-users about how they would change the library in order to encourage people like themselves to go there. Using imagery (a selection of photos for them to respond to) and discussions, we explored options of a more traditional environment, a more lively and fun-filled atmosphere and a calm spacious ambience. We also offered various eating and drinking options, furniture styles and colour ranges.

4.3 The desired library

Look and feel



The preferences were consistent across the three groups:

- Space: clear, natural light / good lighting, airy, calm, green (outdoor space where possible), Group III⁶ colours
- Furniture: comfortable but not sloppy eg sofas and rocking chairs but not bean bags (except for children)
- Zoned: clearly defined space for children and teenagers with appropriate decor
- Friendly: chatty staff making helpful suggestions “Are you ok there?”
You want approachable staff who don’t make you feel stupid if you ask where a book is
- Facilities: coffee and maybe snacks (but not going as far as pizza, chips etc), toilets (for older people and children)
- Convenient: opening hours & parking

Ease of use

It is important for these groups that the library is easy to use because of their fear of authority and making a fool of themselves by not understanding the procedures.

⁶ These colours are very natural and further advice can be provided on pantone colours and precise references. For a general sense of these colours, think of wood / sand, moss / leaf green, sky / teal blue, autumn leaves and berries. Further info from www.customerinterpreter.com/colour.htm

Increasing the attractiveness of libraries for adult learners



Building on the strength that has long been understood by McDonalds and successful retailers: *"I knew what to expect"*. This is particularly important for the groups currently not using libraries as they tend to be more risk averse and fearful of the unknown. Ways of achieving this are:

Easy to recognise

- Increased consistency in branding / signage / entrance
- Connection to publicity "I know what that is"

Easy to pick a book

- Quick reads (not labelled as Basic Skills, literacy or essential skills)
- Small selection displays "Top Ten", "Holiday reads", "Favourite Thrillers", "Bestsellers"

Easy to find your way around

- Transparent, well-lit entrances
- Clear signage
- Welcome desk

Easy to learn something

- 30 minute courses
- Follow up – if you enjoyed this course did you know you could do...
- Sign up for interests and get a text for events

4.4 Product range

Books

For the regular library user as well as many library staff, books are the main attraction and they feel strongly about maintaining a good selection as the main offer.

"Of course books are the most important thing, that's what libraries are for"

"They need to keep a good range"

However, they are also one of the biggest disadvantages for non-users who, even if they are interested in books, want a range similar to that offered in supermarkets

“The trouble with libraries is they’re full of books”

“And they don’t have any of the latest books”

“Too many words in them haven’t they?”

Easy read

When we showed books intended for those with basic skills needs to the focus groups they were greeted with great enthusiasm. They loved the idea of borrowing books like these

“That’s perfect for a train ride or an afternoon in the garden”

“I’d love to read something like that – I’d actually get to the end before it was due back”

“You want to read some of these big books but you look at all those words, and they just take too long to get into...”

“I’ve never seen those before – where do they come from?”

Easy choice

Making it easy for the first-timer or less expert user to find something they like quickly makes sense. We saw the quick choice displays recommended by Vital link in many libraries are popular with users and avoid what Barry Schwartz describes as the tyranny of choice

“unlimited choice can produce genuine suffering.”

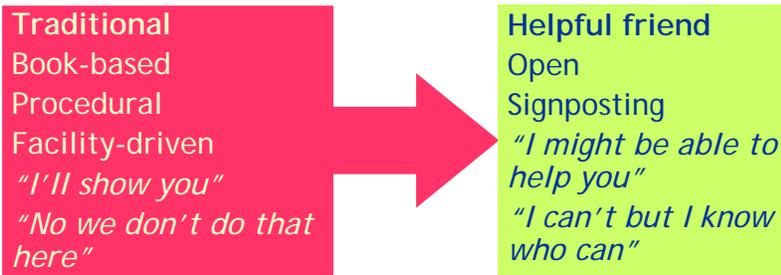
*“In a study conducted several years ago, shoppers who were offered free samples of six different jams were **more likely to buy one** than shoppers who were offered free samples of twenty-four.”*

5 Library staff

5.1 The opportunity

There is a clear opportunity to leverage the strong levels of commitment to the service among staff by inspiring and empowering them.

All the staff we met are highly committed to their work in libraries, with a strong sense of public duty. Among more traditional librarians, this public duty may be based in a teacher-pupil dynamic which is not appropriate for more resistant users; for the majority of staff we interviewed it is based on a simple wish to help people.



In one library (Stafford) we found motivated and empowered staff. Everybody felt they were part of a team and could make suggestions and offer criticism. It is interesting to observe that library usage in that authority is increasing. In terms of adult learning, they felt that their close links with Education within the local authority were critical to better understanding and integration of libraries into this activity.

5.2 Constraints

In most libraries we visited the staff felt they are not encouraged to

- Take initiatives
- Adapt to customer needs
- Flex the service

Although this culture is not intentional, it does seem to be very prevalent and supports the need for leadership training currently in process. Management behaviour can encourage or discourage suggestions and participation from staff. The current situation reflects a high sensitivity to the need to obey the rules (actual and perceived) and low perception of the chance for a member of staff to take initiatives or question current systems.

Traditional management style

Most of our staff interviews were with front line staff, but in some cases we spoke to middle management. Some of them demonstrated a traditional approach to staff empowerment:

Increasing the attractiveness of libraries for adult learners

I believe in giving my staff power but they come up with ideas that have things wrong with them so I say "Take that away and start again".

Lack of confidence in policy makers

There was often a feeling among all staff we interviewed that policy makers in local authorities did not understand the library sector today.

They are just not thinking it through.

It's too long since they've been on the front line, they're out of touch.

"The rules"

We often came across staff wishing they could offer better service but feeling constrained by "the rules". It is interesting to note that often it is their perception that they would be breaking rules, even though these "rules" may not even exist. The culture that has arisen in library services has generated this high level of deference to procedures and management styles do not seem to be encouraging a more open approach.

I wish we knew what the college offers but we only get the prospectuses.

It would be nice to help people on the computers – I have enough training to do that. But it's not part of my job so I can't.

We could have a book swap table – customer could bring in their books. But it might reduce borrowing statistics so probably we wouldn't be allowed to.

In many cases however, the staff are "breaking" these rules in order to give good service. It is an impressive situation that they are so committed to serving their customers that they are prepared to take risk – this is a valuable resource that could be used more constructively.

Don't tell anyone, will you? We're not supposed to accept donations, but I keep them under the counter and slip them to the customers I know are interested.

So we were told to bin 4 shelves of Indic language books and I called my friend who works in another library that needs them and they "fell" into her car when I was binning them. Please don't tell anyone

5.3 What staff would like more of

At the end of each interview we asked staff about their own wishes for their library. We also noted any wishes expressed in the course of the interview.

More flexible time

Staff commented on lack of flexibility about how they used their time – they had ideas of more relevant activities they would like to be doing:

I would like to have more time to spend with customers, more time to be welcoming

More time to build partnerships in the community

Advertising / awareness raising

Advertising was often the most heartfelt request:

People don't come in because it is not advertised enough

Increasing the attractiveness of libraries for adult learners

They need to be better advertised, local hoarding outside, just on the street. "Have you been to your local library recently?" or "Did you know that at your local library you can....?"

There is a lot of misconception of what is available in libraries these days and a perception that nothing serious is taking place in terms of learning

Better learning provision

Some staff did not see learning as part of their role and were ready to pass on enquiries elsewhere or claim no knowledge. However others were keen to be more helpful and recognised the integral role learning plays in the role of libraries.

We need more information for signposting

More should go on to help Adults with basic adult literacy, libraries should do more

People don't use the learning facilities because they don't know about it. There are some people floating around who could get some use of it

The job centre gives people a wrong impression of what is available in the learning centre. Marketing is a problem

Adult learning agenda conflicts with other roles, of course. Time, space, budgets, dividing staff time, etc

Adult learning in this library is a reactive, not a proactive thing and we don't feel equipped all the time

If we knew more non-user needs maybe we could help them

Reliable IT

When any frustrations were expressed about the job, they were either with management or with computer systems. At a time when many staff have broadband in their own home, it seems odd to them that not all libraries have fast internet access, even though they understand the local authority issues involved.

In this library there are always IT issues. There's frustration with infrastructure problems

If I'm having a bad day it's because of computer problems

Why can't we just have broadband? I have it at home.

6 Libraries for learning

6.1 Current situation

Staff view

Many staff acknowledge that learning is already happening and is a good fit with the concept of libraries

Libraries are places where you expect to find out things, It seems to me like the natural place for adult learners

We do those one off taster courses. I suppose there could be more

We just refer them to the prospectuses and there are always websites as well

However many of them also feel that this need could be better served

Libraries have to move with the times and become more like learning centres

We don't advertise our computer taster sessions as demand is too high already

We don't have enough computers to do learndirect courses here.

We used to do learndirect. You might be able to do them somewhere else

To improve this library for adult learners we need to make space for courses get together with Community Education and really advertise what we do. Then you could use the books in conjunction with the courses

Libraries should do more to help learners, provide the space

6.2 Future situation

The role of libraries for Adult Learners

The adults in the huddle are on the opposite side of the river to learning. Across the river are all the things they may want if they are interested in progress and self fulfilment.

The Library can provide a bridge - the informal and taster courses that can run in libraries have the potential to provide outreach to take learners across the river to formal learning providers.

The crucial link is the friendly face, the listening ear, the helping hand. So the first role of the Library staff is to be accepted into the conversation so that an intervention is possible.

They may have to come out of the library to do that and speak to the adults in the huddle. Once they have drawn individuals into the library for informal learning, they can point out the other side of the river, and encourage the individual to find reasons

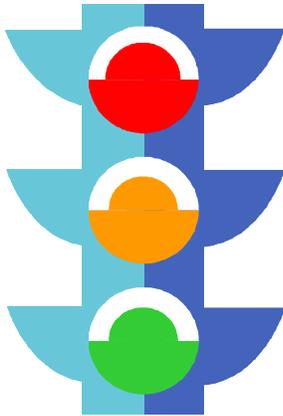


Increasing the attractiveness of libraries for adult learners

why it is appealing in order to overcome the difficulties of getting there (breaking away from the group, choosing a way across, overcoming fear and a sense of inadequacy, daring to go in when you get there, knowing what to do etc).

Different needs

If we return to our traffic light analogy, we now see how the role of libraries is different according to the position of the individual on the traffic light.



STOP: uninspired, demotivated, trapped, low confidence

→ need: gentle support to begin to consider learning

→ library = a softer entry point to learning, tasters

WAIT: floating voter, could go either way or float for ever

→ need: inspiration, a bit of encouragement

→ library = source of ideas, try-outs, materials, **advice**

GO: keen to learn but may not have the information

→ need: specific guidance

→ library = source of **information** (prospectus etc), recruitment point

The attitude of an individual towards learning and towards libraries will affect how the library can best increase its attractiveness as a place for learning.

On the horizontal axis we consider the individual's interest in learning, on the vertical their attitude towards libraries.

Those in the top right area of the graph are already GOs and may require little more than checking a prospectus for details or a quiet place to study – we have heard that in particular from women returners who find it difficult to study in their own homes.



In the bottom right section we have individuals who are interested in learning but do not consider the library. They may be interested to hear what is on offer – information, computers etc – and learning may be the trigger to get them interested in the library. If their tutor brings them in that will also help.

Regular library users who have not yet considered learning are in the top left area and could be enticed with posters / info inside the library that offers short tasters on subjects they are already interested in. They will not be attracted by a message about LEARNING, but they may want to learn how to DO something.

Those in the bottom left with basic skills needs may be attracted to the library via a community learning visit, while others who have just forgotten about libraries could be brought first into the library and then moved towards the group in the top left.

7 Influencing adult learners

7.1 Overcoming the barriers

In order for a potential adult learner to move from absolute resistance to learning to a point where they are likely to sign up for a course, they typically go through various stages of overcoming barriers to that decision. In the table below we see those blocks in sequence, the views expressed by those at this stage and the ways libraries can help them to overcome the block.

Learning block	Views expressed	What libraries can do
Denial	<i>Who needs it anyway? I've managed so far Lots of people manage</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use the right attention seeking language to penetrate denial (eg gremlins)
Self pity	<i>They always said I was thick It's not what men do I'm too old</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bring message closer to home and use Away from⁷ language
Practical	<i>Besides, I don't have time Who'd look after the kids? I don't know where to start</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear relevance Bite size courses that are easier to go to eg at lunchtime
Asking	<i>I'll call later... I'll wait till no-one's around I lost the number</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Easy to spot information Clear processes No stigma
Going	<i>I'll definitely do it next year There isn't a bus that way I phoned but it was full</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Follow up of learners (overcome data collection) CRM (customer relationship management) to nurture fragile learners Enjoyable experience

7.2 Communications

There is currently low awareness of libraries in general and specifically of current range of services. Although we had brought people to venues to talk about learning and libraries, after discussing learning for 45 minutes and then being asked where they might go for information or to do learning, almost none of them thought of libraries.

In the focus groups, we showed respondents a stack of learning related leaflets gathered from over 30 libraries around the country and asked them one by one if they would pick it up and read it if it came through the door⁸. The majority of these leaflets were not selected by non-users. We

⁷ Based on LaB profile explained in detail in Section 8

⁸ We have identified in previous research that this is the broadest acceptance criterion. There are fewer leaflets that they would select in a public place – having a quick read at home is safer so they are more prepared to take a chance with the relevance.

observed clear patterns of popularity with similar reasoning for why they liked them. This is endorsed by other focus group work on learning and is summarised in the list of DOs and DON'Ts shown here.

DON'T USE

- Patronising or too upbeat language / jargon
- Black and white
- Photocopied materials
- Photos of smiling people
- Confusing layout
- Jokes

DO USE

- Their language
- Headline about their stuff
- Bright colours
- Friendly style
- Strong design
- Simple targeted message
- Single sheet
- Quality production values
- Recognised brands

They also dislike information overload. A clear, simple message that is visually appealing is much more likely to elicit a response than a wordy piece of communication.

What to do

The adults we spoke to in focus groups had some suggestions for tackling the issue of convincing people like themselves to go to libraries and to consider learning in libraries.

Awareness raising

- TV advertising
- Single issue flyers
- Product placement eg soaps
- Simple, focused transport posters

Inclusivity

- "People like me" in communications
- Using my language (LaB)
- Motivating for me
- What's of interest to me (my buzz words, specific rather than general, visual rather than wordy)

Relevant messages

- Predictable, convenient opening hours eg lunchtime, weekends, late night shopping
- Inviting entrance
- Friend take friend
"Everyone is welcome"

- It's easy to become a member
- You can talk in libraries these days!
- Spare half hour?
- Local and national papers to read for free

Where to publicise

Often when we talked to library staff about how they publicise library learning opportunities it is the case that advertising is inside the library ie to current users. There is a missed opportunity here to tell a wider audience using venues and media that less skilled adults often cite eg:

- GP waiting rooms
- Supermarket notice boards
- Job section of local paper (if work related learning)
- Entertainment section of local paper (for leisure learning)
- Benefit agencies

7.3 The customer value proposition

General offer

At the heart of any successful organisation is a clear and relevant customer proposition. It explains **what** the organisation does, for **whom** and how the user/customer **benefits** from using the product.

In this case:

- What: information, entertainment, inspiration, education in a range of formats.
- Whom: everybody in the country.
- Benefits as identified by the customers. Currently these benefits do not exist consistently across all libraries and may differ from the list the library service would put forward:

The Customer Value Proposition might be summarised as:

Your friendly local library offers you information and entertainment in a format that is right for you and often free of charge.

Targeted offers

The Customer Value Proposition stated above is of necessity somewhat broad. When it comes to the more specific job of attracting adult learners then we have seen that offering specific activities has more impact than offering "learning". Such a broad term often takes the individual down a path of unpleasant memories and insufficient confidence / self esteem to self direct. The sort of messages that are successful include:

- A quick introduction to email
- A beginners guide to using a digital camera
- Understanding alternative therapies
- Getting legal advice

8 The LaB profile

Language and Behaviour (LaB) profiling can be used to increase effectiveness of all types of communication and reduce wastage. We profile the individuals in the focus groups to identify dominant tendencies which can then be reflected in literature to maximise impact and influence.

This approach has been used by us to develop materials, based on the audience's LaB profile. In later research, these materials are significantly more likely to be read and liked than others designed without this information.

In defining the LaB profile, we look at Buzzwords and 4 key dimensions. Getting this right is as important internally as it is externally, so we have included the staff profile and suggestions for phrases that will influence.

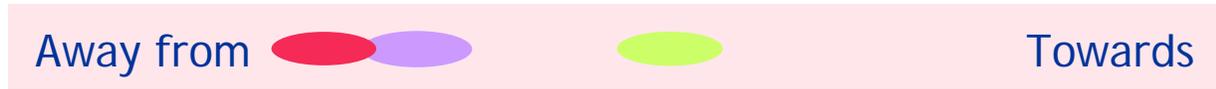
Buzzwords

General	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to... • Cash to help you learn how to... • Free tea • ... in the community • Welcome to your local library • It's time to find out how to... • Taster session • Real • How your library can help you
Subjects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internet, email, web, computers • Alternative: aromatherapy, yoga • Creative: photography, short stories workshop • Family / local history • Manage your money • English, maths, holiday Spanish • Kids' activities
Known brands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BBC • Next steps • Learn Direct • Gremlins (used sensitively)
Level of content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To the point • Single sheet of paper

In all of the following sections, the key is as shown here on the right. The GOs and STOPs are in relation to their attitude to learning and libraries. The staff is in relation to their attitude to their work and in particular making libraries more attractive to adult learners.



8.1 Direction of motivation



The first part of the profile measures the DIRECTION of motivation of the individual with respect to learning.

Asked about the benefits of learning, adults not currently considering learning are likely to talk about getting **away from** problems rather than **towards** goals. Those adults who are positive about the idea of learning have a more balanced view and although they may sometimes talk about achieving goals, their underlying reasons can still be **away from**.

	Adults	Staff
What they say	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well it saves you getting bored • I don't go to the library – I might do the wrong thing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People who use the library might mess that up • We need to improve libraries so they don't get closed down
Messages that influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't waste your skills • You're never too old • Don't let a lack of confidence stop you from developing skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't let libraries get left behind • Don't lose out • Fix the things that get in the way of helping your users

8.2 Comfort Zone



This tells us about the comfort zone of the individual - their tolerance of change and their appetite for new experiences.

Somebody who has a tendency to **sameness** will tend to make a voluntary major change to their life about every 25 years. These are people who feel threatened by change and don't see why anyone should change the status quo. If they are forced to undergo a change, they look for similarities to help cope with the change.

Marketing messages often talk about newness – a new job, a new experience, something completely different. That is attractive to those individuals who are have a difference profile, but can be alarming for the others.

An individual motivated by **difference** on the other hand loves things to be new and exciting. They look for new experiences and welcome change.

A more common pattern is to see things in the context of what is, and what has changed. This is known as **sameness with exception**. Key words are “more”, “less” and other comparative statements. They need to feel a sense of progress, not step change but progression along a continuum.

Increasing the attractiveness of libraries for adult learners

Any marketing activities need to have an element of difference in order to be eye catching, get some standout and attract attention. However this is better achieved by the look and feel of the message than the content if the message is to influence the majority of library staff and reluctant adult learners.

	Adults	Staff
What they say	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Libraries are the same old thing aren't they – books and sshh! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I've worked here for 25 years
Messages that influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Libraries are still there to help and to entertain everybody. These days you can also ... Libraries still have books – and nowadays they encourage conversation We're listening to what you say and libraries are getting better 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning has always been at the heart of what libraries do

8.3 Style of decision making

Procedures



Options

When we look at this dimension, we are looking at the way the individual thinks about their choices.

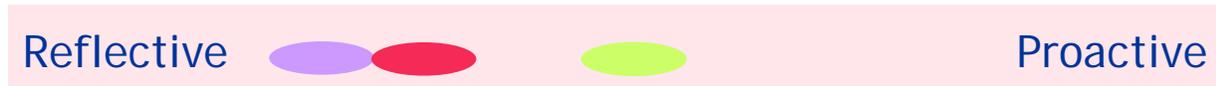
Procedures people like processes, clear steps and a “proper” way to do things. They are more comfortable knowing that they are going through a procedure, which will start with a first step, than they are with the idea of an exciting exploration of a wide range of opportunities (which would worry them).

If asked why they did something, they will answer a question by telling a story explaining HOW not WHY

Well I realised at school that I didn't really like a lot of the lessons ... and then... and then....

	Adults	Staff
What they say	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I wouldn't know the right way to go about it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have a way of doing things and that's important
Messages that influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Come to an introduction at 10am on Thursday. We'll show you around your library, tell you what's on offer and help you sign up if you want to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You know the right thing to do for the people in your community. The first step is to...

8.4 Motivation level



This dimension tells us about the style of decision making displayed by the individual in the context of learning.

A **proactive** individual will have animated body language, may get fidgety or look bored after a few minutes and speaks in short sharp sentences with lots of action words.

A **reflective** individual on the other hand will do just that – reflect. They will consider your questions, use passive tenses and leave sentences unfinished and hanging in the air.

Many adults who have not had positive learning experiences in the past are **reflective** about learning – they can consider learning for many years but never make a move to bring it about.

	Adults	Staff
What they say	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I don't know why really, I've never thought about it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I don't think so I need to think about that
Messages that influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You might have been thinking about coming to the library / doing a short course for some time now 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You've probably been thinking about xxx You might have already thought of ways to improve things in your library

8.5 Example communications

We have produced some examples of communications that could work to entice adults into considering learning in libraries. They take account of all the points mentioned above and develop a simple recognisable style that could easily be adapted to local information.

These are shown below:



Free coffee

Are you **curious** to know how libraries have **improved** while you've been busy with other things?

Come and meet **your local** library staff Julie and Tom at 6pm on Thursday evening (Sep 14). We'll show you round the library, **help you** have a go on the **free** computers and give you a **free** cup of coffee.

The local library
- it's all yours



Manage your money

Useful tips to help your money go further. A series of **free** half hour sessions you could do at lunchtime.

At **your local** library, next to the Post Office. Men and women of all ages **welcome**.

Wednesdays at 1pm in October

The local library
- it's all yours



Yoga for beginners

A **free** one hour class so **you** can see if you want to do more

At **your local** library, next to the Post Office. Men and women of all ages **welcome**.

Wednesday Sep 18, 6pm

The local library
- it's all yours

9 Next steps

Much of what is in this report reinforces the value of work already in progress under Framework for the Future. Many of the suggestions are being implemented by some libraries in some authorities. However consistency is low and public perceptions lag behind the changes that have been taking place in libraries.

9.1 Internal: sharing and corporate culture

- **Other agencies**
A key first step is to share the findings of this report with key stakeholders. These include top-down influences such as Vital Links, Society of Chief Librarians, Learning and Skills Council, Basic Skills Agency, BBC RaW campaign, learndirect and so on.
- **Current programs**
Activities such as the current leadership program can incorporate some of this material to raise awareness, particularly of the staff-related issues. Library managers and policy makers can be briefed at existing meetings.
- **Internal communications**
Existing internal communications eg websites, in-house magazines, can be used to spread the word to a wider group of staff.
A template article could be circulated to local authorities that could be included or adapted for their in-house publication.
Bite size articles covering aspects of the report presented as “Tips” for library staff can be published on relevant websites eg communications in Inspiring Learning for All
- **External communication**
An effective way of encouraging cultural change in organisations is to go public with the change. Creating a new rallying call for library staff – which is in tune with their own motivations and attitudes to the job – can be empowering for staff and make it easier for bottom-up change to take place. Press articles in relevant national publications can be helpful.

9.2 External: working together and customer led

Thanks to the help of the Society of Chief librarians, we easily collected over 100 different leaflets for the research groups. Nationally there are many times that number. If each is designed and produced independently, then the percentage of budget going on development costs, artwork origination and small print runs is disproportionate to the amount spent on the actual communication. Part of the drive for globalisation of brands is to avoid this wastage – there is also an opportunity to raise standards and improve effectiveness by starting with relevant national material that can be adapted to local needs. We have seen that in practice, take up of these templates is higher than initially expected because of competing demands on time and budget.

Those templates could reflect the findings covered in this report.

Integrated campaigns

- Explore possible links with existing marketing activity eg BBC RaW campaign, using Vital Link as the key partner to coordinate this.

Increasing the attractiveness of libraries for adult learners

- Include findings as consideration in definition of role of libraries
- Incorporate learning on design and colour into template adverts / posters / flyers
- Build into future development of marketing strategy

Any future national offer to include

- Attention to entrance area to minimise chance of potential new users not daring to come in or leaving unsatisfied.
- Clear labelling to facilitate new users finding their way around
- Quick tour for new users to let them know what's available and "give permission" to low confidence customers to use the facilities.
- Easy choice books at entrance
- Quick reads displayed as such to appeal to wider market

Synergy

- Maximise opportunities to build on good work already underway by Vital Link eg the Improvement Framework and toolkit (www.vitallink.org.uk)
- Increase consistency to raise standards and reduce development costs by offering templates for interiors, communications and procedures
- Combining research increases confidence in the conclusions and can generate useful insights. Sharing for example this report with those responsible for the BBC RaW research may be valuable.

9.3 Recommendations

As described in the Executive Summary (Section 1.3) the following actions come from customer and staff comments and are recommended as a means to extend awareness to new audiences and improve the customer experience

Role of libraries

- Reinforce to staff the core role of libraries (education, inspiration, entertainment etc) over and above medium (books vs tape / pc etc)
- Work with staff to create culture of empowerment to enhance service
- Training for staff to learn to build rapport with a range of library users so that conversation / enquiry is possible

Increase awareness

- Advertising – posters on buses, leaflets in GP surgeries, flyers in newsagents, cards on supermarket notice boards
- Increase consistency (by use of shared brand values, messages, colour palette and templates) in order to increase recognition and impact
- Community outreach – encouraging staff to connect with local groups and explore ways the library can help them

Increasing the attractiveness of libraries for adult learners

- Member get member – use existing library base to encourage new visits – come with a friend so it's an easier thing to do

Increase trial

- Library buddies in the workplace, trades union, children's primary school
- Satellite libraries in supermarket cafes, clinics, primary schools, fitness clubs
- Staff - allow them to give the service they want to⁹. Unleash their passion for serving their users and help them develop skills required for more proactive service giving

Improve environment

- Safe space with comfortable seating eg sofas in small clusters or with a coffee table in front and coffee
- More and better lighting In line with normal ambient lighting levels in retail outlets
- Easy processes including joining procedures
- Clear and accurate signage (using pictures as well as words)
- Library guides to help out, show you things you didn't know about
- Aromatherapy to overcome the "library smell"

Fit for purpose product

- Manageable choice (more books in storage, fewer on display)
- New books prominently displayed
- Older stock removed or in storage in case it is requested
- Local papers (and national)
- Teenagers books / magazines / music / listening posts
- Appropriate video/DVD stock

9.4 Conclusion

As is often the case, the story is fairly simple. There is a gap between what certain audiences want and what is on offer. Given the national affection for libraries, their wide, local based network and the exceptionally high levels of commitment among the staff we spoke to, there is a clear platform for adjusting the offer to become a more inclusive service at the heart of the community.

9 See Section 5 on staff for more detail.

Museums, libraries and archives connect people
to knowledge and information, creativity and inspiration.

MLA is leading the drive to unlock this wealth, for everyone.

Current news, developments and information
on our activities are available to view or download
from our website.

Museums, Libraries and Archives Council
www.mla.gov.uk

16 Queen Anne's Gate

London SW1H 9AA

Tel: 020 7273 1444

Fax: 020 7273 1404

Email: info@mla.gov.uk

Registered Charity No: 1079666