What do the public want from libraries?

Summary report of quantitative research

November 2010

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Introduction

This document provides an analysis of the findings from a telephone survey of 1,102 people aged 18+ in England, conducted by Ipsos MORI on behalf of the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council. The survey was about public attitudes towards public libraries, and formed part of a wider study being conducted for the MLA by Ipsos MORI and Shared Intelligence.

Interviews were conducted between 4 and 10 October 2010. Data are weighted by gender, age, work status and Government Office Region to the profile of the adult population of England, based on 2009 Mid-Year Estimates and the 2001 Census.

Our full research report, which draws on this quantitative research, as well as qualitative research and a desk review, is available at http://research.mla.gov.uk/. For further information about the methodology and advice about the interpretation of quantitative results, please refer to the Technical Report which accompanies this document. A full topline document providing headline frequencies is also provided. Tables detailing subgroup breakdowns are provided under separate cover.
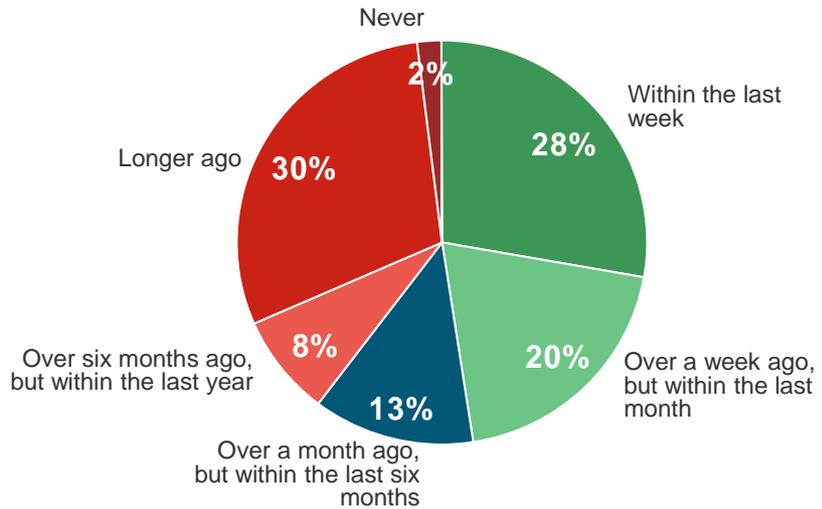
Library usage

As the following chart shows, almost half of people interviewed (48%) say they have used a public library recently, either in the last week or in the last month. Seven in ten (69%) say they have done so at some point in the last year[1]. Only two per cent of people interviewed say they have never used a public library or one of its services.

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[1] *We would expect this to be higher than the levels recorded by large-scale national face-to-face surveys such as Taking Part due to the inherent nature of this survey being about libraries as opposed to culture and leisure services more generally and the interest those selecting to take part will have in the subject matter.*

Frequency of library use

Q *When was the last time, if ever, you used a public library or one of its service?*

Never 2%

Within the last week 28%

Longer ago 30%

Over a week ago, but within the last month 20%

Over six months ago, but within the last year 8%

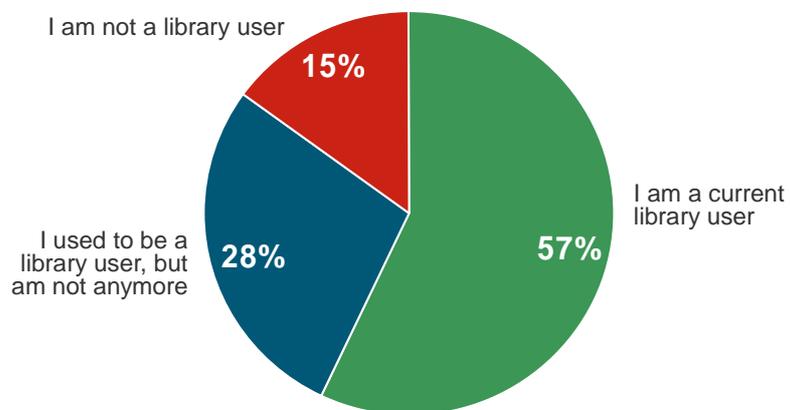Over a month ago, but within the last six months 13%

Ipsos MORI   Base: 1,102 adults in England aged 18+; interviewed 4th – 10th October 2010   Source: Ipsos MORI

When asked to 'self define', almost three in five people interviewed (57%) consider themselves to be a 'current library user'. Around a quarter (28%) say they were once a user but are not any longer (defined for the purposes of this analysis as a 'lapsed' user). One in seven (15%) say they are not a user.

Personal definition of library use

Q *Which of the following statements, if any, best describes you?*

I am not a library user 15%

I am a current library user 57%

I used to be a library user, but am not anymore 28%

Ipsos MORI   Base: 1,102 adults in England aged 18+; interviewed 4th – 10th October 2010   Source: Ipsos MORI

The way people define their usership of libraries is fairly complex, and does not necessarily reflect their frequency of library use, as the qualitative phase (phase 2) of this study also suggests. For example, the survey results show that while respondents who use libraries at least monthly are generally likely to define themselves as current users, there is more of a mixed picture when it comes to less frequent use – three in ten (30%) who have used libraries over a month ago but within the last six months consider themselves to be lapsed users, while six in ten (63%) perceive themselves to be current users. Conversely, for those using libraries over six months ago but within the last year, around half (54%) consider themselves to be lapsed users, but one in three still regard themselves as current users (32%).

Similarly, although they do not consider themselves users, the great majority of people who would define themselves as a non-user actually appear to have had some contact with public libraries in the past (90%), and one in six (16%) say they have used a library service at least once in the last year. Linking the findings back to the qualitative phase, theses people may have joined a library for a limited or specific purpose (e.g. to borrow a piece of sheet music), and, having done what they wanted, not used the library service again. Others go on behalf of someone else, and consequently they do not consider themselves users.

'Current users' tend strongly to be recent users. Four in five (80%) say they have used a library service within the last month, compared with almost half (48%) of all people interviewed. The profile of those defining themselves as current users versus non users appears to reinforce the findings of the desk research phase (phase 1):

• Women are more likely than men to see themselves as 'current users' (64% vs. 50%), as are those with children in the household aged up to 17 (64% vs. 53% of those who do not have children). Conversely, men are more likely than women to say they are non-users (20% vs. 10%).

• How people define their usership seems to vary across the age ranges too, with older people (aged 65+) and middle aged people (aged 35-44) more likely to say they are current users (65% and 62% respectively). Younger people (aged 18-24) are the least likely to define themselves as a current user (45% compared to 57% of respondents overall), and are the most likely to define themseves as a non-user (22% vs. 15% of respondents overall).

• Full-time workers are much less likely to be a current user – around half (48%) see themselves as current users compared with two in three (64%) of those who do not work full-time. However, full-time workers are no more likely than average to see themselves as 'non-users'. Instead, they are more likely to be

someone who used to use a library but who does not anymore (35% compared to 23% of those who do not work full-time).
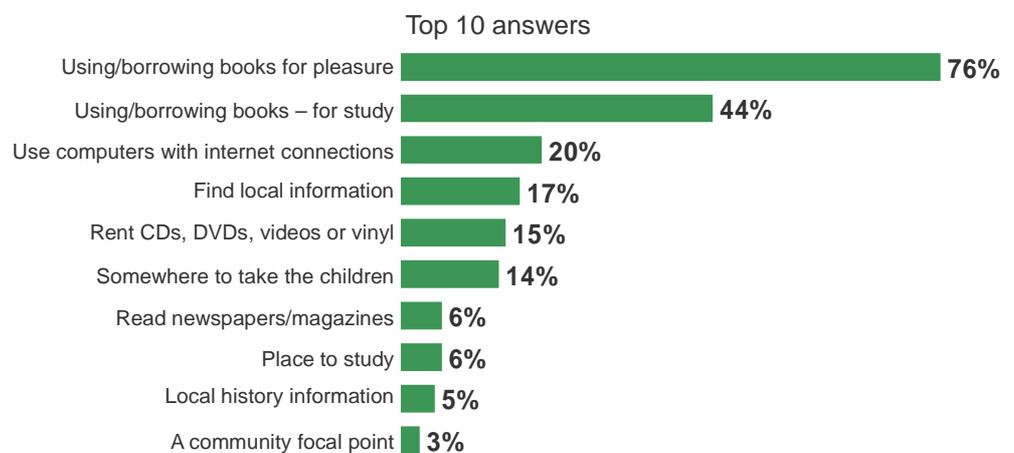
When we look at **'lapsed' users**, these proportions are highest among people in full-time work (35% compared to 28% of respondents who overall regard themselves as someone who used to be a library user, but is not anymore) or who look after the home (36%) and is lowest among people aged 65+ (20%) or who are retired (20%). They are also higher among those who do <u>not</u> have children in the household aged up to 17, compared with those who do (30% vs. 24%). These patterns all underline the importance to library use of changes in personal circumstances. As found during the qualitative phase of this study, major changes in somebody's day-to-day life (e.g. getting a full-time job or children leaving home) may mean they no longer have the same reason or opportunity to visit libraries, moving them from being 'current' to 'lapsed' users. Conversely, as people retire or have children they may be more likely to move from the 'lapsed' into the 'current user' catergory.

Motivations for using library services

For current users, by far the most popular reasons for visiting a library are to use or borrow a book for pleasure (76%) or study (44%). One in five (20%) say they go to use computers with internet connections. This is followed by searching for local information (17%), renting CDs, DVDs, videos or vinyl (15%) and going because it is somewhere to take the children (14%).

Reasons for using public libraries

Q   *What are your main reasons for using libraries/library services?*

Top 10 answers

Reason	%
Using/borrowing books for pleasure	76%
Using/borrowing books – for study	44%
Use computers with internet connections	20%
Find local information	17%
Rent CDs, DVDs, videos or vinyl	15%
Somewhere to take the children	14%
Read newspapers/magazines	6%
Place to study	6%
Local history information	5%
A community focal point	3%

Ipsos MORI   Base: People who say they are current library users (631)   Source: Ipsos MORI

Age is an important factor in people's reasons for using libraries. For older users aged 65+, libraries are important as a place to pursue interests and intellectual hobbies. They are more likely than users overall to say they go to use or borrow books for pleasure (82% vs. 76%), and to read newspapers or magazines (11% vs. six per cent). They are also more likely than users overall to say they use the library as a communal focal point (seven per cent vs. three per cent) and to conduct family history research (six per cent vs. three per cent). For younger users, libraries are more important as a place for quiet research. Those aged 18-24 are more likely than users overall to say they read or borrow books for study (72% vs. 44%) or that they go because it is a place where they can study (17% vs. six per cent). For users aged between 25 and 44, taking children to the library is a particularly important reason for going (30% compared with 14% overall), whereas middle-agedusers, i.e. aged 45-64, are more likely than average to say they go to find out local information (27% vs. 17%).

Looking at work status, full-time employees are more likely than average to say they use or borrow books for study (50% vs. 44% of users overall) or rent CDs, DVDs, videos or vinyl (19% vs. 15%), whereas their non working counterparts are more likely to say they borrow or use books for pleasure (84% of part-time workers and 85% of retired respondents vs. 76% of users overall). Users in education or training are the most likely to say they read or borrow books for study purposes (80% vs. 44% for users overall) or that they go to the library because it is somewhere where they can study (30% compared to six per cent of users overall).

Studying is also an important reason why minority ethnic users use library services. They are more likely than white users to say they borrow or use books to study (61% vs. 41%) or that they go because the library is a place to study (21% vs. four per cent). There is a similar split between rural and urban users, with those in urban areas being more likely to say they use or borrow books for study (47% vs. 35% of rural users). On the other hand, rural users are more likely to say they borrow or use books for pleasure (85% vs. 72%). Those living in London are also particularly likely to say libraries are a place they go to study (16% vs. six per cent overall).

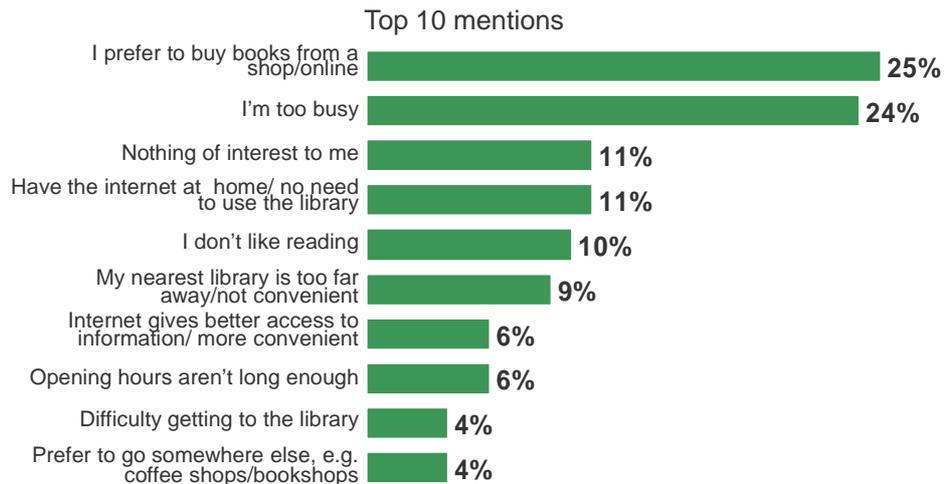Looking at other demographic groups, women users are more likely than men to say they go to the library because it is somewhere to take the children (19% vs. eight per cent).

The main reasons given by lapsed users and non users for *not* using library services are that they prefer to buy books from a shop or online (25%) and that they are too busy (24%). This is followed by there being nothing of interest for

them in the library (11%) and by the fact that they have the internet at home and do not need to go (11%).

Reasons for not using libraries

Q   *What are your main reasons, if any, for not using public libraries (nowadays)?*

Top 10 mentions

Reason	%
I prefer to buy books from a shop/online	25%
I'm too busy	24%
Nothing of interest to me	11%
Have the internet at home/ no need to use the library	11%
I don't like reading	10%
My nearest library is too far away/not convenient	9%
Internet gives better access to information/ more convenient	6%
Opening hours aren't long enough	6%
Difficulty getting to the library	4%
Prefer to go somewhere else, e.g. coffee shops/bookshops	4%

Ipsos MORI   Base: People who say they used to be library users or who have never been (470)   Source: Ipsos MORI

Lapsed users and non users who are in full-time work are more likely to say they are too busy to go to the library (28% compared with 19% who do not work full-time) and, perhaps linked to this, that opening hours are not long enough (eight per cent compared to three per cent respectively).

Across age groups, the attraction of other outlets or activities is more important for younger people. For example, those aged 25-34 are more likely to say they prefer going to other places, such as a coffee shop (eight per cent vs. four per cent overall), or shopping online (nine percent prefer to buy DVDs from a shop or online compared to three per cent of lapsed or non-users overall). They are also more likely to say they do not know what their library offers or where it is (nine per cent vs. three per cent overall). For those aged 18-24, university libraries are also a potential alternative; nine per cent say they have access to these resources instead of public libraries, compared with two per cent overall. For older people, problems with accessibility are more important reasons for not using libraries. For example, one in ten of those aged 65+ (10%) say they have difficulty getting to the library, compared with only four per cent overall.

There are also differences between ethnic groups. 'Lapsed' or non-users from a minority ethnic group are more likely than their white counterparts to say libraries

are too far away and difficult to reach (20% vs. eight per cent) or that they themselves cannot read (nine per cent vs. one per cent). In their turn, white 'lapsed' users and non-users are more likely than their ethnic minority counterparts to say they prefer getting books at a shop or online (27% vs. 13%).

Some differences also exist between rural and urban areas. Rural 'lapsed' users and non-users are more likely than their urban counterparts to say their reason is they do not like reading (17% vs. eight per cent), whereas in urban areas a more common reason is that people prefer going to other places, such as a coffee shop (5% vs. none in rural areas).

Looking at self-defined categories of library use, 'lapsed' users are more likely to give conditional reasons for not using libraries at the moment, suggesting they might use them in other circumstances. For example, they are more likely than non-users to say they are too busy (27% vs. 18%) or that opening hours are not long enough (eight per cent vs. two per cent). Non-users are more likely to indicate they simply do not like reading (17% vs. seven per cent of 'lapsed' users).

The value and importance of libraries

Libraries are valued as a community asset by the great majority of people interviewed, but these sentiments are strongest amongst users - 90% say they are 'essential' or 'very important' compared to 59% of non users. Nonetheless, this pattern supports the findings of the qualitative phase, which shows a high level of agreement overall that libraries are a vital community service, irrespective of whether respondents have actually used them.

Respondents are less likely to say public libraries matter to them as individuals, but still levels are quite high - three in four users (74%) say public libraries are essential or very important to them personally, compared with one in four 'lapsed' users (23%) and one in eight non users (13%). The personal importance given to public libraries also correlates very strongly with the level of use. Nine in ten people who say they have used a library in the last week (87%) say the service is either essential or very important to them personally, with this proportion shrinking substantially the longer ago people used the service.

Libraries appear to play a particularly important role in the lives of women (55% say that libraries are essential or very important to them personally compared to 51% of respondents overall), older people (64% of those aged 65 or over say this), retired people (62%) and those not working full-time (58%). As many as seven in 10 respondents (70%) from a minority ethnic background regard libraries as essential or very important to them personally, compared to 48% of white

respondents. Notably, there is no difference in opinion between respondents who have children in the home and those who do not.

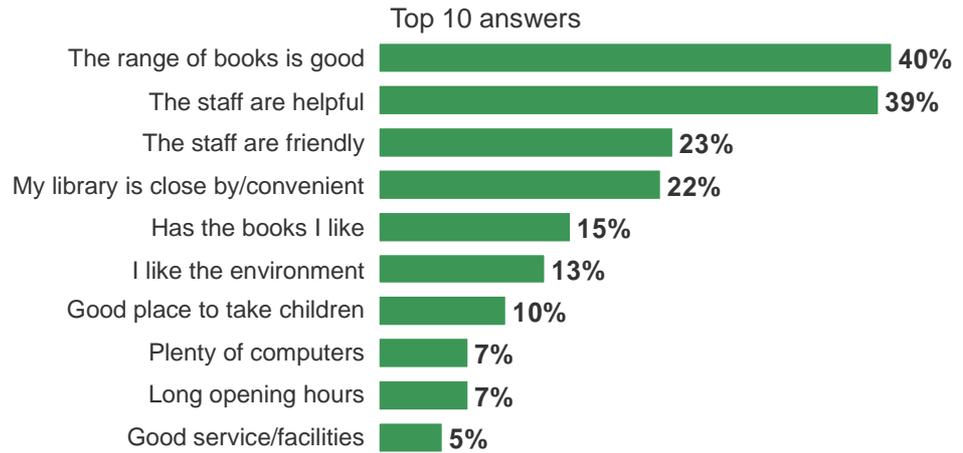## Satisfaction with the library service

People are far more likely to speak positively rather than negatively about the library service. As might be expected, satisfaction is highest among the most frequent users of public libraries: those who say they used a library in the last week (95% say they are satisfied) or the last month (94%) and those who define themselves as a 'current user' (94%). Satisfaction is lower among 'lapsed' users (57%) and non-users (44%) but this is because members of these groups are less likely to have an opinion – ultimately active *dissatisfaction* is very low across all user and non-user groups.

Linked to this, satisfaction is higher amongst older age groups (85% of those aged 65 or over are satisfied compared to 76% of respondents overall), those who are not working full-time (82%), people with children under 17 (80%) and those from a minority ethnic background (84%). This supports one of the findings of the desk research phase - that there seems to be a core of dedicated, loyal users with high levels of satisfaction which may reflect a strong sense of loyalty and attachment to particular libraries.

High levels of satisfaction amongst users specifically appear to be the result of a number of factors, but most importantly because the range of books is good (cited by 40% of satisfied users) and the staff are helpful (39%). This is followed by the staff being friendly (23%) and the library being close by or convenient to reach (22%).

Reasons for satisfaction with public libraries

Q   What makes you say that?

Top 10 answers

The range of books is good	40%
The staff are helpful	39%
The staff are friendly	23%
My library is close by/convenient	22%
Has the books I like	15%
I like the environment	13%
Good place to take children	10%
Plenty of computers	7%
Long opening hours	7%
Good service/facilities	5%

Ipsos MORI   Base: People who say they are library users and are satisfied with the service (592)   Source: Ipsos MORI

Reasons for being satisfied vary between different demographic groups. For example, the range of books is most important to younger users (56% of users aged 18-24 who are satisfied with library services cite this compared to 40% of satisfied users overall) and those in education or training (56%). The helpfulness of staff is a more important factor for older users (47% of users aged 65+ who are satisfied cite this, compared to 39% of satisfied users overall), whereas users aged 25-44 are more likely to say they are satisfied because the library is a good place to take children (20% vs. 10% of all satisfied users).

Among satisfied users who say libraries are essential or very important to them, impressions of staff seem particularly important; 42% say the helpfulness of staff is a key reason why they are satisfied, compared to 39% of satisfied users overall, and 25% say it is because the staff are friendly, compared to 23% overall.

These key reasons for being satisfied closely match the main factors that people value in libraries as identified in the qualitative phase. The range and quality of books mattered greatly to users in the focus groups and the helpfulness and general attitude of staff was also a vital factor in people's experience of libraries. Among parents, there was also particular emphasis on the importance of making libraries appeal to children and young people.

Only 21 current library users (three per cent of those interviewed) say they are dissatisfied with the current library service. By far the most common reason is that the range of books is not good enough (given by 10 people), followed by opening hours not being long enough (given by six people).

Feeling informed about library services

Feeling informed about public libraries is highest among the most frequent users; over four in five of those who say they have used a library in the last week or month (84%) say they feel informed about what they can do, compared with half (49%) of those who say they last used a library over a year ago. Similarly, over four in five self-defined current users (82%) say they feel informed, compared with just over half of lapsed users (55%) and less than half of non-users (46%).

As we find with wider research across the local government sector, satisfaction with local public services is heavily influenced by how informed people feel about the services available (even if they do not necessarily use them) – 85% of respondents to this survey who feel informed about public libraries are also satisfied with the service, compared to 55% of those who do not feel well informed. This suggests that while satisfaction with libraries is generally high, improving communications and awareness about what libraries do could potentially help to increase it further.

Promoting greater use of public libraries

The following chart shows how people responded to a series of possible suggested changes to public libraries, illustrating whether these changes would encourage them to visit libraries more often or whether no difference would be made.
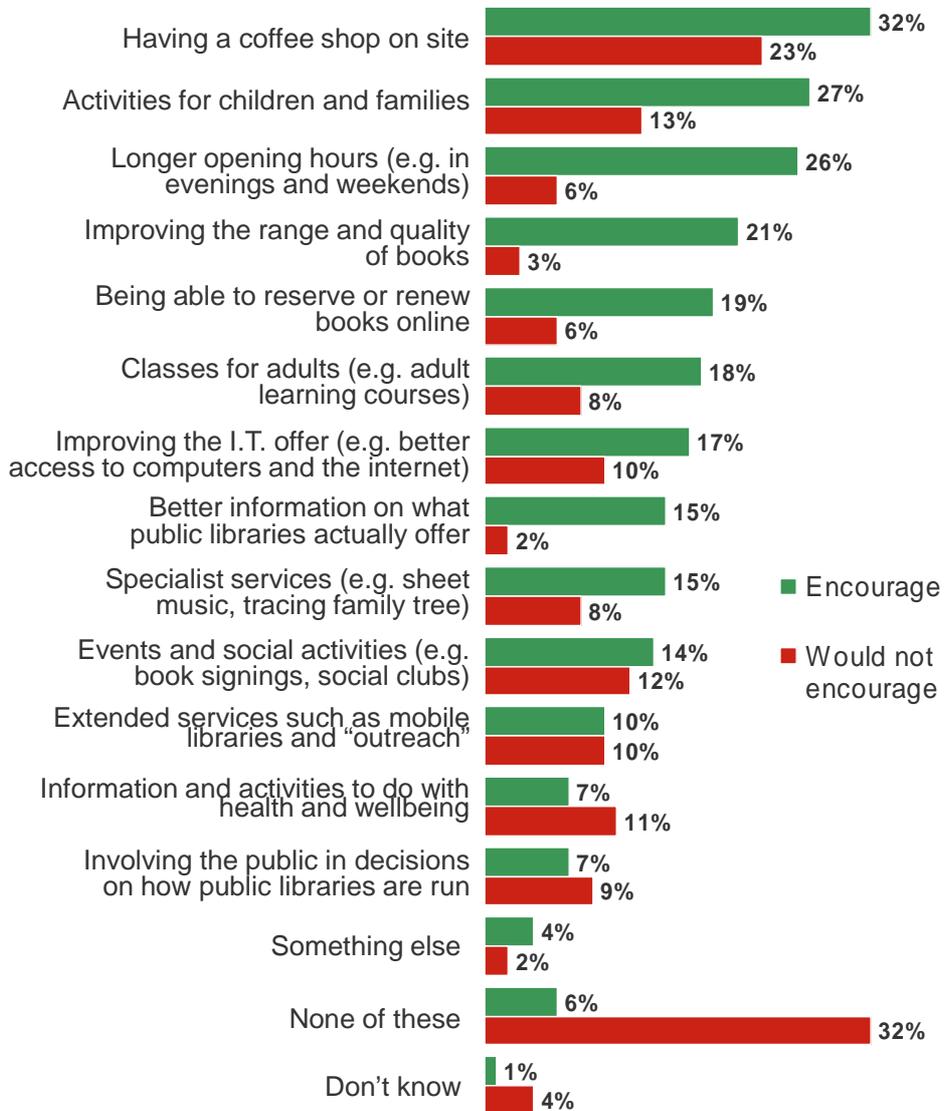
People are most likely to have an opinion about a coffee shop on site or about activities for children or families. Yet there is a mixed feeling about these potential changes to local libraries. A third (32%) say a coffee shop would do most to encourage them to visit, but a quarter (23%) say this would do least to encourage them. A quarter (27%) say activities for children and families would encourage them to use libraries more often, but one in eight (13%) say this would do least to encourage them. Longer opening hours (e.g. in evenings and on weekends) are an important improvement for around one in four (26%). Improving the range and quality of books is also important to around one in five (21%).

These findings broadly mirror those found from the qualitative phase, especially when we consider the profile of respondents – e.g. activities for children and

families would be particularly encouraging for middle age groups (37% of respondents aged 25-44), those looking after the home (48%) and respondents with children (42%) compared to 27% of respondents overall.

Encouraging visits

Q   Which two or three, if any, would encourage you to make more use of public libraries?

Q   And which two or three, if any, would not encourage you to make more use of public libraries?

	Encourage	Would not encourage
Having a coffee shop on site	32%	23%
Activities for children and families	27%	13%
Longer opening hours (e.g. in evenings and weekends)	26%	6%
Improving the range and quality of books	21%	3%
Being able to reserve or renew books online	19%	6%
Classes for adults (e.g. adult learning courses)	18%	8%
Improving the I.T. offer (e.g. better access to computers and the internet)	17%	10%
Better information on what public libraries actually offer	15%	2%
Specialist services (e.g. sheet music, tracing family tree)	15%	8%
Events and social activities (e.g. book signings, social clubs)	14%	12%
Extended services such as mobile libraries and "outreach"	10%	10%
Information and activities to do with health and wellbeing	7%	11%
Involving the public in decisions on how public libraries are run	7%	9%
Something else	4%	2%
None of these	6%	32%
Don't know	1%	4%

■ Encourage

■ Would not encourage

There are some other notable differences according to demographic and geographic groups, for example:

- Extended servics such as mobile libraries and outreach services are important to retired people (15% say these would encourage them to make more use of public libraries compared to 10% of respondentsd overall).

- More convenient services would be preferable to respondents who work full-time, e.g. longer opening hours (32% of people who work full-time cite this compared to 22% with those who do not work full-time) and being able to reserve or renew books online (21% compared to 17% respectively).

- Younger people appear to be more encouraged by IT-related services; of those aged 18-24, 28% would be encouraged to use libraries if they could reserve or renew books online (compared to 19% overall) and 26% by improvements to the overall IT offer such as better access to computers and the internet (compared to 17% overall). Correspondingly, these suggestions are also favoured by people who are in training or education (32% and 30% respectively).

- People in London are the most likely to say they would be encouraged by being able to reserve or renew books online (27% vs. 19% overall). Along with people in Eastern England, they are also the most likely to favour improving the quality and range of books (28% in the East and 26% in London compared with 21% overall). People in the East Midlands are more likely than average to favour having classes for adults (28% vs. 18% overall).

There is clearly no single change that will satisfy everyone. Looking just at patterns of library usage, it is clear that preferences vary significantly according to how people define their use and when they last went, which is shown in the table below.

Top five changes people say would encourage them to use libraries more often

Current users (631)	Lapsed users (308)	Non-users (162)
Coffee shop on site (31%)	Coffee shop on site (35%)	Coffee shop on site (30%)
Longer opening hours (29%)	Longer opening hours (27%)	Activities for children and families (26%)
Activities for children and families (28%)	Activities for children and families (26%)	Improving the IT offer (18%)
Improving the range and quality of books (27%)	Improving the IT offer (20%)	Specialist services (e.g. sheet music, family tree) (18%)
Being able to reserve or renew books online (19%)	Better information on what libraries offer (19%)	Classes for adults (15%)
Source: Ipsos MORI		

Although having a coffee shop on site and staging more activites for children and families feature highly for all three groups, other preferences vary. For 'current' users, an improved book offer features highly, but it does not for either 'lapsed' users or non-users, reflecting the fact that using and borrowing books are current users' main reasons for going. However, 'lapsed' users are more likely to favour improving the IT resources (20% vs. 14% of current users). Perhaps because they feel more detached from the library service, they also favour providing better information on what libraries offer (19% vs. 13% of current users). For their part, non-users are more likely to favour offering better specialist services and staging more classes for adults.

There is little difference in opinion between the different user and non-user groups about the things that would would *least* encourage them to make more user of public libraries. However, what the results do illustrate is that different suggestions for change will be favoured by different types people. There appears to be no single 'magic bullet' for increasing usage of libraries, but of the options up for discussion it will be important to understand which changes are most likely to encourage (and in some instances discourage) greater usage of the services on offer and amongst which particular target audiences.

It will be important to strike the right balance between, on one hand, attracting to libraries people who used to come or who have never visited, and on the other hand, retaining the loyalty of the service's dedicated and loyal users.
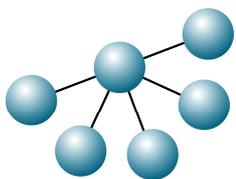
Leading strategically, we promote best practice in museums, libraries and archives, to inspire innovative, integrated and sustainable services for all.

SHARED INTELLIGENCE

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