
Envisioning the library of the future Phase 3: understanding what people value about libraries

Research by Involve and Dialogue by Design

This document is an independent report, part of *Envisioning the library of the future*, commissioned by Arts Council England.

This report is a summary and synthesis of four public dialogue workshops held across the UK during the course of September 2012. The aim of the workshops was to build a picture of the role and value of public libraries for individuals, their families and the communities in which they live.

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About the authors

Involve are experts in public participation. We believe passionately in a democracy where citizens are able to take and influence the decisions that affect their lives. Through both research and practice we seek to radically transform the relationship between citizens and their governments to better use the creativity, energy, knowledge, skills and resources of all.

Dialogue by Design is a specialist engagement and consultation company with a track record of delivering high quality consultation and engagement services across a range of sectors. In addition to providing strategic advice we design and run face-to-face and online engagement and consultation projects. Our work is underpinned by a commitment to openness, transparency and support for an active and well-functioning democracy.

Executive summary

Arts Council England assumed responsibility for championing libraries and supporting development of the library sector in October 2011 at a time of significant change. Ongoing social and technological changes in society are having an impact on the way library services are delivered and on the public's views on the value that libraries provide. In this context, Arts Council England carried out a programme of research and debate - Envisioning the library of the future - that will support the development of a long-term vision for public libraries in England. This report presents the findings of four deliberative dialogue workshops, each with around 40 members of the public, held in Newcastle, Stratford-upon-Avon, Totnes and London in September 2012. This analysis is part of the evidence base that will inform the Arts Council England vision for the future of public library service delivery.

Our approach

The deliberative research tested the public view of the purpose and value of public libraries. During the workshops we explored in detail the public's appreciation of public libraries – as citizens, as individual consumers or non-consumers of library services, and as taxpayers who fund public library services.

The deliberative nature of the workshops provided time and space for these participants to engage with each other, their own thoughts and perceptions of the library service, and with the views and opinions of other participants. Although the findings and the conclusions of the workshops cannot claim to be representative of the population as a whole, they offer an in-depth, thoughtful and robust insight into the reasons why the public values the library service.

The findings

Our analysis of the data collected through the workshops identified five clear themes that emerged from participants' discussions of the value and purpose of public libraries. These themes were:

The importance of the library space, including its look, feel and purpose

Many of the values that participants spoke of related to the physical space of a library. This included its physical layout and the spatial relationship between different functions and services, the architecture and aesthetics of library buildings and the feeling, sound and atmosphere of the library space. Participants' discussions revealed the public library as a space of multiple, sometimes competing, values.

The value of libraries to children and young people (Children and young people: norms, independence and education)

The value of libraries as a place in which children have fun and learn skills and behaviours that will be important to them as they grow was a strong theme in all discussions. In addition to the more obvious value of providing access to books – and in some cases toys - through lending services

and child-centred activities, libraries were seen as a place in which children learn independence of thought and imagination, respect for others, how to take care of borrowed items and how to follow 'rules of engagement' such as how to take out a book. Most importantly, however, these values were conveyed through fun: children were felt to enjoy libraries.

The role of libraries in collecting and offering a gateway to knowledge and culture (Collecting knowledge and culture)

Public libraries are seen as gateways to knowledge, culture and information. The systems and structures which organise and manage this knowledge and information provide a sound starting point for individuals who use library services. The fact that information and other resources in a library are curated as public goods, rather than commercial property, is seen as one of the fundamental values of libraries. This is something that participants felt differentiates libraries from online digital formats, which many saw as unorganised, unfocused and often difficult to navigate. New technologies and changes in the scope and range of library services were not embraced by all participants: in particular, there was a variety of different attitudes towards the value and usefulness of the book. The value of other aspects of what might be considered the 'traditional' library was also challenged, such as the value of the service offered by staff.

The inclusivity of libraries and their role in social opportunity and equality (Equality, opportunity and access)

Equality, opportunity and access were recurrent themes in all four workshops. Free access was valued most as a way of providing equal opportunities to all. Services that were free or low-cost, in comparison to commercial services, were also discussed in terms of equal opportunities. Easy access, both physical and temporal, was valued. Participants valued things such as access to career information, work skills and job searches and the opportunity to keep on learning throughout their lives. Also, participants saw libraries as having a wider social value in creating or defending social equality. Whilst most participants agreed that creating or protecting equal opportunities for all is a value intrinsic to libraries, some questioned whether libraries *should* cater for all – and indeed, whether this is possible at all.

The tension between change and continuity in libraries (Libraries in a changing context)

Change and continuity were themes that weaved their way through many of the groups' discussions. There was at once a real understanding that the societal context in which libraries operate has changed significantly, and a contrasting sense that the general purpose of libraries had not necessarily kept pace. This came through as a mix of nostalgia from some and disappointment that libraries have not modernised more from others. This seemed to reflect competing views of the value of libraries in a period of change.

The impact of technology came through as a particularly prevalent issue in all of the workshops. This was both in terms of its impact on the role of libraries and how library services were delivered. Participants also spoke about the changing use of library space and the diversification of services in recent years.

Conclusion

The values and purpose of the library service expressed by participants at the workshops appear to provide a clear vision of a library service that has a role at the centre of all communities. The value of the public library is to:

- provide a neutral and safe space
- provide a shared space to facilitate interaction and create a sense of community
- be an environment for exploration, a point of trusted information and provide a breadth and depth of knowledge
- introduce children to books and reading, firing their imagination and at the same time supporting the development of children and young people
- provide a learning environment and space for quiet study
- be inclusive and open to all, and provide a non-stigmatising environment

Throughout history wider societal, technological and economical changes influenced how libraries are used and valued by the public. The rapidly changing societal and technological context might not always match individual preferences. Tensions can arise where there are competing views on the purpose and value of public libraries. Throughout our discussions people debated: the extent to which libraries should embrace and exploit technological changes; to what extent libraries have a role for socialising and as a community hub; what constitutes 'core' library services; and the correct balance between the core library services and other services.

There were many contradictions in how participants thought libraries deal with, or should deal with, social and technological changes. For example, there was disagreement over the social and community aspect of libraries, the influence of technology, the diversification of services and the commercialisation of libraries.

At the same time, libraries seem to provide a constant and solid grounding for citizens who are also adapting to a rapidly changing world. Whilst tensions arose regarding what the purpose of public libraries is or should be, what and how services should be provided and, moreover, the multiple values associated with public libraries. It is clear from the discussions at the four workshops that public libraries are valued and that there is some consistency in these across the four workshops. There is strong public attachment to public libraries and the variety of ways they demonstrate value to their communities, from both users and non-users.

The challenge for libraries is how to reconcile these competing views of how libraries do and should enact these values. The findings from this study suggest that there is great public demand for libraries and the potential for them to continue to adapt to change. There is scope for innovation that will enable public libraries to meet the needs of a 21st century society without this meaning that their core values are lost.

Introduction

Background

In 2011 Arts Council England became the national development agency for the library sector, with responsibility for championing libraries and supporting the development of the sector. In September 2011 they published *Culture, knowledge and understanding*, a framework for decision making in the arenas of museums and libraries during the current spending period (2011-15).

In order to support the development of a longer term vision for libraries, the Arts Council embarked on Envisioning the library of the future, a series of research projects commissioned to inform policy development that is rooted in an understanding of what a 21st century library could and should look like, and how it delivers value to its stakeholders.

Public library services are currently grappling with a period of transition, working to adapt to economic, technological and social change. Debate about the role and function of public libraries has tended to focus on short term issues of funding and management. This research is designed to inform a more strategic approach to the future potential of public library services and the value they offer, encourage fresh thinking and promote positive change.

Envisioning the library of the future

This report presents the results of four deliberative workshops held with members of the public across England in September 2012. The workshops explored public views of the purpose and value of public libraries. The workshops comprise the central strand of phase III of Envisioning the library of the future. Arts Council England also commissioned Dialogue by Design and Involve to carry out an online survey and two small workshops with young people. These are reported on separately.

These workshops sit within the wider programme of research and debate that will inform the Arts Council's development of a long-term vision for public libraries in England.

Deliberative dialogue workshops

Throughout September 2012 we ran four public deliberative dialogue workshops across England. Deliberative dialogue is a distinctive form of engagement in which participants are provided with information on the topic under discussion and have sufficient time to discuss and reflect on this topic in depth. The process is designed to take participants beyond their immediate and surface views.

Each workshop lasted five hours and involved approximately 40 participants. Participants were recruited to ensure a balanced mix of users, non-users and lapsed users of libraries and a broad and inclusive demographic. The workshops were held in the following locations:

- **Newcastle** – Saturday 1 September
- **Stratford-upon-Avon** – Saturday 8 September
- **Totnes, Devon** – Saturday 15 September
- **London** – Saturday 22 September

The process included a mix of small table discussions, plenary sessions and 'carousel' activities. The process design was underpinned by the following principles:

- the process must be transparent, which means that the information given to the participants is balanced and accessible, participants understand how their views are reported, and it has been made clear to all participants how the results of the dialogue will be used
- the process demonstrates the value accorded to participants giving their time and energy to the project

- the process must be varied to generate and retain interest
- participants' views should be treated with respect

At the start of each workshop, participants completed a brief questionnaire on their library use and their feelings about the workshop in which they were to take part. At the end of each workshop, participants completed a brief evaluation questionnaire.¹ After the first workshop in Newcastle we reviewed the process and made some minor amendments to improve the subsequent three workshops.

A detailed overview of the methodology and the session plan can be found in Appendix I.

What we heard

Facilitators recorded workshop discussions in a range of ways, including on flip-charts and post-it notes and on digital recorders. The facilitation team took notes of their table discussions as well as the plenary discussions.

Whilst the data captured have not allowed us to carry out a rigorous analysis of the outputs according to the recruitment variables, we have, where possible, attached specific themes to different types of library user or non-user. Where themes are clearly specific to or highlighted within a particular location, we have noted this.

The five themes are:

- **space:** the value, meaning and aesthetics of the library space
- **children and young people:** norms, independence and education
- **gateways to knowledge and culture:** the curated library
- **equality, opportunity and access:** the role of libraries in social opportunity
- **continuity and change:** the adaptive library

About this report

This report is structured as follows: chapters 2-6 deal in turn with the five themes outlined above; chapter 7 outlines our conclusions; and the appendices cover the detailed description of the methodology, the recruitment process and the participants, and the results of the pre and post workshop questionnaires.

The discussions that took place were rich, varied and wide-ranging and we have not been able to include in this report all of the points made. The broad themes encompass the full range of the discussions and where we have provided detail or quotes, we have chosen these to illustrate the main points, or to highlight a particular tension or divergent view.

Terminology

In this report, we use the term 'library' to mean 'public library'; where other types of library are being referred to (eg school library), we will make this clear. Throughout this report, when we refer to the 'value' of public libraries, these are the values ascribed to them by participants in the research.

Non-attributable quotes from participants are used throughout the text to exemplify certain issues.

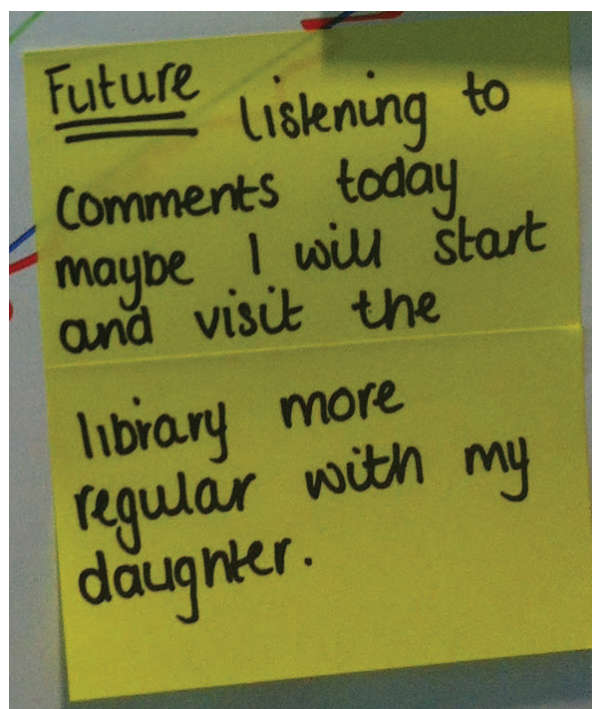


Figure 1. Comment on the library timeline

¹ See Appendix 3 for the collated findings from these questionnaires.

Space

Introduction

The physical space of the library was a recurrent theme throughout the workshops. Participants referred to the architecture and aesthetics of library buildings and the feeling, sound and atmosphere of the library space.

Participants' made vivid descriptions of the library space and of the memories or feelings they associated with this space. Some spoke of beautiful old buildings and architecture, others of quiet, warm and peaceful spaces, and others of damp, cold, gloomy and unwelcoming places. Some participants valued the architecture and aesthetics of library buildings themselves: in remembering the role that libraries played and continued to play in their lives, they spoke fondly of old buildings and old furnishings. Others clearly preferred more modern library buildings.

In all four workshops, the dialogue between participants revealed the public library as a space of multiple, sometimes competing, values. Libraries were variously described as individual, social and community spaces and participants were able simultaneously to hold competing, and sometimes contradictory, views about the value of the library space. This is perhaps because there was a broad consensus that libraries *should* perform all of these roles (ie provide a relaxing, quiet and safe individual space, while at the same time be a space for social interaction and community).

The value of the library as a public space can be grouped broadly under five headings:

- non-judgemental or anonymous space
- space to relax and escape
- safe space
- social space
- community space

Non-judgemental or anonymous space

For many participants, public libraries were neutral spaces in which people could be anonymous and free from the judgement of others. This neutrality was often mentioned in relation to non-traditional library services such as employment assistance or skills development, when the library was being contrasted with places such as job centres, which participants felt were 'judgemental' spaces.

Some participants described the value of a non-judgemental space in relation to library services such as borrowing books or accessing information. They felt that the library allows people to be 'anonymous', removing the embarrassment for some of borrowing books that might be considered 'stupid' – as one participant in Newcastle expressed it - or accessing information that might be sensitive.

'If you need to read up and find out information and you don't want to ask your mum or dad, or you live in a rural community.... If you want to access information you can come in here. There might be times you want to use the library for quite personal reasons.' Totnes

Some participants disagreed with the view that libraries are non-judgemental spaces. For people who are not familiar with them they can be intimidating places; and for some participants at least, absence of familiarity seems to mean that they did not develop a 'library habit' as a child. Some also felt that there was a stigma attached to using libraries; this point was often made with reference to young people. One participant said that they 'would not have been seen dead' in a library when they were young and others referred to the struggle of getting their older children into the library. These people were also less inclined to see libraries as providing a welcome space.

'When I was younger, I was never interested in it. The last place we'd think to go was a library.'

Although no one argued explicitly that libraries should not be welcoming, a few participants did feel that there should be some limits to the welcome, as we note in a later section in this chapter. There does also seem to be some tension between viewing libraries both as a space where people can be anonymous and yet also as a social and community space (discussed below).

Safe space

Most participants saw libraries as safe spaces. Those who challenged this view tended to focus either on the feeling of intimidation resulting from unfamiliarity with library layouts and catalogue or on being unsettled by other library users.

For participants who do see libraries as safe, safety can mean being a non-threatening space for individuals, offering familiarity, comfort and/or security. In this sense, it is linked to the idea of the non-judgemental space. In other cases, safety is conceived of socially, in terms of the library offering a secure and comfortable environment for collective social activities.

When discussing the safety of the library space, participants made particular reference to groups perceived as more vulnerable or more in need of

somewhere to go, especially children and young people. Libraries were seen as providing a safe space for children to explore and to develop their independence: many participants recounted their own experiences of visiting libraries as a child and of taking their own children and grandchildren.

For older children – particularly those able to use the library without adult company – libraries are seen as a safe place to socialise and 'chill', particularly after school. The library can provide a quiet place to study or a warm and free place to chat with friends; some participants positioned this as an alternative to hanging around on a street corner. However, for the most part, participants seemed to be speaking on behalf of children and young people, rather than from their own experience. (See chapter 2 for more discussion of libraries and children and young people.)

One participant (a non-user of libraries) suggested that libraries can duplicate an existing service – namely schools. For this participant there is a tension between the safe space provided for almost everyone and anyone and the concern to use public resources well and provide value for money.

Some participants were less convinced that public libraries are a safe space. Discussions of their views exposed a tension between being a safe space and being open, inclusive and non-judgemental: people 'chilling out' could make a library feel less safe, particularly if these people were 'down and outs'. One participant commented that she would not want to take her grandson to a library if it was being used by people who would otherwise be 'roaming the streets'.² This was a cautious discussion and participants were aware of the tension between the value inherent in libraries being open and non-judgemental and their insistence that a library should be used for 'the purpose it's there' and 'not for shelter'.

'The thing is, we're trying to say that we like libraries because they're indiscriminate, but now we're saying that they should be discriminate'

² This point arose from a discussion of a pen portrait using the phrase "roaming the streets". For more detail of how the pen portraits were used in the process, see Appendix I.

This issue is complex. Participants valued the library as a non-judgemental space in which one can be anonymous but were also concerned about the image a library might develop if the absence of judgement extends too far. They want the library to be a space that attracts all sections of the population without any one section putting off the others. This is well illustrated by a quote from a group in a London library, explaining their design for an ideal library. This group was effectively differentiating between making a positive choice to visit the library – it's 'where you want to be' – and the library as a place of shelter.

'An old school library room is the priority of the [ideal] library. For the older generation it's somewhere where they can feel comfortable....However, the biggest room is the one with the high tech IT. It takes it away from that idea that it being a bit for wayward people as was mentioned in the video.³ This is somewhere where you *want* to be, and it's not just for unemployed people.'

While there was widespread agreement that libraries should offer a safe space, there was concern from at least one participant that libraries are becoming overly controlled and sanitised environments. In the London workshop, participants in one group expressed amazement when it emerged in discussion that some libraries have security guards.

Space to relax and escape

The value of libraries as a relaxing space was linked to their value as a non-judgemental and a safe space. The relaxing environment was particularly important for many participants, who spoke variously about libraries being peaceful, a nice environment and a place to think, where they can concentrate and escape to, while not feeling rushed or being interrupted. One participant described this as 'just me and a book', and another as 'isolated time', in contrast to the general busyness of everyday life.

Participants referred often to libraries as a place of escape from day-to-day life or work. Others spoke about how 'you do feel relaxed' in the library and that 'it slows everything down'. The relaxing and quiet environment of libraries was thought to be particularly important in cities.

'Takes the weight off your hectic life, doesn't it? When you go to a library. The atmosphere is nice when you go in, it's relaxing.'

In part, this relaxing atmosphere seems linked to the friendliness of the library as a space and to the quality of library staff.⁴ People said they feel accepted or 'at home'. Many participants felt strongly that the inclusivity, openness and welcome of libraries are important, providing a 'home from home', regardless of who people are. One participant commented, positively, that libraries can be a 'home to eccentrics'.

As with the tension around the library as a safe space, this relaxing space might well be thought less of a 'home from home' if it is open to all. However, it is not clear where participants drew the line between 'eccentrics' and 'down and outs'.

Aside from library staff, one of the most important contributors to the feeling of relaxation and homeliness is the absence of commercial interests in libraries. Participants emphasised the value of not being pressured to spend money and being able to use the space as they wished for as long as they wished. For young people who have few places to go and little money to spend, this is particularly important. Similarly, for older people or those on a low income, the free space of the library offers a warm place in which to relax and relaxing activities in which to get involved. This is discussed further in a later chapter (see Equality, opportunity and access).

³ The video shown to participants during the dialogue included the following comment from one member of the public responding to a question about the image of libraries today: 'It's really weird because I think actually public libraries don't have much of an image. They always feel like they are run down and a place for wayward people to go, when it should feel like it's a total community thing. It almost feels like, if you don't have a lot of money, that's what you do, you use the library. Whereas, it shouldn't matter how much money you have.'

⁴ See Chapter 4 for more discussion of library staff.

Social space

In all workshops, participants spent time discussing the value of libraries as social spaces. By this, we mean a space in which individuals meet and interact with others and we contrast it with the concept of a 'community space', discussed in the next section. A range of different views emerged in these discussions. First, some participants do see value in libraries being social spaces and emphasise the importance of the library as a place for interaction, meeting friends and socialising. Second, some participants see value in this but feel that there is a tension between the social space and the need for libraries to provide a quiet space for study. Third, some participants felt that it was not the role of libraries to provide a social space.

Those participants who saw value in libraries as a social space saw two dimensions to this. Some spoke about libraries as a space to use for socialising (ie meeting with friends and acquaintances). We will call this 'sociable space'. Participants recounted their own experiences of using the library to socialise with friends (particularly when they were young) or talked about what the library space offers to other people (eg a place for young people to hang out or for groups to meet). This notion of the library as a 'sociable' space was most likely to be challenged by those who felt that libraries should be silent spaces where verbal interaction is not appropriate and should not be encouraged.

A second dimension of this social value lies in sharing a space physically and, perhaps, occupationally (eg reading the paper or using the internet) but not necessarily interacting directly or verbally. We will call this 'companionable' space. It can be illustrated by one participant's experience of using the library as a place to relax and read the papers during a period of recuperation from an illness. This participant said they recognised and nodded to the same people over several weeks and months, gaining a feeling of companionship and wellbeing from this, without the need to exchange words.

This view of libraries as providing a 'companionable' space was less disputed. Participants spoke about libraries being a good place for 'human contact' for the 'excluded', and for promoting intergenerational interaction. Finding value in libraries as a companionable space but not as a space for socialising provides a way of reconciling the inherent tension between their value as quiet places of study or contemplation and their value as a shared public space. As with the discussions about the homeliness and safety of the library spaces, there is a tension between companionable space and non-judgemental space.

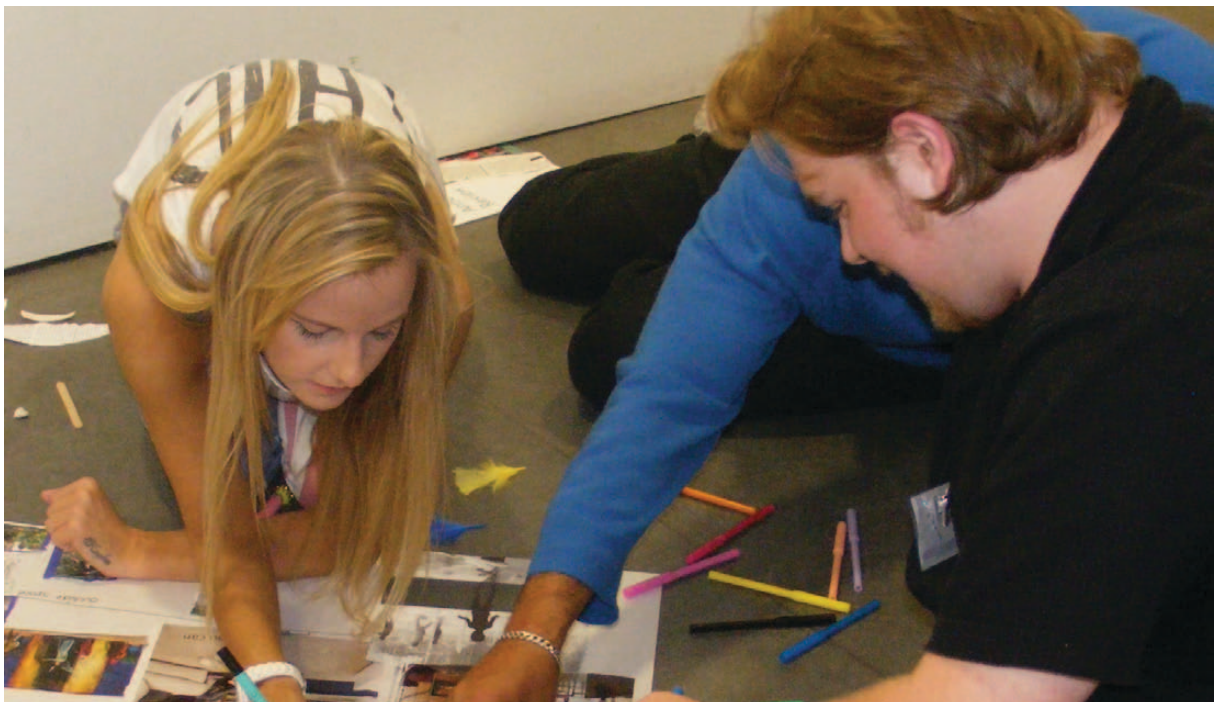


Figure 2. Designing an ideal library

Community space

In addition to being a social space, many participants felt that libraries play an important role in the local community, reflecting and shaping its interests and needs. This value and purpose were particularly evident in the designs for an ideal library that participants developed during the workshops. People spoke of libraries as a 'community hub', as 'essential' to a community and part of its 'social fabric'. Libraries perform these roles by providing access to volunteering opportunities and information about local services and the local area. They are also seen as a space in which people from different walks of life and cultures can (or could) mix and create a sense of a community, making an important statement about the local area and community.

'Very often in a community, different cultural groups are aware of each other because we pass each other by in the markets and shops, but rarely do we stop to interact. So I think it a good place to start getting people to interact, to share the positive things of people's cultures so people aren't so wary.'

The value of libraries as a community space is highlighted by the response of some participants to the suggestion that libraries are being made redundant by new technologies. In response to a pen portrait quote that suggested computers are 'home libraries', one participant said:

'We're talking about libraries as a place of community, the different groups going. Your computer is at home, it doesn't give you that experience. The person that said that is literally thinking for books, for resource, for information, they're not understanding all the other things a library can do.'

Participants saw the inclusivity of library space as an integral dimension of its value as a community space.

Conclusion

Participants described the space of the library as a complex network of interwoven services, interactions, feelings and memories. The value of the library space appears to rest in its ability to reconcile tensions within this network or, at times, to be able to hold those tensions together. Being a non-judgemental space, into which anyone might wander, can be at odds with being a safe space or a companionable space. Being a social space might be at odds with being a quiet place for study or reading the paper. Different participants privilege different dimensions of library space and see the library through the lens of their own interests and behaviours. This suggests that to some extent at least, public libraries are flexible, malleable spaces, which people can make their own in the way that they choose.

Equality, opportunity and access

Introduction

Equality, opportunity and access were recurrent themes in all four workshops. The main issues covered in these discussions were:

- no charge for access: free access was valued most as a way of providing equal opportunities for all. Services that were free or low-cost, in comparison to commercial services, were also discussed in terms of equal opportunities
- easy access: by this, participants understood both physical access – of particular importance to disabled people and those with children in pushchairs – and temporal access, in terms of flexible opening times
- opportunities for life and work: participants value things such as access to career information, work skills and job searches and the opportunity to keep on learning throughout their life
- supporting social equality: participant saw libraries as having a wider social value in creating or defending social equality

Most participants agreed that creating or protecting equal opportunities for all is a value intrinsic to libraries. However, some questioned whether libraries *should* cater for all – and indeed, whether this was possible. Some felt that the opportunities opened up for people through the services provided in some public libraries are also opened up by other channels – for example, through the internet or in schools. Others felt that not everyone in society is actually able to benefit from the opportunities offered by libraries, despite social equality being an inherent value of public libraries for many participants. We have seen already in this report that not all participants think that everyone in society *should* be able to benefit from library services, because their presence in the

library might have a negative impact on others using the space and services.

‘It doesn’t matter if you’re a down and out – they’ve got as much of a right to read a book as the rest of us.’

Free access and low-cost services

Participants valued the fact that libraries provide an environment that is free from commercial pressures. This has an additional value, in that it provides an environment in which space is not demarcated by income. Access to (or use of) any part of the space is not determined by how wealthy a person is. Participants felt that providing this free or very low cost access to all services and making them equally available to all is a crucial value of the library services. Some participants suggested that free access for everybody implies a right to knowledge for all. They valued what they felt was the free education available in libraries.

As well as providing free access to a space and to books, libraries provide free or low-cost access to other resources that otherwise might be financially out of reach for some people. This includes the internet, Wi-Fi, books, toys, DVDs, etc as well as services such as photocopiers, reasonably priced coffee and food and community activities and facilities such as meeting rooms.

Not everyone saw free access as a good thing. Some participants felt that free access meant that the ‘usual suspects’ were always in the library. Though these suspects were not defined, it could be surmised from the suggestion that introducing charges would reduce their number that these are the same ‘down and outs’ whose presence or absence from the library is a recurrent theme.

Free access could mean that non-users of libraries see library users as a particular type of person, and hence be deterred from visiting. Free access could encourage the hanging about and use of the space for purposes other than its 'real' one.

Easy access

There was a broad consensus that libraries should be easily accessible and that this is a valuable characteristic. By easy access, participants mean a library is well-located within an area, easy to reach or offers free parking. They value all that libraries do to make access easy for all, including disabled people. Equalities legislation has ensured that libraries have accessible exits and toilets and, where necessary, lifts. In the absence of these facilities, some participants might not visit a library. Mobile libraries are seen as another way in which libraries promote and provide equality of access to services, particularly for disabled people and people who live in remote areas. This is particularly important for those who do not have access to transport.

Participants mentioned a number of barriers to easy access. These included being poorly located, buildings not being child friendly, or having limited accessibility for disabled people. The cost of public transport was mentioned as a further barrier, particularly for people in rural areas, those with children and those with no close local library.

A further possible barrier to access mentioned was lack of information about library location or what services are offered. Participants suggested that libraries should make more effort in advertising the wide range of opportunities available to individuals and the community.

'Libraries are quite insulated, they don't really advertise.' Stratford-upon-Avon

'I didn't know they did computer courses. That's why I never walked in to one.'

Some felt that libraries should increase access for people in specific groups. These included children whose parents don't read or don't see the importance of reading. Others felt that language could also be a barrier, suggesting that people with limited use of English might be under-served. Finally, some participants viewed opening times

as a barrier to easy access, often because they don't suit people's busy work schedules.

Creating opportunities

Libraries provide and create opportunities in a number of ways. Foremost amongst those discussed by participants was the opportunity for education and lifelong learning. Libraries are seen as useful and comfortable spaces in which to develop skills for employment (such as IT), or for general self-improvement. In addition to IT courses, participants mentioned music lessons, language skills, informative talks and access to information without commercial bias. The particular value of libraries, in contrast to other places of learning, is related to the sense of safety and absence of judgement mentioned earlier. Participants felt that these qualities encourage a relaxed frame of mind which boosts confidence and motivation.

'Libraries are a little bit more relaxed. You're not committing yourself. You'd feel more confident to go there – it's not as if you're walking into a classroom.'

In addition to education, participants suggested that libraries provide opportunities for voluntary work, for example, teaching others – young people in particular.

'If it wasn't for libraries and books, I would never have learnt to read and speak in public.'



Figure 3. Why people visit public libraries

A further opportunity provided by libraries is that of accessing information related directly to employment. Participants spoke about libraries advertising jobs, and providing personal help with job applications. As noted earlier, some participants compared their experience of using a library as a place for finding employment opportunities with their experience of using job centres. The latter seemed to be mostly negative: job centres were felt to have a stigma attached to them. In contrast, libraries were seen as neutral spaces in which to access very similar services more comfortably. The library was also seen to be filling a gap created by a perceived reduction in job centres. In a similar vein, participants mentioned the increasing importance of libraries in helping people access services and entitlements such as tax credits.

‘You aren’t labelled going into a library compared to a job centre’.

Some participants valued the opportunity libraries provided for mixing with a wide range of people and, in particular, for developing intergenerational relationships. For example, it was suggested that young people could help older people to gain IT skills or use the internet. Some participants felt that without libraries the gap between generations would increase, as older people would miss the opportunity to keep up with new technologies, having no support or free access to it.

Value of libraries for society as a whole

Participants reflected on the social value of libraries, in particular as a way of helping to level out social inequalities and reduce or remove class barriers.

‘The main function of a library is to put us all on equal footing, so really it can increase social mobility because everyone has the choice to pick up a book and educate themselves.’

For some participants, public libraries represent, and perhaps defend, social equality. The library is a place where people from different backgrounds, rich or poor, can find something that is of value to them. Some participants attributed ‘equalising’ powers to libraries. Libraries were also seen by

some participants as the ‘back-up’, the basic service that is there when others fail.

At least part of the value attached to free access to learning and education, is derived from the role it plays in reducing social inequalities. Without free access, some felt that education would be only for the upper and middle classes.

‘I’m going, get your nose in a book! It doesn’t matter if your mum’s a cleaner and your dad’s a labourer...I just think, knock down these barriers of class.’

However, there were those who argued that middle class people are more likely to use libraries because they can see the benefits. Some participants argued that even though the aim might be that libraries are for everyone, lots of people do feel that they are not for them.

Not all participants agreed that libraries play this equalising role. Whilst in theory they acknowledged this as a value, the way they engage – or don’t engage – with libraries is more dependent on individual preferences. This tends to be because, for some participants, a library is not an essential public service. For example, these participants argue that they have access to the internet at home, the same information is available at a low cost elsewhere, or they can afford to buy all the books that they want.

Conclusion

Overall, participants regarded access to libraries as essential and a right for everyone. They felt that everyone should be able to access a library, and that the barriers that prevent accessibility should be addressed.

Access to knowledge and opportunities for learning and self improvement were valued highly, as was the availability of a wide range of services that cater to the diverse needs in society. However, to be of real benefit to the community, the public need to be made aware that these services are offered by public library services. In some cases – particularly in relation to skills and services relating to employment – these services gain additional value precisely because they are offered by a library, rather than through formal employment services such as job centres.

Gateways to knowledge and culture

Introduction

Participants saw public libraries as gateways to knowledge, culture and information. The systems and structures which organise this knowledge provide a framework for using library services – in particular, the core services of book borrowing and reference materials. Library users trust the resources in the library, in part because of these systems, which differentiate the library from the internet. Whilst both are places of discovery, the internet was seen as wild and untamed. What contributed even more strongly to participants' trust in library services is their non-commercial nature. Participants viewed the decisions and motivation behind the content and structure of library services as driven by public interest rather than by the imperative to profit from public use of libraries.

System, order and guidance

Cataloguing and classification, choices made by library staff, budgets, input from local library users and the availability of resources within the wider library network and a library's place within that network: all of these things contribute to the system and order built into the services that libraries provide. The management of the collection - the deliberate and systematic decisions that gather the books and resources available – makes the collection as a whole more than the sum of its parts.

Participants saw the provision and maintenance of order within their library as a very valuable aspect of the work done by library staff. If they need help with their journey – where to start or where to go next – many participants felt that library staff provided this help, serving as trusted advisors or guides. They noted the value of friendly and helpful library staff, and some recounted developing personal relationships or friendship with their local library staff. This value is due in part to their knowledge of the collection and their ability to give advice, and also to the general support and encouragement that library staff can give to the visitor.

Not everyone recognised these qualities in the staff in their local library. In all workshops, some participants recounted experiences of unhelpful or unfriendly library staff. In London, some participants raised concerns about the replacement of paid staff with volunteers, fearing that this might reduce the quality of service from library staff.

'They're guides, they can point you in the right direction.'

'Some are more knowledgeable than others.'

The system and order contribute to but do not explain entirely what participants see as the trustworthiness of library collections. Order generates confidence in the resources, in contrast with what one participant termed 'the Wild West' of the internet. A more important factor in the trust that participants expressed in their libraries is the absence of commercial pressure. Library users are not exhorted to buy, to believe or to consume any particular field of knowledge. The latter is perhaps the most important, underpinning trust in the content of libraries and in the neutrality of their space, and was something that participants emphasised repeatedly throughout the workshop discussions.

'Where else do we go in our life today that we're not being sold to? Everywhere else you go you're getting sold to. So it's an unbiased opinion you're getting... well, should be getting anyway.'

Range and depth

For many participants the diversity of resources available at the library makes them inclusive places that provide 'something for everybody' in the community. As collections and services have diversified to include CDs and DVDs, internet access and community activities, access to skills development and more, participants feel that libraries meet the majority of public needs.

As well as having breadth and meeting a diversity of needs, participants saw libraries as catering for specialist interests. For example, regular library users mentioned the popularity and value of local history collections, which bring highly specialised knowledge about a community to life. Participants spoke of being able to get free access even to rare and out-of-print books, accessing a collection of knowledge that extends beyond the walls of the local library.

Some participants debated the relative balance of – for example – the fiction collection ('too large') and the reference section ('not large enough'). Others described frustration at not being able to find what they were seeking, especially at smaller local libraries; this included up-to-date or specialised books, audio books or books in foreign languages. However, most were aware of the wider network and inter-library loans service, which mean that even the most specialist interests are likely to be met given time.

'There's so many tangents of information that apply to your life... and if it's not there, they can often tell you.'

Not all participants were aware of the range of their library's collection or the services it offered: non-library users were often surprised at how libraries had changed since they had last visited one.

For some participants the range and diversity of collections was a further indication of the value of a non-commercial approach: the choices made by library staff were seen as a function of their role as curators and enablers of public knowledge and culture, rather than being driven by the imperative to make money.

Journeys of exploration

The order, trustworthiness and absence of any hidden or commercial agenda combined to enable what might be described as journeys of exploration. Participants saw the library as a place where they could go beyond their immediate experience and develop or discover new interests. Some talked, for example, about finding wonder in a library's collection, being inspired by their reading to travel abroad and experience for real the things they had discovered in their local library. Others talked about exploring their family or local history through local library archives. The process of using a library – rather than merely the ends to which that process might be put – was seen as intrinsically valuable.

'Libraries are like a map.'

Participants attached particular value to the spontaneity of unplanned journeys. They described the 'serendipity', or happy accident, of discovering things that had not been deliberately sought. One participant summed this up in a description of the library collection as a 'treasure trove' for exploration. These unplanned journeys were felt to fire the imagination, particularly for young visitors.

'I take random selections of books as well. Sometimes I'm disappointed, other times I might read something I wouldn't ever consider and thoroughly enjoy it.'

Participants valued the freedom to browse at will and at leisure without needing to worry about the provenance of information; they described being able to use the library on their own terms, taking self-guided and self-defined journeys. For some participants, this freedom – and the confidence to use it - was linked to the openness and accessibility of libraries. When imagining their ideal libraries, many groups took trouble to plan in some initial welcoming, open space comparatively free of books or the traditional physical contents of the library, describing an intention not to intimidate unconfident library users.

'The internet for me only really works if I know what it is I want to ask... whereas if I go into a library and there's all these spines, and I can just drift and waft, and I can go 'ah!' – and so it hasn't originated from me.'

However, others designed reception areas full of practical, appealing or topical information, suggesting some tension between the content and display of the library collection and the ability of visitors to access and explore it in these un-prescribed and unlimited journeys.

Serving the public interest

These features – order and system, support and guidance, the lack of commercial imperative and the potential for journeys of discovery – contribute to participants' trust in library services. This trust is allied with a fundamental value attributed to libraries, which is that of serving the public interest. Participants feel that libraries can be relied upon to act in the best interests of the library user. Perhaps with the contrast with commercial environments in mind, one participant suggested that 'there is no small print in a library'. Providing public information such as community news or benefits advice and support for accessing civic services, and increasingly widespread access to computers and support for those who need to develop computer skills are some of the ways in which participants feel that libraries serve the public interest.

Conclusion

The value to participants of an ordered and selected collection seems to derive, at least in part, from the trust they have that the decisions that inform this reflect no agenda other than that of serving the public interest. Participants value the range and diversity of their local library's 'offer', whether this is books, games, toys, information or activities. The order of the collection provides library users with a secure foundation for the exploratory journeys they take and these journeys are made richer and more engaging because of its range.

While many discussions hit upon frustrations with the ways libraries manage or share their collections, and in some cases identified these as a cause of disengagement from library services, it was clear at all the workshops that many current library users value libraries for the rich knowledge and culture they keep.

Chapter 5

Children and young people⁵: norms, independence and education

Introduction

The value of libraries as a place in which children have fun and learn skills and behaviours that will be important to them as they grow up was a strong theme in all discussions. In addition to the more obvious value of providing access to books – and in some cases toys - through lending services and dedicated toddler and child activities, libraries are seen as a place in which children learn independence of thought and imagination, respect for others, how to take care of borrowed items and how to follow ‘rules of engagement’ such as how to take out a book. Most importantly, however, these values are conveyed through fun: participants emphasised that children enjoy libraries.

In their discussions about libraries and young people, participants tended to focus on the value of the library as a place of study and on the non-commercial nature of libraries – important to young people who are likely to have very limited resources and very few places for them to go. The extent to which young people find the library fun is less clear, as the quote below suggests:

‘My kids think a library is boring. You need something to ‘bribe’ your kids with to go the library, like going for lunch in the library cafe. Once they’re in there, you’d probably get them interested in books.’

Reading

Participants felt that children should be introduced to libraries from a young age to engage them with reading and connect them to books. Many of those participants who were still using a library referred to their own childhood experience of using libraries and learning to read: library use appears to be a habit that, if started early, can continue through life.

Libraries offer a range of tools to help a child learn to read, including open access to books, space for quiet reading and fun activities. Many have a wide range of books and children can choose those books that interest them most. Participants saw this as a fundamental difference between public and school libraries and part of the reason why public libraries were fun places: in school, a particular book is likely to be prescribed by a study topic or selected for a child by their teacher.

‘Reading is really good for you. It’s something that I’ve not done a lot of. I should have, I wish I could have. It makes you brainy, I reckon.’

Participants saw reading as central to many aspects of a child’s development: reading engenders curiosity and a thirst for knowledge, firing the imagination in a way that ‘the boring internet’ cannot. In part, the distinction between reading a book and using the internet (for example, to play games) was made by reference to the imagination and children learning to entertain themselves: participants felt that this was an essential part of reading a book, but not true of online games. One participant suggested that reading books helps

⁵ We have not used age ranges to define the difference between children and young people. Participants tended to distinguish between them on the basis of whether they were able to visit and use the library without adult accompaniment (‘young people’) or whether they needed accompaniment to get to the library safely and/or to use its resources effectively (‘children’).

to develop the 'inner person'. This was seen as providing a positive counter and some resilience in the face of what they felt was society's focus on the superficial body image.

In addition to these values, participants referred to the straightforward educational value of reading which they also contrasted to time spent on a computer or games console.

Fun and play

For most participants, the element of fun underpinned the values ascribed to libraries discussed so far in this chapter. In its absence, libraries would become more like schools and the children's excitement (that participants described) at the prospect of a trip to the library could be lost. Participants felt very strongly that the fun aspects of a library help to entice children into libraries in the first place and keep them coming back over time, thereby making library use a normal part of everyday life.

Participants emphasised the value of the fun activities that encourage reading, such as book trails which incentivise reading by awarding stickers to children once they have read a certain number of books (The Reading Agency's Summer Reading Challenge, for example). Storytelling is valued because of its social nature and the participation of lots of children and parents. Having an activity area near to the children's section, where children can draw their impressions of books they have read, is also seen as important. One participant shared a memory of an American library where a live snake was on show in the library, with snake books and other information placed alongside. The group saw this as a clever way to pique a child's curiosity with something exciting, encouraging them to embark upon a journey of discovery.

When recalling childhood memories of libraries, many participants spoke of the excitement they felt when selecting a book. This excitement came from the realisation that they were allowed to choose whatever they wanted, which was an unfamiliar concept to some participants when they were younger. As is discussed in more detail in the 'gateway to knowledge and culture' theme, the sheer variety of knowledge available was also an exciting prospect to children, with one participant recalling borrowing their first book about magic when 14 years old. This excitement was something that participants appreciated seeing in their own children and grandchildren when they took them to the library.

Family day out

Participants saw the library as a place for the whole family to enjoy time together, with several speaking of their Saturday morning trips to the library for particular activities such as mother and toddler groups or playacting stories together. The family day out aspect is particularly important for younger children who cannot use the library independently. Activities for all the family make the library seem more appealing to parents and visiting it less of a chore. In the ideal libraries session, one group described the café as a place for parents to sit while their children are doing library activities; if it were absent, they felt that some parents might not bring their children at all. This echoes the point made earlier about the malleability of library spaces and highlights the potential for flexibility: not everyone needs to be engaged in the same activities, as long as there are activities available for everyone in the family.

The importance of places such as a café was highlighted by some participants' views on who should have access to a children's area. A few participants saw this as a place for children to call their own, into which others – including parents – should not be allowed.

Life lessons

Participants spoke of libraries as places where young people can start to develop values and patterns of positive behaviour that will last a lifetime and stand them in good stead.

‘I don’t want them to become couch potatoes at home. I think at an early age they should be educated to go to the library’

Library routines such as having to return books on time were seen as teaching punctuality and responsibility. Taking care of borrowed books, toys or games that others need to be able to enjoy is seen as teaching respect for property held in common. Sharing a space with others who might wish to use that space differently to you encourages children to learn respect for others and interacting with these people supports the development of social skills.

Several participants had clear memories of libraries making them feel grown-up. In part, this was due to the independence and freedom they felt when choosing a book. However, several participants felt that the more mundane aspects of the library system contributed to this feeling too. These included joining the library, owning a library card, or getting a ticket for your books. The library was seen as one of the first places where a child can be directly involved in tasks of this nature, and so participants remembered seeing this early encounter with responsibility as a taster of adult life.

Participants talked about the library as a place where children can learn to communicate and interact with others, including other children and people with whom they might not otherwise spend time. They felt that children with no siblings would gain particular value from this opportunity to socialise with their peers. In some of these discussions, the question of safety re-emerged. Whilst some participants emphasised the value of interaction between children of different ages, some felt that there would be parents who did not feel safe leaving their young children alone in the presence of teenagers. There was also a question of whether teenagers themselves would want to visit the ‘kids section’.

A similar concern was raised in relation to ‘down and outs’. Libraries are seen as places where children learn about diversity, seeing and meeting people from different cultures and ages. However, as discussed in chapter five, participants have different views about whether the library is a place for a child to be introduced to some aspects of the real world. On the subject of whether to take children to a library if ‘down and outs’ go there, two participants disagreed:

‘It’s life, it’s educational, they have to see it’

‘It is life, but I’m not going to rub their noses in it. I’m not going to put it in front of them’

Study and homework

Participants referred often to the value of the library as a place for young people to study effectively. Many participants had made use of library resources at some point in their lives, either using textbooks in the library to revise for exams, or using more specialist books to research school projects. Some pointed to the necessity of this, with schools or colleges providing insufficient copies of textbooks to meet the needs of all students and not many children being able to afford their own copies.

Participants felt that the atmosphere of a library struck a good balance between a formal school setting and the home environment where you could be easily distracted or interrupted: offering somewhere for young people who might not have the space at home to study.

Many participants felt it was important to make the most of this learning environment, which could help to inculcate good studying patterns in children, helping them to learn how to work effectively. However, some of the younger participants argued that libraries were not as good as schools as places to learn, because it was often not possible in a library to combine quiet study with discussion about the study topic.

‘I don’t find it relaxed enough to study in the library because of the way you have to be quiet.’

Some participants felt that this was due in part to the multi-functional character of many libraries detracting from the quiet atmosphere. The tensions that can emerge between different groups of library visitor using a multi-functional library are discussed in more detail in chapter 6, ‘Continuity and change’.

Libraries aren’t cool?

‘When I was younger I was more interested in climbing trees than reading books.’

Not all participants were convinced that young people valued libraries. Some felt that getting them to visit the library – especially once they were independent of adult company – was difficult because going to the library isn’t ‘hip’ any more. Others spoke of the peer pressure that sets in once a child goes to secondary school and puts young people off going to the library.

However, some did feel that younger people could be enticed into the library, with one participant remarking that their children went in to play video games when it was raining. This, and access to the internet and free Wi-Fi, were seen as ways of encouraging young people into the library building.

Conclusion

The values of public libraries described in this chapter can be summarised as: the facilitation of a child’s social, educational and creative development; a place for children to have fun; a learning environment for young people; and an induction into responsible adulthood. The importance of these values was apparent from the amount of time participants spent discussing how to increase library use among children and young people and overcome young people’s perception of libraries as dull or redundant. The image of libraries is discussed in more depth in the next chapter, but an often mentioned solution was to introduce children to the library from a young age, perhaps before they can even read, in order to normalise the library in the eyes of the child and remove the stigma that can be attached to books and reading. Participants felt it was important to get children into the library so they can benefit from the immediate value of libraries, through the pleasure of reading and the fun of library activities, and from the long-term value that comes from the skills that a library can help develop. The view that children should be introduced to libraries and books *before* they can read helps to highlight the distinction participants made between reading (in all its diverse forms) – which could be done online – and reading *books*. Most participants emphasised repeatedly their view that books have an intrinsic value which – though they found it hard to articulate – is different to that of e-readers. Whether this value accorded to books as objects will begin to change as new technologies improve and younger generations migrate more completely to online and digital media, we cannot say.

Continuity and change

Introduction

The themes of continuity and change were woven into many discussions, either explicitly or implicitly. Participants were acutely aware that the economic and societal context in which libraries operate has changed significantly over recent years and some felt that the role, value and position of libraries in public life had lost clarity. This came through as a mix of nostalgia for how libraries once were and some disappointment that libraries had not kept pace with the changes around them. Overall, participants had competing, and sometime contradictory, views of the value of libraries in a period of change and of how libraries should respond to these changes.

These themes of change and continuity crystallised around two particular discussions. One focused on impact of new technologies. Participants discussed how online and electronic media had affected the role of libraries, the use of library space, the range of services they offered and the ways in which these services were delivered. A second and related discussion concerned library buildings and how changes in library design and architecture had impacted on perceptions of what might – or even should – be provided within any given library and on the role and value of the library in the community.

The impact of technology

The impact of technology on libraries was discussed primarily in terms of the internet – as an alternative route to accessing information and knowledge – and also e-readers such as Kindles – as alternatives to books. Television and computer games were seen as providing new forms of entertainment that competed with reading. During discussions participants generally formed one of three distinct positions:

- the value of libraries is diminished or made redundant by modern technology
- a value of libraries – in the context of modern technology – is that they promote digital inclusion
- a value of libraries is that they offer escape from modern technology

Participants who argued that new technologies have diminished or made redundant the value of libraries, referred to being able to access knowledge and information via the internet at home or in other locations. One participant made the comparison that: 'If I had a swimming pool at home, I wouldn't go to the leisure centre to use the pool.' For this group, technology threatened to make libraries 'redundant'.

Those who argued that libraries promoted digital inclusion pointed to free or low-cost access to computers and computer courses, which were felt to help older people in particular to keep up-to-date with rapidly changing technologies. These participants felt that it was important for libraries to keep up with the times and that providing technology would encourage people to use libraries, so promoting the values of inclusive and open access and of equality.

A third group of participants valued libraries as a sanctuary away from technology. One participant, for example, spoke about the library providing a peaceful place to study away from distractions, as a place to 'avoid' the internet.

The pleasure of old technologies

During many of the discussions about technology and its impact on libraries and, potentially, on the value of libraries in public life, participants spoke extensively on the specific and special value attached to books – which of course are themselves a form of technology. Participants found it hard to articulate this value with exactitude but were adamant about its existence. Pushed to explain the difference between reading words in a book and reading the same words on a screen, participants provided a range of arguments. For some it rested in the 'feel' of holding a book: holding a printed and bound book was contrasted favourably with holding a Kindle. Some pointed to the ubiquity of online and screen-based media in many working lives and saw books as a change from this; they felt that people who have worked on computers all day would not want to read a book on a screen when they got home. Others spoke about books having a quality, a smell and a character that you cannot get from a Kindle. Turning the page and the internal tussle involved in deciding whether or not to turn to the end to see what happened were other factors that participants felt contributed to the particular value of books.

For some participants, the physical qualities of the printed book seemed to be linked to particular memories of the library of 20 or more years ago. Participants mentioned opening the cover to examine the stamped slip showing when a book had last been borrowed and how many times it had been taken out, the buff-coloured slot into which a borrowing slip was put, the sound of the stamp when a book was borrowed and the rather stern and very respectable library staff – always described as 'the librarian'. The features and rituals of borrowing a book from a public library were associated by many participants with the wider discussion about the value of books more generally and what might be lost if books were replaced entirely by new means of accessing the written word.

Technology and the experience of using the library

Some participants suggested that libraries had lost their personal touch and felt that this was due, at least in part, to the automation of some processes. Services mentioned included 'self-service' machines which enable people to check out and check back in their own books. These machines were felt to reduce contact with library staff, and this was seen as a negative impact, since library staff were seen as essential contributors to the wider overall value of libraries. As in their discussion of the value of books, some participants recalled experiences of staff doing projects with children and of their dedication to helping children to develop a love of books. When technology replaces personal interactions, participants worried that the 'human aspect' is being lost from libraries.

Many participants saw the thoughtful integration of technology into the library as essential. Their argument relates in an interesting way to the notion of the library as a social space and to its wider value as a community service. Whilst an increasing number of people have access to the internet in their homes, by providing access to computers and having Wi-Fi, libraries offer a social environment in which to use these technologies. This counters the view of some participants that libraries should not provide these technologies because people have them at home, or that these technologies are making libraries redundant, because people can access them at home or work. Those arguing for the importance of digital technologies in libraries were making an appeal to the wider social value of libraries – either as 'companionable' spaces or as spaces that provide opportunities, in this case access to technology – discussed earlier in this report.

One service or many?

Whilst personal preference clearly plays a role in participants' responses to these changes and the extent to which libraries have become more or less impersonal over the years, other factors are also relevant. Technology is uppermost amongst these, but the diversification of services offered in libraries is also relevant. So whilst technology might be seen as reducing the 'human aspect' of library use, the openness of libraries to children and to community and social life tend to increase it. Indeed, some participants saw new, non-traditional services (eg coffee shops and social groups) as a way of drawing more people into the library.

Some participants questioned the provision of a range of services by suggesting that diversification could affect the quality of the library service, which is providing access to media – including books. They were concerned that concentrating too many services in one place could impact on the quality and professionalism of the 'essential' library service and lead to this being neglected. These issues tended to emerge in discussions about the transformation of libraries from spaces in which individuals occupied themselves (ie they partook in solitary activities, such as reading and studying) into spaces in which community and social activities are allowed and encouraged.

During the session in which participants designed their ideal library, the tension between the optimal conditions for individual use (such as quiet, calm spaces) and those for community and social use was much discussed, with particular reference made to the value of libraries as places for learning and quiet study. Some participants suggested that a quiet environment for study duplicated similar environments elsewhere, most notably in schools.

'Are libraries duplicating services? Shouldn't schools be providing a space for young people instead?'

This was a minority view, however. Most participants felt that the study environment of a library was something to be preserved, and that the provision of these other services could detract from this.

To resolve this tension between quiet space and community and social space, most participants suggested segmenting the space – for example, by having a 'community room' that could be used for group activities, or keeping books separate from computers and children and young people separate from adults. None of the groups used time to resolve the tension – for example, by confining group activities within certain hours.

The library in its local context

In Totnes, one young participant described modern libraries as looking like 'lego bricks dropped from space'. This helps to illustrate that whilst much of the affection expressed for old Victorian library buildings might be put down to fond memories of childhood use of the library, the picture is more complicated than this implies; it is not just a generational thing.

Changes in library buildings played a part in the way that participants understood their role in a community or, more broadly, in public life. For example, in Newcastle, participants contrasted the new City Library with their local libraries. The new building spoke of a different type of library, with different types of services, including non-traditional services such as self-service borrowing or personalised computer accounts. In London, participants referred to a library which was part of a larger complex of services, including a GP practice. This co-location accounted for the library having a stand in the lobby containing health information and promoting smoking cessation services. Indeed, one participant in London, when asked about why they visited the library, said 'to go swimming'. This is an extreme example of changing perceptions of the library, but helps to illustrate that the boundaries of the library and its relationship with other public services has grown more complex in recent years.

This issue was discussed – again in Totnes – in relation to the services it was appropriate for a library to provide. One argument put forward by participants was that libraries should not provide services such as refreshments that are also offered by local independent retailers. Their view was that the library was part of a local service ecology and, as such, it should understand the impact of offering any particular service on the sustainability of small independent businesses that were also part of that ecology. In contrast, one participant argued that a coffee shop in a library would not just bring in

Conclusion

The people who took part in the workshops that form the core of this study for Arts Council England are in no doubt about the value of public libraries. This value is expressed across a number of different dimensions and through a wide range of services. It also transcends level of usage: most participants not currently using public libraries did, nonetheless, value their presence within a community and recognise their importance. Public libraries serve as a kind of indicator of the overall social health of the nation. And people recognise that libraries are at a transition point.

Public libraries offer a wider range of services than they have in the past and this has an impact on who uses libraries and why. Familiar book-lending and reference services have been complemented by story-times for toddlers, computer courses, yoga classes, meet the author events, job search facilities and more. Many of the participants not currently using the library were surprised by the extent of change since their last visit and encouraged to take another look at what was on offer at their local library.

The wider range of services also impacts on the position of libraries within the wider economic and social environment. Many participants pointed to the public library as one of the last bulwarks against commercialism. Libraries are valued because they're not trying to sell nor forcing you to buy in order to remain within the library space. They are seen as one of the last free public spaces.

One fundamental – and unexpected – question emerged in relation to this theme of the library as a public space. Who has – and who *should* have – access to public space and resources? This question emerged again and again, in all workshops. It cropped up in relation to the safety of the library as a space, in relation to whether or not a library really does provide access to opportunities for all, and in relation to the fundamental purpose of a library.

This question is essentially about boundaries or limits and, as such, relates to other themes that emerged during this work. For example, where is the boundary between the library as a place of quiet study and the library as a social space? Where is the boundary between the library as a place for children to learn essential skills for life and the library as a place for older people to develop new skills that might be essential for them to access other public services, which are increasingly being offered online? Where is the boundary between 'core' services and nice-to-have, additional services? Where is the boundary between the library as a warm and safe space for people who might have nowhere else to go and the comfort and ease of people who might feel uncomfortable or even threatened by people who are bedraggled or unwashed?

For the participants in this study, libraries are valued for a range of qualities. Many of these qualities are grounded in the fact that they provide a resource held in common and free at the point of access. Because the services are largely free, anyone can access them. Because anyone can access them, they extend opportunities to those who might otherwise be excluded. Because anyone can access libraries, people from a wide range of different backgrounds, with different interests, can be encountered there. In this sense, they are – potentially, if not always in practice – community spaces. However, like other community spaces and the notion of 'community', they can be paradoxically exclusive.

We noted in an earlier chapter that participants' discussions showed the public library to be a space of multiple, sometimes competing, values. With more or less success, libraries seem to hold together or reconcile these values, each in its own way. Each person using a library does so in their own way, taking their own journey and extracting from their use a different dimension and balance of these values. This project takes place at a time of great changes within public services, driven by

wider social, economic and technological changes. Perhaps one of the greatest challenges for the library services will be to retain the values that are so important to the people in this study, whilst re-shaping existing services and developing new services that will keep current users involved and also attract new users.

Technological changes over the past 20 to 30 years in the ways we access and use information have opened up new and interesting ways of thinking about the core library services. But technology is seen as a potential threat too. The central importance of the book and its contribution to the values inherent in libraries were emphasised repeatedly throughout this work. So one set of questions to which this project gives rise to is:

- how do the values that are important to library users translate into the specific services provided? Which way does the value chain run?
- are the values – or some of the values – attributed by participants to public libraries intrinsic to the books to which they provide access?
- is there something so particular to books that their loss would detract from – or at least significantly alter – the value of the library itself? Or is the particular value accorded to books a function of habit and nostalgia? Are books simply the current and long-standing incarnation of a wider set of values that will survive technological change and simply migrate into new technologies, which will be as cherished as books by future generations?

Users and non-users of library services took part in this study, though these categories are not static. Some library users had returned to using the library only after having children or grandchildren. Non-users were often lapsed users, rather than people who had never used the library. A number of non-users appeared to re-evaluate their view of libraries as a consequence of taking part in the workshops, during which they learned how much libraries had changed since their last visit. However, a very few non-users felt that libraries were becoming redundant. Cheap books and easy access to the internet at home or at work appear to be behind some of these views.

Democratic renewal in local government and changing models of ownership, including community trusts, with local people taking control of community assets could, if they are genuinely community-led and not captured by sections within a community, revivify a sense of common ownership and the value of a service that is open to all and free at the point of access. These changes are embedded in a wider political debate about the future of public services, the role of the public, private and third sector, in providing public goods, funding arrangements and the respective roles and responsibilities of central and local government.

In many respects, participants' views on the purpose and value of public libraries are well established and shared across the generations. No participant questioned the value of library services as a whole. Even those who do not use public libraries recognise their value. The library offers: atmosphere and aesthetics; core lending and reference services; a connection with the wider community, through provision of information, activities or a place to meet; openness to anyone; structure and protocols that generate trust and encourage the development of skills for life; and spaces for quiet study and places for fun. This study suggests that libraries still manage to generate and protect these values even at a time of great change.

Appendices

Appendix I: Methodology

This section provides a detailed description of the methodology of the deliberative dialogue workshops.

A Workshop process design

There were four public dialogue workshops. Each workshop lasted from 10am–3.15pm and involved approximately 40 participants. The workshop schedule is shown below:

Location	Date	Team
Newcastle	Saturday 1 September	Lead facilitator: Diane Beddoes Support facilitators: Simon Burall, Isabelle Guyot, Fionnuala Ratcliffe
Stratford-upon-Avon	Saturday 8 September	Lead facilitator: Simon Burall Support facilitators: Ingrid Prikken, Tim Hughes, Isabelle Guyot
Totnes, Devon	Saturday 15 September	Lead facilitator: Diane Beddoes Support facilitators: Tim Hughes, Fionnuala Ratcliffe, Alfie Stroud
London	Saturday 22 September	Lead facilitator: Diane Beddoes Support facilitators: Ingrid Prikken, Fionnuala Ratcliffe, Alfie Stroud

B Room set-up

The room was set-up 'cabaret style', with participants seated round four tables of 10. Each table had a facilitator.

One separate 'points capture' tool was on the wall of the room – a large sheet of paper with a 'timeline' drawn on it.

At the front of the room there was a screen on which was shown the introductory presentation and a 'vox pops' video.

C Data capture

Data was captured in the following ways:

- flip charts
- participant-generated post-it notes
- digital recordings
- facilitators' notes

D Overview of process

The process included a mix of small table discussions, plenary sessions and 'carousel' activities. The principles that informed the design of the process are as follows:

The process must be transparent: the wider context within which the project sits should be made clear to participants. This should include the Arts Council's overall libraries programme and the other activities (eg website consultation) that form part of this particular project. The use to which the findings will be put should also be explained.

- the opening presentation should provide this context and cover how the findings will be drawn together by Dialogue by Design/Involve and used by the Arts Council
- the closing session should include a reiteration of the use to which findings should be put

The process demonstrates the value accorded to participants' giving their time and energy to the project:

- venues should be pleasant and of adequate size
- venues must be accessible, meaning people with physical impairments should not be de-barred from taking part. This includes providing ramp access, hearing loops, etc
- food must be enjoyable and cater for anyone with special dietary needs (gluten-free, vegetarian, etc)

The process must be varied to generate and retain interest:

- materials must accommodate different preferences for receiving information (written, visual, etc)
- participants should have sufficient time to discuss the issues, without feeling rushed
- small tables should include a balance of different people to enable focused discussions to draw out different perspectives and attitudes (ie not just men or older people on any one table)

Participants' views should be treated with respect:

- facilitators will emphasise that there are no 'right' or 'wrong' responses or attitudes in relation to the dialogue themes
- minority views will be accorded as much value as majority views

E Revisions following the first workshop

The table below provides the detailed methodology for the final three workshops. The original plan was revised following the Newcastle workshop to minimise repetition and focus conversations on the values of libraries. This revision entailed removing the 'gravestones' session, due to the feeling that it was a repetition of other sessions during the day, and replacing it with a light-hearted post-lunch session devising strap lines for libraries. A community board was also used in the Newcastle session, where participants wrote on the board how different sections of the community valued public libraries. This was removed to allow the pen portraits session to be extended, as it was this session which provided the richest discussion.

F Capture and analysis of the workshop data

Facilitators recorded workshop discussions in a range of ways, including on flip-charts and post-it notes and on digital recorders. The facilitation team took notes of their table discussions as well as the plenary discussions.

Following the workshop, each facilitator wrote up the notes from their table, using the digital recordings to add richness and detail and to provide verbatim quotes illustrating particular themes.

This information informed the development of a thematic framework which was generated and refined over the course of two half-day workshops.

The first workshop focused on generating a structure that would capture the descriptive content of the data produced during the dialogue. We identified the emergent themes which would capture broadly the main topics of discussion across all workshops. This process resulted in five high-level themes, each of which was divided into sub-themes. We also agreed an overall structure for the report.

Following the first workshop, each member of the analysis and writing team took responsibility for writing up one theme, using all the data produced during the workshops and referring back to the original project objectives. Through this process a more analytical perspective began to emerge. This perspective informed the second analysis workshop.

In the second workshop we interrogated and refined the themes and subthemes and adopted a more interpretive approach, exploring tensions, minority and opposing views both within and across workshop locations.

Whilst the data captured have not allowed us to carry out a rigorous analysis of the outputs according to the recruitment variables, we have, where possible, attached specific themes to different types of library user or non-user. Where themes are clearly specific to or highlighted within a particular location, we have noted this.

The five themes are:

- **space:** the value, meaning and aesthetics of the library space
- **children and young people:** norms, independence and education
- **gateways to knowledge and culture:** the curated library
- **equality, opportunity and access:** the role of libraries in social opportunity
- **continuity and change:** the adaptive library

Process design

Time	Session title	Detail	Notes
8.30 – 9.30am	Set-up		<p>Registration table</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • name badges with coloured dots • participant registration list <p>Ensure sufficient chairs (tables and observers)</p> <p>Colour labels for tables, post-its and pens</p> <p>Table papers (eg agenda)</p> <p>Wall timeline</p> <p>Technology</p> <p>Ensure there is enough space for people to gather around the timeline</p> <p>Ensure venue has correct break timings/numbers for catering</p> <p>Facilitators: ensure you understand profile of your table in relation to use/non-use of libraries</p>
9.30 – 10am	Arrival, registration and refreshments	<p>Ask participants to complete opening questionnaire (one to two pages only: should list services, principles (eg services for everyone in the local community, funded from public money, supported by volunteers, run by professionals etc): people would be asked to select top two to three priorities). Could also ask demographic/library use questions.</p>	<p>Facilitators not on registration table to ensure participants sit at correct table; ensure they have coffee/tea if wanted, etc</p>

Time	Session title	Detail	Notes
10 – 10.30am	Presentation, ground rules	<p>Dialogue by Design (2-3 minutes):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • open the meeting and welcome everyone • introduce all in the room • introduce Arts Council England speaker <p>Arts Council England (5-10 minutes only):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • situate the meeting within the Arts Council England project as a whole (ie previous phases, overall objectives, etc) • emphasise value of participants' contributions • brief description of how findings will be used • brief Q&A <p>Dialogue by Design ('business': 5 minutes):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • overview of agenda <p>In particular, explain that over the course of the day, we want to build a visual picture of the role and value of libraries for us as individuals, for the communities in which we live, work and play and for the country as a whole.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • room layout/facilities • fire alarms • toilets • mobiles • ground rules • questions of clarification 	<p>This session will give participants a clear understanding of why they are in the room together and what this project is about. It will provide them with the context and practical information they need in order to understand how the day will work as a whole.</p> <p>The session will also give people a chance to ask any initial questions they might have.</p> <p>Some timing flexibility in this session: might be able to start next session early.</p>

Time	Session title	Detail	Notes
10.30 – 10.55am	Introductions and warm-up	<p>Small table warm-up discussion</p> <p>Introductions (10 mins):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in pairs: name; interests/ occupation; earliest memory of a library • feedback (participants introduce each other so that they say 'This is Rachel, she is a nurse, her first memory of a library is...') <p>Broad discussion (15 mins):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • why do people visit libraries? • why do people NOT visit libraries 	<p>This session provides a gentle warm-up, starting to focus participants on the issues for the day, to draw out initial views and to provide facilitators with an understanding of the different people on their table and how they interact.</p> <p>Table discussion should not be steered too much: participants should have space/time to bring up the issues that are important to them. Ensure that people who do not use libraries are given time to discuss this and that they don't feel excluded.</p> <p>Facilitators capture comments on post-its, which are recorded on wall.</p>

Time	Session title	Detail	Notes
10.55 – 11.20am	Libraries and you	<p>Whole group</p> <p>Lead facilitator introduction:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • aim of session is to develop a map of participants' experiences of public libraries over their lifetimes and the lifetimes of their families <p>Ask participants to put at least three things on the timeline:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • something you have enjoyed about public libraries • something you have found frustrating/didn't like about public libraries • an important memory about libraries • piles of post-it notes on your tables and a large time-line on the wall: please write down anything that is important, interesting, frustrating or valuable about libraries – for you, personally <p>If there is spare time: Encourage participants to look at other comments on the timeline and see how the different uses/views of libraries compare. Ask participants to choose a comment written by someone else that they find interesting. Then have five minutes of plenary where the lead facilitator asks for a few examples of these comments.</p> <p>Provide participants with time check (11.20 finish)</p>	<p>Overall aim of session is to encourage participants to consider their relationship with libraries over the course of their lives and the lives of their families.</p> <p>Large timeline on wall (1922-2022). Participants map their memories/ experience of libraries over that time.</p> <p>Post-it notes should be of different colour for each table.</p> <p>Facilitators: help your participants – eg, ask them questions about visits to library as a child/with their children/as a student, etc – what did they go for, what did they do, what do they remember about it etc.</p> <p>Why didn't you use libraries? Ensure non-library users have opportunity to contribute their views – eg, when did they become aware of libraries – did they think of library users in a particular way?</p>

Time	Session title	Detail	
11.20 – 11.35am	Tea break	<i>During break, facilitators to note down different ways in which libraries are used/different services used (focusing on appropriate colour for their own table)</i>	
Time	Session title	Detail	Notes
11.35 – 11.40am	Plenary feedback from facilitators	<p>Lead facilitator: quick feedback on comments on the timeline.</p> <p>Highlight the intention to move now from talking about services to talking about values, and that the following exercise should help us to do this.</p>	
11.40 – 11.50am	Why do we value things?	<p>Small table discussions:</p> <p>Why do we value gold? Why do we value it differently to other metals? Get participants to think of social and sentimental values as well as economic values.</p> <p>Why do we value our family/friends?</p> <p>Prompts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • what if you don't see them very often? • what if they're far away? • what if you don't even like spending time with them? How does this change how you value them? 	<p>This session is to introduce participants to the thought process we would like them to apply to the upcoming discussions about the value of libraries.</p> <p>Facilitators capture comments on flipcharts.</p>

Time	Session title	Detail	Notes
11.50am – 12pm	Libraries in your communities video	<p>Vox pops of people talking about how/why they have used libraries: to include wide range of different people (ages, ethnicities etc) with different experiences.</p> <p>Lead facilitator:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the video has brought other voices into the room, taking us outside our own personal experiences of using the library • on your small tables, find out from others what they found particularly interesting/ surprising about what we've heard on the video. What we'd like to do in this next session is think more widely about the library in the community: what role does the library play in your community and what do you think it is valued for? 	

Time	Session title	Detail	Notes
12 – 12.45pm	Libraries in your communities (2)	<p>Table facilitator: explain how pen portrait session will work Emphasise that we're interested not just in the different services that different people use and value, but why they value them – what's important to them about those services.</p> <p>Small table discussion (30 min) Table facilitator passes the pen portraits around the table. Each person notes down the number of one (or two) that resonate with them. When everyone has selected a quote, facilitator asks each participant to read out their selection in turn, asking:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • what caught your attention about this particular pen portrait? What benefit do you think that using their local library brings to this person? How does this relate to people round table? • draw out points about the values/principles that underpin their choices and probe as to whether there are particular aspects of the statement that make it resonate with them. Try to move the conversation beyond aspects of service delivery (eg computers, book stock etc) • how does this way of using the library or the values/principles they think should inform that compare to other people's choices of pen portrait? (Encourage cross-table dialogue: this should not just be a 'round the table one at a time' session) • what have we learned about what our communities value about the services that libraries offer? <p>5 minutes before end of session, facilitator draws together main points of discussion. Ask for volunteers to feed back two to three key points to plenary, with particular focus on what was different. Lead facilitator: Ask for feedback from each table (15 minutes).</p> <p>Do you think these values are more important for particular sections of the community?</p> <p>Lead facilitator probe for different views across the room.</p>	<p>Discussion then widened through use of pen portraits: each table has set of cards, each of which describes different possible use of a particular library service.</p> <p>Notes of plenary discussion taken on a flip chart by one of the table facilitators.</p>

Time	Session title	Detail	
12.45 – 1.30pm	Lunch	<i>Facilitator debrief to explore issues of particular interest, common themes, minority views etc.</i>	
Time	Session title	Detail	Notes
1.30 – 1.40pm	Straplines for libraries	<p>Lead facilitator welcome back and introduction to the afternoon sessions</p> <p>Table facilitator: Ask participants to come up with a strapline/slogan for libraries</p> <p>Working in twos/threes, participants pick a group of library users – eg young people, old people, schools, unemployed, working mothers and in pairs draft a strapline for that group and then read to the table.</p>	<p>This is a fun session to remobilise participants after lunch</p>

Time	Session title	Detail	Notes
1.40 – 2.20pm	Our ideal library: designing the floorplan	<p>Small table activity</p> <p>Separate each table in two groups.</p> <p>Our ideal library: each table/group has two empty 'floor plans' with six rooms in it and a pile of different activities.</p> <p>Their task is to work as a team to develop their 'ideal public library' and to provide an explanation of why this is ideal.</p> <p>Each 'room' should be described:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • why is this important? • who is it important to? • what does it tell us about the community where it is located? <p>How will the library be described by the people in the community?</p> <p>Emphasise that there will a plenary feedback session after this to explore why they have chosen their particular rooms, so they should come prepared to justify their decisions to the group.</p> <p>30 minutes for task.</p> <p>Feedback at tables (10 minutes)</p> <p>Reconvene at tables so that each group can present their floor plan to the others on the table. Table facilitators to prepare their groups for the plenary discussion.</p>	<p>Coffee/tea available during this session, to take back to tables.</p> <p>Facilitators: ensure participants understand that this is about us understanding what people value about their library service, how they make decisions about what an 'ideal' library would include and why.</p> <p>Emphasise that the Arts Council won't be using their work to inform their idea of an 'ideal library'.</p> <p>Each group has large A3 sheet with blank floor plan on it, blu-tack, magazines, scissors, glue etc.</p> <p>Facilitators to record comments during feedback session on tables.</p>

Time	Session title	Detail	Notes
2.20 – 2.45pm	Review floorplans	<p>Plenary discussion: review floorplans (25 minutes)</p> <p>Lead facilitator to ask for feedback from each table and to use any differences between floorplans to encourage discussion about the prioritisation of values. The following bullet points can be used as prompts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how did you decide what was a priority in your floorplan? • did you need to exclude things you'd like to have included? • what decisions did you have to make in order to arrive at this design? • will this library serve everyone in the community? Does that matter? • what will this feel like? What will it say about us and what's important to us as individuals? As communities? As a country? 	Lead facilitator to encourage debate between groups about why they would choose particular rooms over others.

Time	Session title	Detail	Notes
2.45– 3pm	Close and thanks	<p>Lead facilitator</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • summarise and feedback what you've heard from the tables about what's important/messages to the Arts Council England • Arts Council England: thank, explain what you will do with findings • lead facilitator: show slide with website url and encourage participants to go online and take part in the consultation and to tell their family and friends about this – want to hear from the general public – important to balance the views of professional library sector with those of the people who use library services and this is their chance to make sure their views are heard • thank you – and ask people to complete evaluation form/closing questionnaire, which will be exchanged for their 'thank you' payment at the registration desk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • summary review and looking forward • encourage use of public consultation website – expand on or say more than they've had a chance to say today • next steps and closing remarks
3 – 3.15pm	Evaluation questionnaires and thank you, payments	Participants complete evaluation questionnaires at their tables and collect 'thank you' payment in exchange for completed questionnaire.	

Appendix II: Recruitment and participants

Recruitment specification

We used purposive sampling to recruit a cohort that was broadly reflective of the national population. The sample was constructed around variables such as gender, ethnicity, disability and age as well as attitudinal traits, which were identified through use of a screening questionnaire. Potential participants were asked to express their level of agreement with a range of statements which, for example, indicate different attitudes towards public services, different library usage (eg purpose and frequency) and other relevant themes. Participants in deliberative work are generally not taken as representative of a population but as inclusive and reflective of the wider population so that the group as a whole is relatively balanced in terms of range and strength of relevant views and demographic and other relevant variables. This tends to mean that we need to weight certain quota. Inclusive recruitment involves ensuring that those who attend events are sufficiently comfortable to express their views. This can be hard to achieve if a participant feels themselves to be 'the only one of a kind'. Hence, we over-recruited in some groups.

Participants were professionally recruited through 'on street' recruitment, which Dialogue by Design led and managed. Our recruiters, interviewers and project staff regularly work with diverse communities and we have expertise in recruiting a great variety of participants in our work, including children and young people, people with long-term health conditions and disabilities and people from Black and minority ethnic communities.

The core elements of our approach were:

- **strategic sampling:** we designed our sampling framework and quota to meet the demands of the project, including weighting minority audiences where necessary to ensure their voice
- **clear communications:** our recruitment materials and briefings for recruiters and interviewers ensured that participants received an inviting and motivating description of the project. We highlighted why the project was important, who commissioned it and their interests in its outputs and what, in our experience, were the benefits of participation
- **incentivisation:** we ensured that participants felt incentivised to take part in a project. This included 'thank you' payments, as well as other factors: support with carer responsibilities; support with planning and paying for transport; selecting an accessible and attractive venue; the promise of an interesting, socially rewarding, and enjoyable experience; feedback on the impact of participation; and opportunities for further involvement

We recruited across regional boundaries based on the assumption that there would be things in common across different areas (for example, rural areas sharing similar service delivery models) that are more likely to inform values and principles than straightforward regional location.

Recruitment tables

1 September 2012, Newcastle upon Tyne, Great North Museum

Age specs	Number (specs)	Number (actual)	Segment	Gender (specs)	Gender (actual)	Ethnicity (specs)	Ethnicity (actual)
18–24 (at least 2 between 18–21)	8	12	2 x C1 3 x C2 3 x DE	50/50 male/female throughout (as close as possible)	24 female and 21 male	3 Black/Black British participants	3 Black African
25-34	8	8	2 x B 2 x C1 2 x C2 2 x DE			3 Asian/Asian British participants	3 Asian
35-44	6	6	1 x B 1 x C1 1 x C2 3 x DE			34 remainder white/other	38 White British
45-54	6	6	1 x B 1 x C1 2 x C2 2 x DE				
55-64	6	6	1 x B 2 x C1 1 x C2 2 x DE				
65 +	6	7	2x BC1 2 x C2 2 x DE				

Other quota (specs and actual)		Libraries used:
Nobody who currently works in the library sector		Benwell
At least five parents of children aged 10 or under, not all in the same age band	Eight participants in three age bands	Fawdon Library Fenham Library
At least five parents with elder children, not all in the same age band	Six participants in three age bands	Gosforth
At least five participants with no children, not all in the same age band	32 participants in five age bands	Heddon on the Wall High Heaton
At least six respondents to the question		Jesmond
<i>When was the last time, if ever, you used a public library or one of its services?</i>		Kenton Library City Library
1. <i>within the last week</i> (at least six respondents)	9	North Shields Library
2. <i>within the last month over a week ago</i> (at least six respondents)	9	Sunderland
3. <i>within the last year over a month ago</i> (at least six respondents)	12	West Denton
4. <i>longer ago</i>	13	
5. <i>never</i> (at least six respondents combined between response 4 and 5)	2	
The services being: 1) Using/borrowing books for pleasure	20	
2) Using/borrowing books – for study	9	
3) Find local information	6	
4) Read newspapers/magazines	4	
5) Local history information	4	
6) Use computers with internet connections	20	
7) Rent CDs, DVDs, videos or vinyl	4	
8) Somewhere to take the children	5	
9) Place to study	8	
10) A community focal point	3	
Taken from quant study Ipsos page 4		

**Saturday 8 September 2012,
Stratford-upon-Avon, Civic Hall**

Age specs	Number (specs)	Number (actual)	Segment	Gender (specs)	Gender (actual)	Ethnicity (specs)	Ethnicity (actual)
18-24 (at least 2 between 18-21)	8	7	1 x B 2 x C1 3 x C2 2 x DE	50/50 male/female throughout (as close as possible)	24 female and 18 male	2 Black/Black British participants	0
25-34	8	10	2 x B 4 x C1 1 x C2 1 x DE			2 Asian/Asian British participants	3
35-44	6	8	1 x B 2 x C1 2 x C2 1 x DE			36 Remainder white/other	39
45-54	6	6	2 x B 2 x C1 1 x C2 1 x DE				
55-64	6	7	2 x B 2 x C1 1 x C2 1 x DE				
65 +	6	4	1x B 2 x C1 2 x C2 1 x DE				

Other quota (specs and actual)		Libraries used:
Nobody who currently works in the library sector		Bridgenorth
At least five parents of children aged 10 or under, not all in the same age band	Nine participants in four age bands	Coleshill Coventry
At least five parents with elder children, not all in the same age band	Three participants in two age bands	Leamington
At least five participants with no children, not all in the same age band	31 participants in six age bands	Redditch Stratford
At least six respondents to the question		Warwick
<i>When was the last time, if ever, you used a public library or one of its services?</i>		
1. <i>within the last week</i> (at least six respondents)	2	
2. <i>within the last month over a week ago</i> (at least six respondents)	6	
3. <i>within the last year over a month ago</i> (at least six respondents)	14	
4. <i>longer ago</i>	14	
5. <i>never</i> (at least six respondents combined between response 4 and 5)	7	
6. <i>No response</i>	9	
The services being: 1) Using/borrowing books for pleasure	23	
2) Using/borrowing books – for study	10	
3) Find local information	5	
4) Read newspapers/magazines	5	
5) Local history information	2	
6) Use computers with internet connections	6	
7) Rent CDs, DVDs, videos or vinyl	3	
8) Somewhere to take the children	4	
9) Place to study	1	
10) A community focal point	0	
Taken from quant study Ipsos page 4		

15 September 2012, Totnes,
The Dartington Hall Trust, The Elmhirst Centre

Age specs	Number (specs)	Number (actual)	Segment	Gender (specs)	Gender (actual)	Ethnicity (specs)	Ethnicity (actual)
18-24 (at least 2 between 18-21)	8	8	2 x C1 3 x C2 3 x DE	50/50 male/female throughout (as close as possible)	24 female and 16 male	2 Black/ Black British participants	1
25-34	8	9	1 x B 3 x C1 2 x C2 2 x DE			2 Asian/ Asian British participants	1
35-44	6	6	1 x B 2 x C1 2 x C2 1 x DE			36 remainder white	38
45-54	6	6	2 x B 2 x C1 1 x C2 1 x DE				
55-64	6	5	2 x B 2 x C1 1 x C2 1 x DE				
65 +	6	6	1x B 2 x C1 2 x C2 1 x DE				

Other quota (specs and actual)		Libraries used:
Nobody who currently works in the library sector		Bath University
At least five parents of children aged 10 or under, not all in the same age band	11 participants in three age bands	Exeter Ivybridge
At least five parents with elder children, not all in the same age band	Seven participants in four age bands	Luton
At least five participants with no children, not all in the same age band	28 participants in six age bands	Newton Abbott Sidmouth
At least six respondents to the question		Southampton
<i>When was the last time, if ever, you used a public library or one of its services?</i>		Totnes
1. <i>within the last week</i> (at least six respondents)	13	
2. <i>within the last month over a week ago</i> (at least six respondents)	12	
3. <i>within the last year over a month ago</i> (at least six respondents)	7	
4. <i>longer ago</i>	6	
5. <i>never</i> (at least six respondents combined between response 4 and 5)	2	
The services being:	25	
1) Using/borrowing books for pleasure		
2) Using/borrowing books – for study	6	
3) Find local information	5	
4) Read newspapers/magazines	3	
5) Local history information	2	
6) Use computers with internet connections	11	
7) Rent CDs, DVDs, videos or vinyl	5	
8) Somewhere to take the children	3	
9) Place to study	1	
10) A community focal point	2	
Taken from quant study Ipsos page 4		

**Saturday 22 September 2012,
London, St Albans Centre**

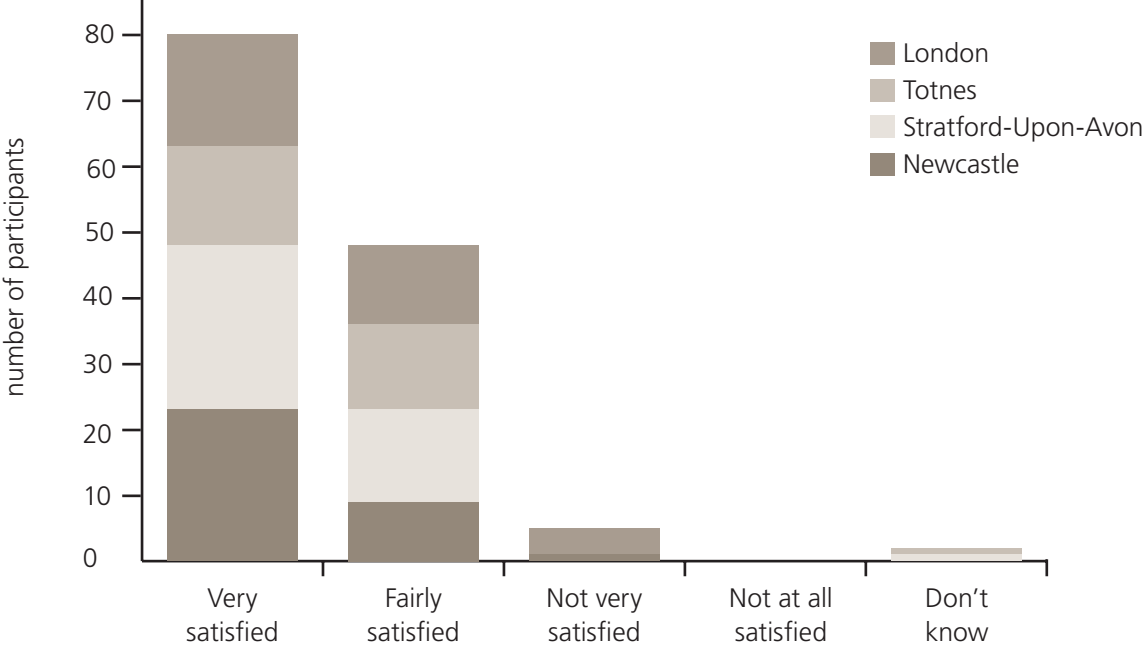
Age specs	Number (specs)	Number (actual)	Segment	Gender (specs)	Gender (actual)	Ethnicity (specs)	Ethnicity (actual)
18-24 (at least 2 between 18-21)	8	8	2 x B 2 x C1 2 x C2 2 x DE	50/50 male/female throughout (as close as possible)	20 female and 20 male	Black/Black British	Black Africa – 5; Black Caribbean – 3
25-34	8	10	2 x B 3 x C1 1 x C2 2 x DE			2 Black/Caribbean and 3 Black/African	Black Caribbean – 3
35-44	8	8	2 x B 2 x C1 2 x C2 2 x DE			Asian/Asia British	Mixed – 3
45-54	6	7	1 x A 1 x B 2 x C1 1 x C2 2 x DE			3 British Indian, and 3 Asian others/Chinese	Mixed – 3; Mixed British – 2; Vietnamese – 1
55-64	6	4	1 x A 1 x B 1 x C1 1 x C2 2 x DE			29 Remainder white / other	White other – 2; White Irish – 1; White British – 20
65 +	4	3	1 x B 1 x C1 1 x C2 1 x DE				

Other quota (specs and actual)		Libraries used:
Nobody who currently works in the library sector		Balham Library
At least five parents of children aged 10 or under, not all in the same age band	11 participants in four age bands	Brixton Library Combes Croft Library
At least five parents with elder children, not all in the same age band	13 participants in four age bands	Downham Library Hackney Central Library
At least five participants with no children, not all in the same age band	20 participants in six age bands	Hommerton Library
At least six respondents to the question		Hornsey Library
<i>When was the last time, if ever, you used a public library or one of its services?</i>		Isle of Dog Idea Store Lewisham Library
1. <i>within the last week</i> (at least six respondents)	8	Marcus Garvey Library
2. <i>within the last month over a week ago</i> (at least six respondents)	6	Mottingham Library
3. <i>within the last year over a month ago</i> (at least six respondents)	11	Stanford Hill Library Stock Newington Library
4. <i>longer ago</i>	8	The library at Deptford Lounge
5. <i>never</i> (at least six respondents combined between response 4 and 5)	7	The London Library The Tate Library
The services being: 1) Using/borrowing books for pleasure	23	Wood Green Library
2) Using/borrowing books – for study	6	
3) Find local information	3	
4) Read newspapers/magazines	3	
5) Local history information	4	
6) Use computers with internet connections	12	
7) Rent CDs, DVDs, videos or vinyl	6	
8) Somewhere to take the children	11	
9) Place to study	8	
10) A community focal point	2	
Taken from quant study Ipsos page 4		

Appendix III: Pre and post workshop questionnaires

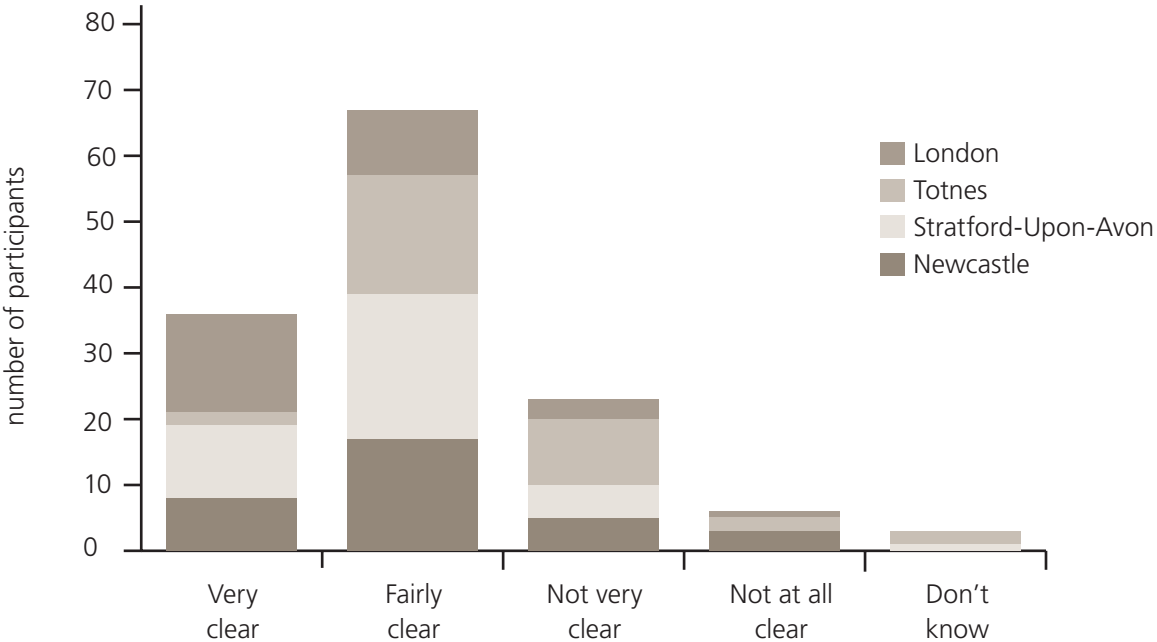
Analysis of pre-event questionnaire responses

Satisfaction with the materials received before the workshop



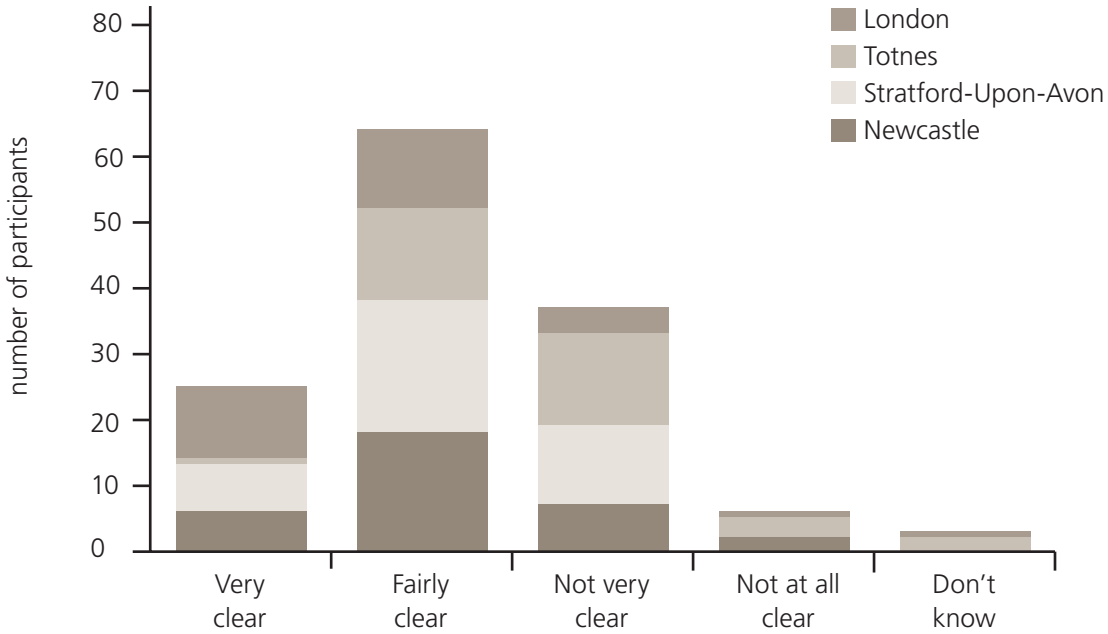
More than half of participants were very satisfied with the materials received so far, for example from the recruiter who sent the initial invitation. Of the remaining, only five were not very satisfied.

Clarity about the purpose of the event



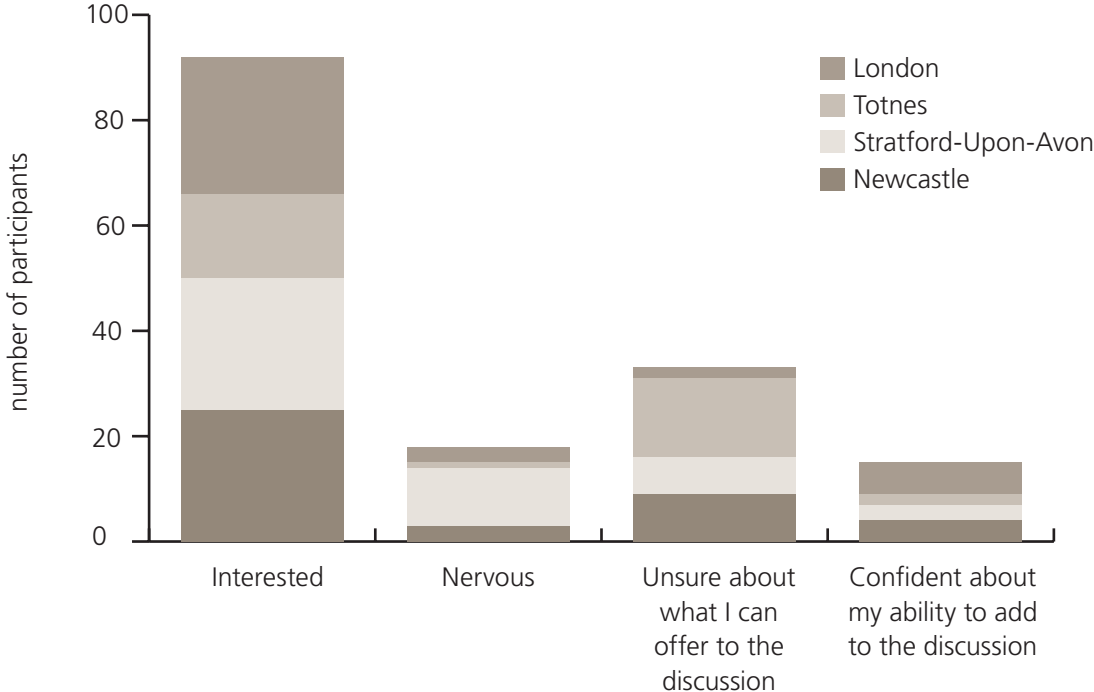
There was more of a range of opinion on how clear the purpose of the process was prior to the start of the workshop. The majority of respondents felt the purpose was fairly clear or very clear, but 23 respondents thought it was not very clear or not at all clear.

Clarity about the role of participants at the event



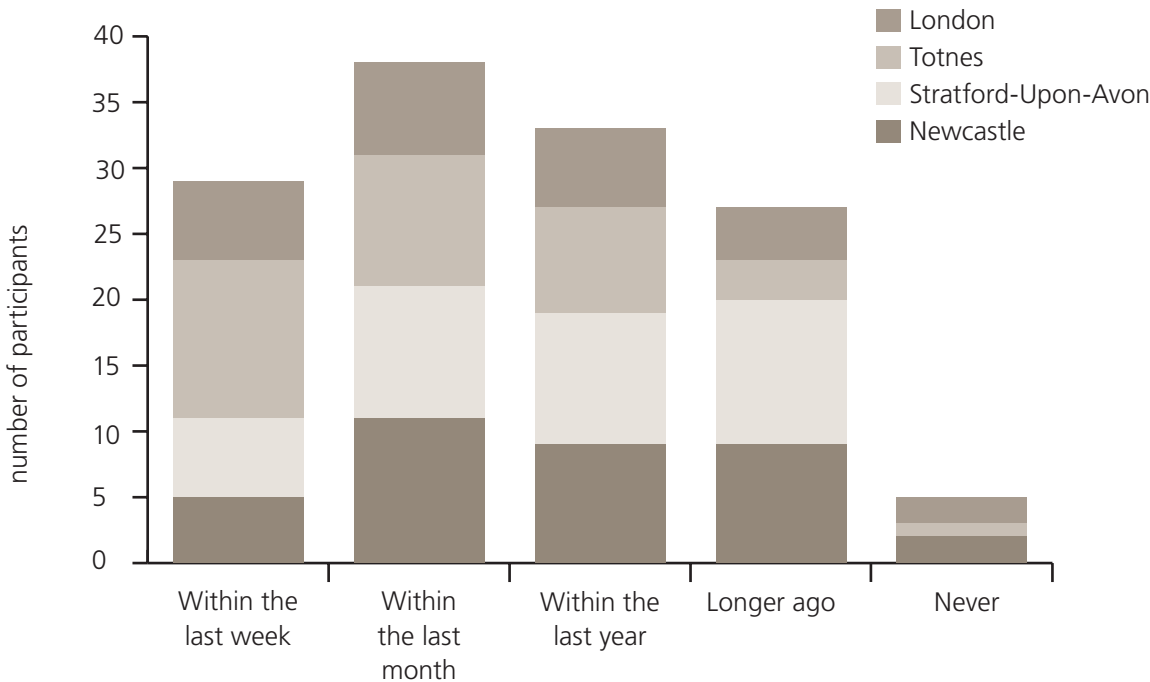
Similarly, the role of participants in the process was fairly clear or very clear to more than half of participants, but 43 participants were unclear about what was expected of them.

Feelings about taking part in the event



Participants were asked how they felt about taking part in this event. In Newcastle, Stratford-upon-Avon and London, most participants said they felt interested, with only a few feeling nervous. In Newcastle, nine participants were unsure about what they could offer to the discussion. In Totnes, only 16 participants said they were interested in taking part. 15 were unsure about what they could offer to the discussion.

Participant use of public libraries or its services



Library use was quite varied between participants and locations. Totnes had the highest number of very recent library users (12 within the last week compared with five or six at the other workshops). Every workshop except Newcastle had at least one participant who had never used a public library or public library services. 100 participants across workshops had used a library at least within the last year.

Analysis of post-event questionnaire responses

Participants were asked to fill in an event evaluation questionnaire at the end of the workshop. This consisted of both multiple choice questions and open questions with opportunity for a written response. The event either mostly or completely met the expectations of almost all participants. Everyone who attended was either fairly satisfied or very satisfied with the structure and organisation of the event, and all except three participants enjoyed taking part in the event (one participant from Newcastle, Totnes and London neither agreed nor disagreed that they enjoyed taking part).

All but four participants strongly agreed or agreed that the information provided was clear and easy to understand, although there was a full range of opinion on whether more information should be provided in advance. One participant in Totnes felt that they were unable to discuss the issues that concerned them, and seven participants felt there was not enough time for them to say everything they wanted, but the majority of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that there was enough time and opportunity for them to express their opinions, and that the whole group discussions reflected the discussions that took place on the tables.

Three questions were asked about how the event influenced their views on public libraries. Although the majority of participants agreed that the event reinforced the views they already had about public libraries, more than half of the participants said that their views on public libraries had changed as a result of attending this event. Most participants across workshops understood how the results of the process would be collected and used, and only three people did not think that their views would be taken into account by Arts Council England.

Participant views on the best part of the event

- interactive and lively discussions and being able to have my views heard: exchanging ideas, brainstorming, community values; feeling involved and part of something important
- activities: making our own library, the collage
- meeting new people
- everything, enjoyed it fully
- knowledge, learnt new things
- lunch and refreshments
- great facilitators
- people changed the opinions they came with

Participant views on the worst part of the event

- everything was great the way it was
- too short: too many things to be discussed, felt rushed towards the end, did not want to go home
- too long
- the venue: dark room, difficult to find, parking
- food: vegetarian food, no pastries on arrival
- not convenient time of the day/week: too early, Saturday, missing on the sunshine outside
- do not feel our views will have an impact
- too repetitive
- filling in forms
- not enough information provided beforehand
- disappointment with some of the views people held
- fear we might lose the libraries
- some of the activities: making our own library, gravestone section, not enough scissors

What would improve events like this?

- fine the way it was
- better food
- should be shorter
- should be longer
- better venue: lighter rooms, convenient parking
- venue setup: light music, beanbags, bigger tables, more scissors, better pens
- more events like this
- different time of the day
- more information beforehand
- feedback
- more crafts
- better pay
- have the consultation before the decisions were made
- fewer questionnaires
- longer morning break
- outside activity
- work closer with schools

What was the most important aspect, for you, of taking part in this event?

- interactive and lively discussions and being able to have my views heard: exchanging ideas, honesty, diversity, inclusive
- the feeling that our opinion will be listened to and will have an impact in the decision-making process
- learning new things about the libraries
- to help keep the libraries open: help the community, help the next generations
- meeting new people
- everything
- revived mine and others' interest in libraries
- to know that people are still interested in the future of public amenities
- the payment
- the facilitators and the friendly atmosphere
- nothing