



Annex C

October 2021 survey results



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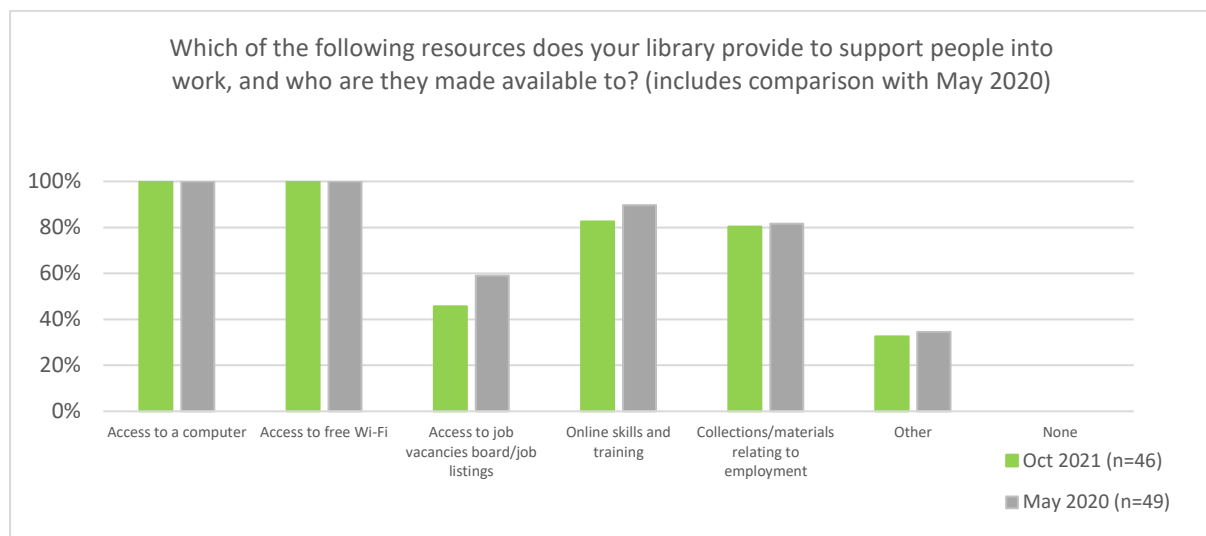
This survey ran during October and November 2021 and was targeted at individuals responsible for running public library services in England. A similar survey had been conducted in May 2020, enabling comparisons to be made between the two surveys. The aim was to gather data and information about the scale and nature of services offered to jobseekers by public libraries. There was a total response of 56, but 46 full responses after removing duplicates, abandoned responses, and one response from outside England.

Responses were received from across England, counties, cities, small unitaries, and from council-run services as well as outsourced and spun-out services.

The first question asked what the respondent considers to be the top work and skills priorities in their local community. This was open text and the responses were highly consistent; “digital skills” (using those exact words or very similar) were referred to in the vast majority of responses, followed by digital access, and basic skills.

Resources for jobseekers

The first set of questions asked about the range of resources provided to support people into work. These questions were designed to uncover what physical or digital resources are provided – separate from human support and activities. These questions mirrored those asked in our first survey in May 2020, allowing us to compare results.



The order shown is the order in which the options were presented. Public PC and Wi-Fi access were universally offered by respondents, and online training and other resources were made available by around 80% of respondents. The question was also structured to discover whether these resources could be used by anyone or only specific groups; in the vast majority of responses these resources could be used by all users.

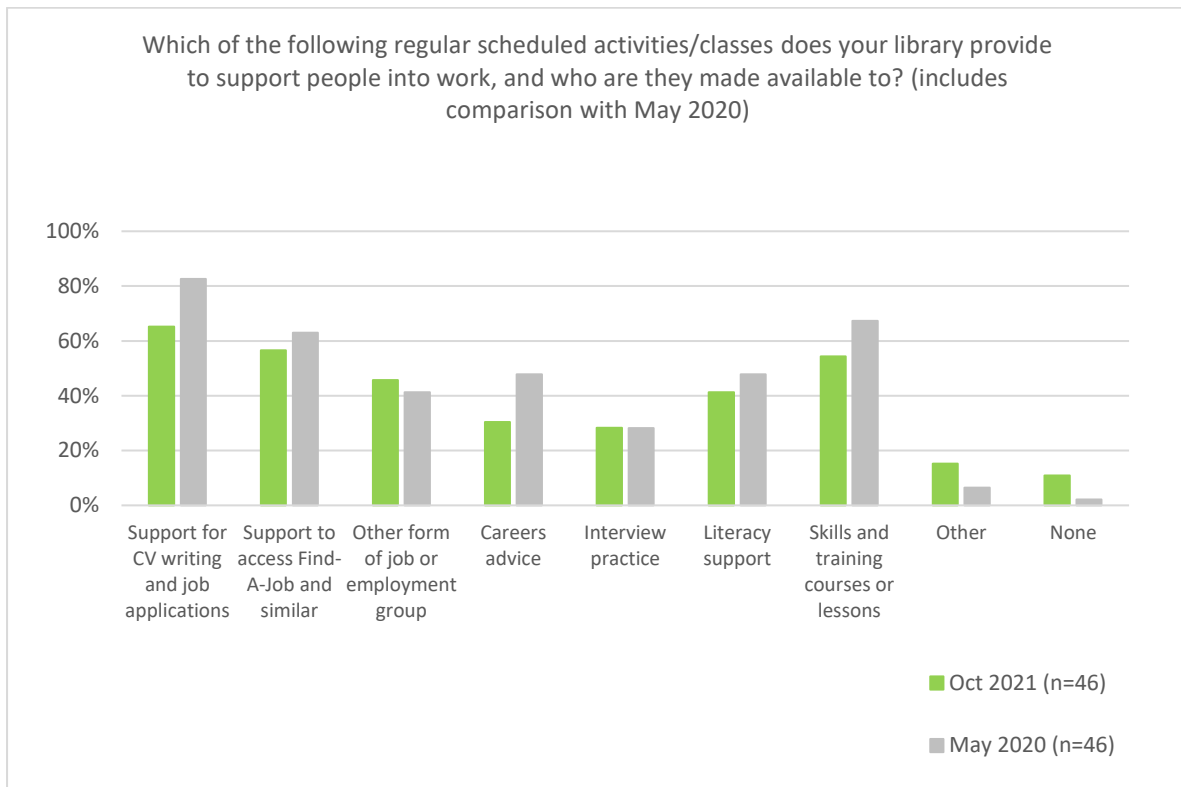
In May 2020 most respondents were describing what was offered prior to the March 2020 lockdown, and now in October 2021 we see that while PC and Wi-Fi access are still at 100%, access to other resources now appears to be lower.

Where more details were offered by respondents, these typically referred to other resources offered by their library service but delivered in partnership with, or directly by, partner organisations including adult and community learning providers, DWP and Jobcentre Plus, or the British Library.

Some of these open text answers pre-empted the next set of questions on activities and programmes, eg mentions of ‘digital buddy’ schemes. The Learn My Way programme produced nationally by The Good Things Foundation was often mentioned.

Activities for jobseekers

The second set of questions asked about activities, programmes or classes offered which might benefit jobseekers.

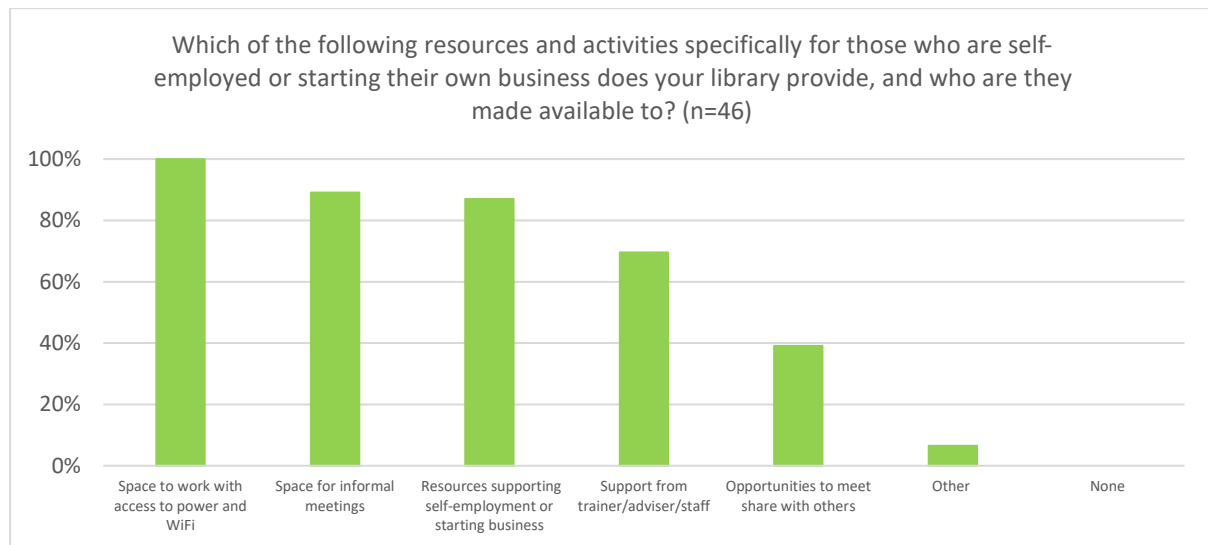


Again the chart shows the answers in the order in which the options were presented. In open text comments, support with CV writing and with accessing the government’s jobseekers website Find A Job, and various forms of skills and training were mentioned most. We asked whether these were offered to everyone, or just specific groups. While most were available to all, up to one quarter of respondents referred to some activities being aimed specifically at jobseekers. Under this question, respondents also mentioned place-specific programmes, eg Get Oldham Working, Work and Skills Leicestershire, Stockton’s Skills Hub, Opportunity North Somerset, and Employ Crawley.

Compared to May 2020, almost all forms of activities are now less frequent. This is most likely due to libraries having suspended face-to-face activities for much of the past 18 months.

Support for the self-employed and those starting businesses

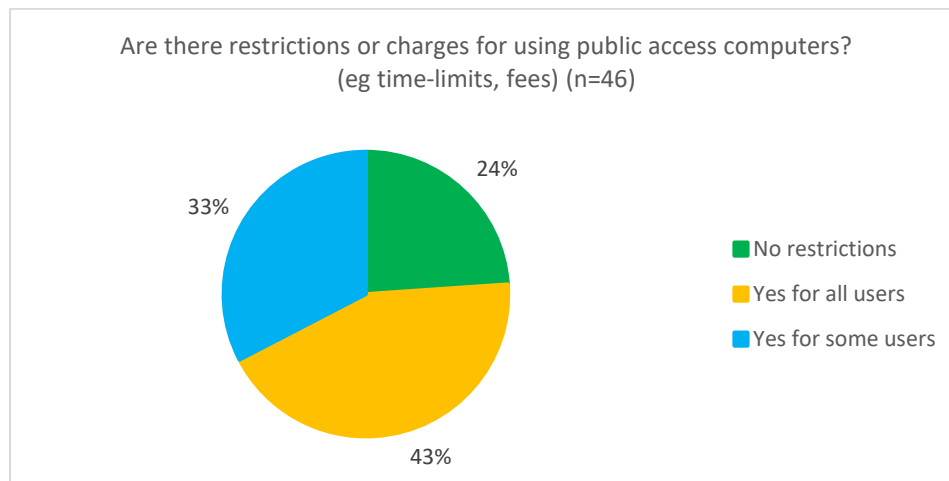
The main forms of support for self-employed individuals and those starting businesses were the universal resources of workspace, Wi-Fi, access to power sockets, and free meeting space, as well as business-specific resources, and human help.



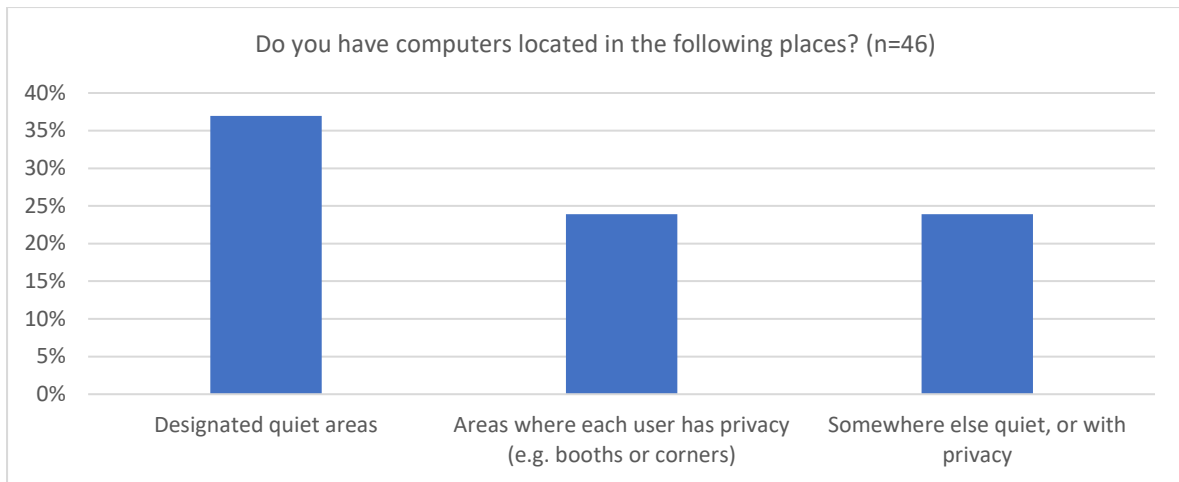
Open text comments mentioned local initiatives, eg Greater Manchester Build a Business and Solihull Enterprise for Success, as well as many mentions of being part of the British Library's BIPC Centre Network, and several mentions of the COBRA business reference resource. Suffolk Libraries referred to their partnership with the women's enterprise support network We Are Radikl.

Facilities in physical locations

The next series of questions were designed to understand the specific arrangements for accessing different resources based on insights from the ethnography.

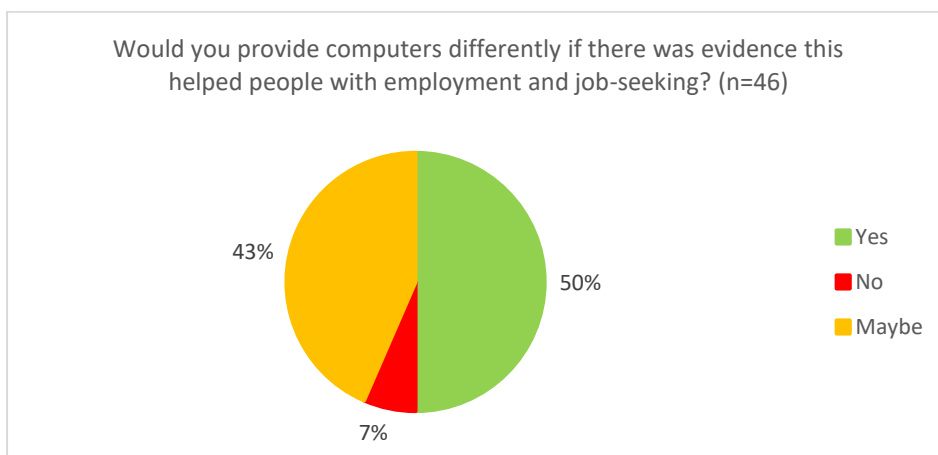


We know from the ethnography that jobseekers value the flexibility offered by libraries in terms of time limits and other restrictions on accessing resources. The survey shows that while not universal, restrictions on public access computers are commonplace. However, the open-text responses make frequent references to a variety of approaches aimed at making access for jobseekers easier, eg longer official time-limits, informal time limit extensions for jobseekers, and computers reserved for jobseekers or job club attendees.



The ethnography also pointed to the value jobseekers derive from computers they can access which are in quieter areas of the library and have a degree of privacy. This is not universally offered but one third of respondents say they have designated quiet areas, and one quarter have computers with a degree of privacy.

Furthermore, when asked if they would provide computers differently if there was evidence this helped people with employment and job-seeking, over 90% answered either “yes” (50%) or “maybe” (43%).



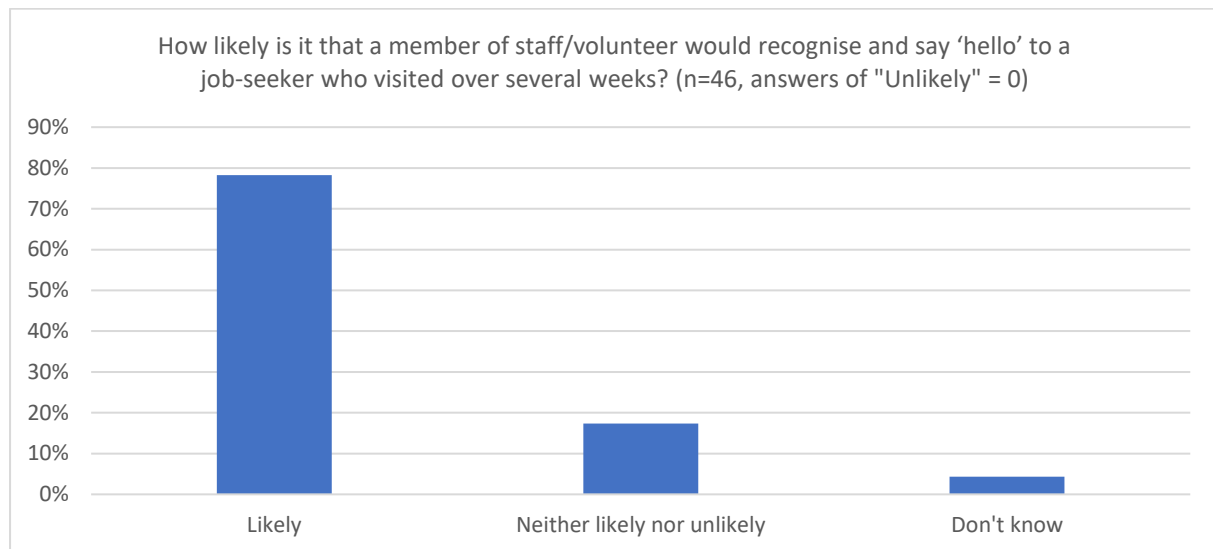
The ethnographic research has shown some users prefer tablet computers to desktop PCs as their main digital experience is on a mobile device. Just over 40% of survey respondents said they already provided tablets for users, and 98%, when asked if they would do so if there was evidence this helped jobseekers, said “yes” (60%) or “maybe” (38%).

The ethnography also highlights the importance to jobseekers of having access to printing and scanning. These services are typically charged for (although charges are often only a few pence per sheet) and while 46% of respondents said they offered printing and scanning which were all charged for, a larger proportion (54%) said they offered a mix of free and charged. The open-text responses to this question indicate different ways in which library services take a flexible approach designed to make it easier for jobseekers to make use of these resources. Many said they waived charges for those on JSA or UC, or those attending a class or learning activity. There were also various references to staff discretion, eg: “Officially, everyone is charged, but we ask colleagues to use their empathy and discretion”.

Staff support

The ethnographic research has shown that much of what makes libraries unique in the eyes of jobseekers is related to staff and volunteers; in particular the practical help they provide and the user experience and supportive growth-focused atmosphere they create within the library. This section of the survey tested specific aspects of jobseeker experience which have been highlighted in the ethnography.

We know that being recognised and greeted by a member of staff or volunteer is reassuring, adds to the sense of welcome, and reduces anxiety; more than three quarters of respondents believed that jobseekers would be greeted in this way.



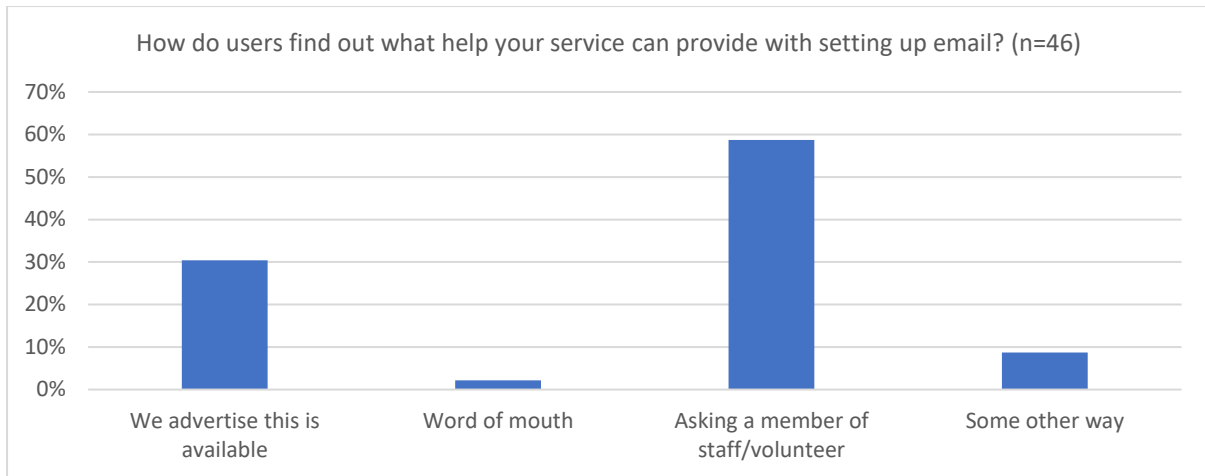
We also know that jobseekers often get a significant amount of help from staff and volunteers to complete digital tasks like setting up email, accessing a government website, or filling in an application. We asked a series of open-text questions based on specific themes from the ethnography:

- Describe what happens if a user asks for advice on setting up a new email address?
- Describe what happens if a user asks for advice on using the government's Find a job service?
- What other support do you offer to people around filling in employment-related forms or making job applications?
- What other basic digital skills support do you offer for employment and job seeking?
- Would a user receive help using Teams or Zoom for employment or job seeking?

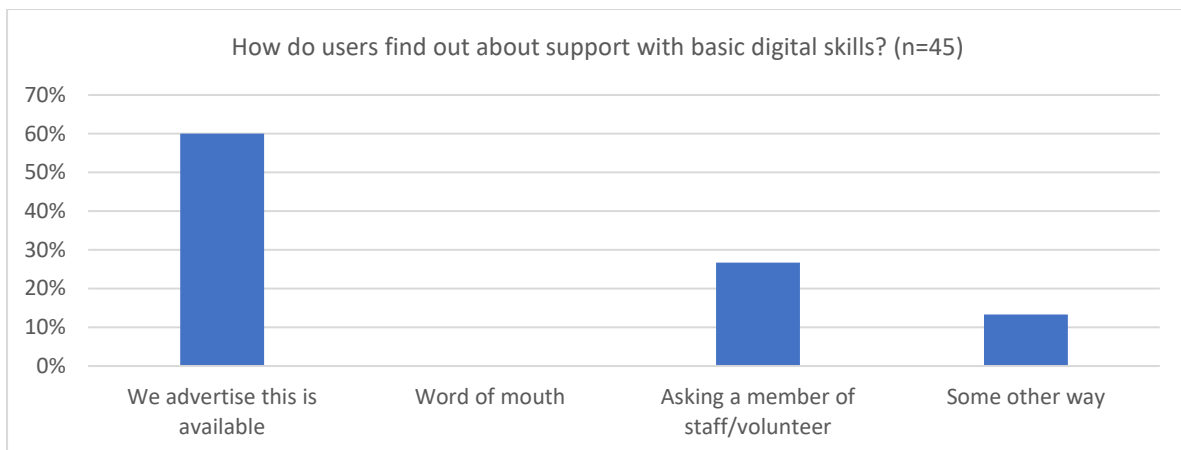
The answers to all of these (except for the question about Teams and Zoom) were consistent. According to respondents, jobseekers requiring help in these ways would usually receive direct help. Some respondents mentioned digital buddy schemes or sign-posting to other services, and a few said they would give the individual a written advice sheet. However, the most common response was that someone would try to help there and then. Some answers highlighted specific challenges jobseekers might face and how these would be addressed, eg help getting verification codes when setting up an account, or offering a tablet computer if the person was not confident using a PC.

However, what is also notable in the responses is that while these forms of support are highly valued by jobseekers, and while respondents seem to understand this, library services do not widely advertise the fact this kind of support exists.

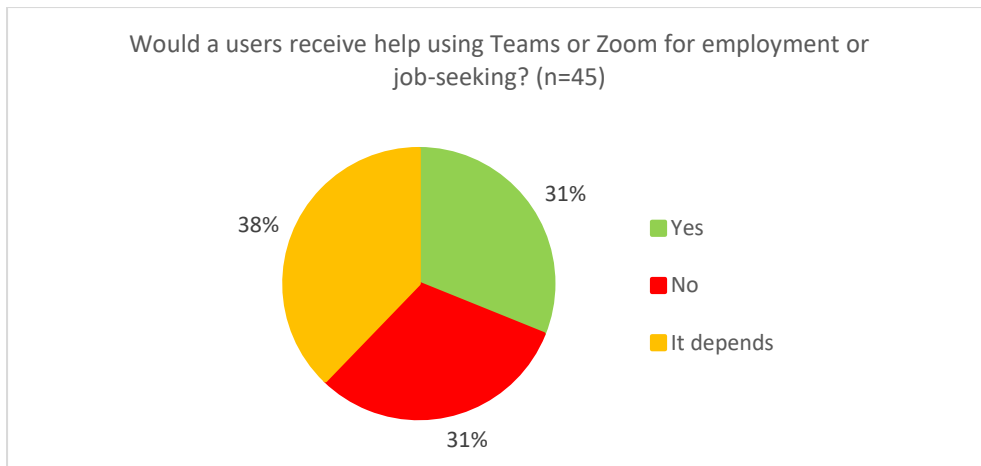
When we asked how a jobseeker would find out about this type of help being available, the most common response was, “Asking a member of staff/volunteer”. This pattern is common to most forms of support we asked about, in other words jobseekers would most likely find out only if they asked.



The exception was for digital skills support where respondents said the most likely way someone would find out was because this was openly advertised.

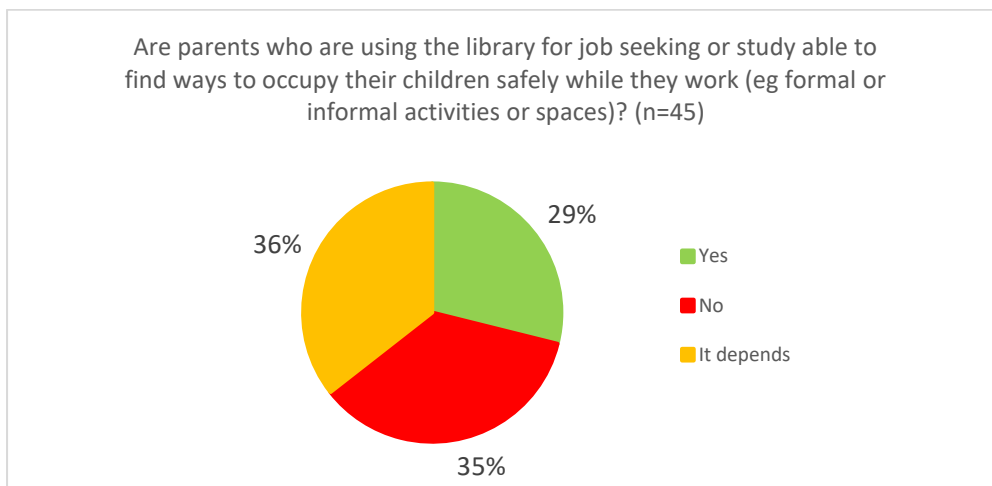


We asked, “Would a user receive help using Teams or Zoom for employment or job seeking?”, which seems an important question currently while social distancing is still in place but may also be an important longer term question if tools such as Teams and Zoom interviews become permanently more common. One-third said yes, but almost the same proportion also said “No” or “It depends”. Here the main barriers (explained in the open-text comments) were technical, with respondents citing hardware (eg lack of cameras or speakers) or software (not having Zoom installed) barriers.

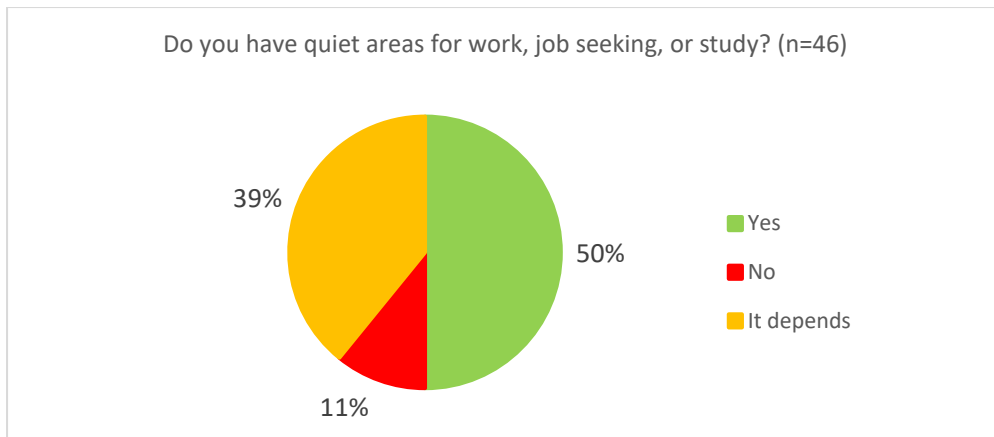


Environmental factors

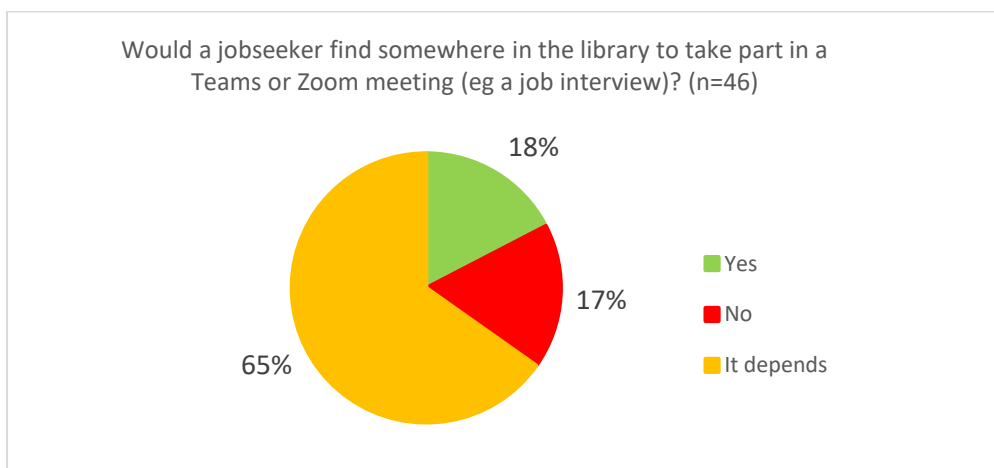
Here we tested three factors highlighted in the ethnography. Firstly we tested how common it is for jobseekers with young children to be able to study in the library while also being able to occupy their children safely. Around one third of respondents believe this would definitely not be possible, but the rest think it would or could be. The open text responses note that it depends on many factors including the age of the children.



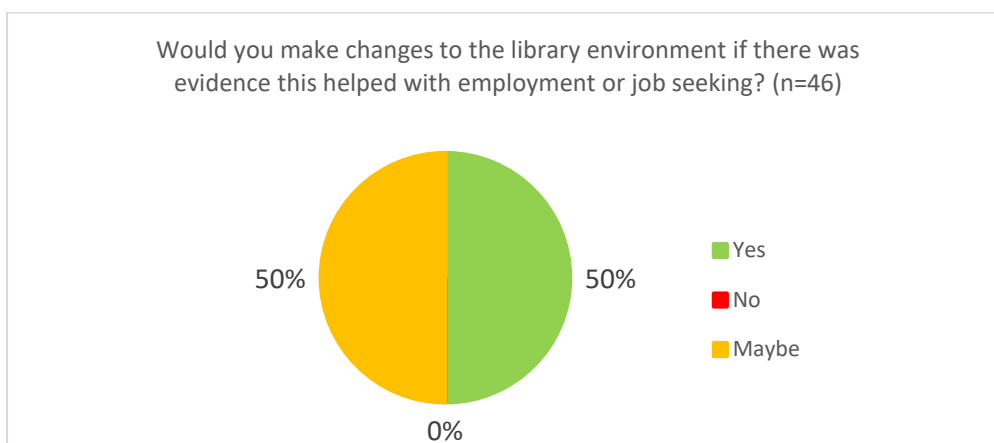
In terms of quiet areas (also highlighted in the ethnography), a larger proportion of respondents believe users would find what they need. In the open text responses, many respondents noted they had designated quiet areas for work and study, but not for specific types of users. So the answers here may underplay the availability of quiet space.



Lastly, being able to take part in a Teams or Zoom meeting or interview gets the least optimistic response, reflecting the earlier question about offering help with Teams and Zoom. As with the previous question about Teams and Zoom, most of the barriers here seem to relate to the library service’s hardware and software.



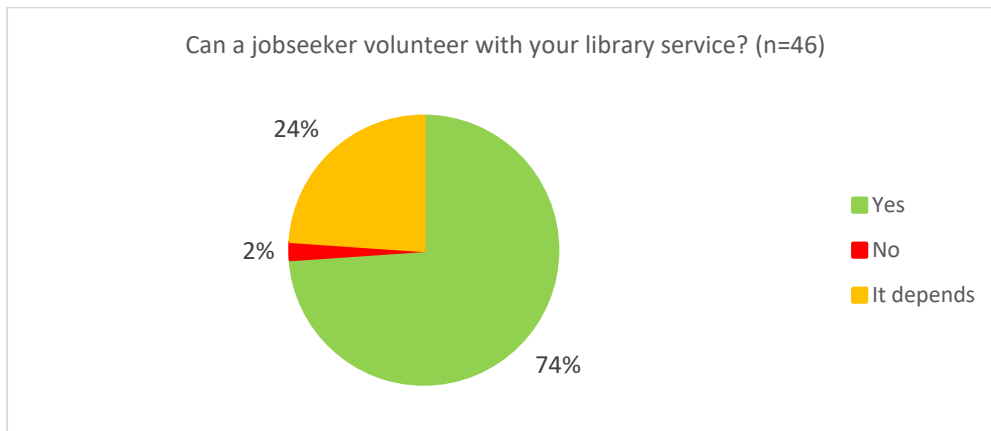
Nonetheless, when respondents were asked whether they would make changes to the library environment if there was evidence this helped jobseekers, none said “No”.



Programmes and activities

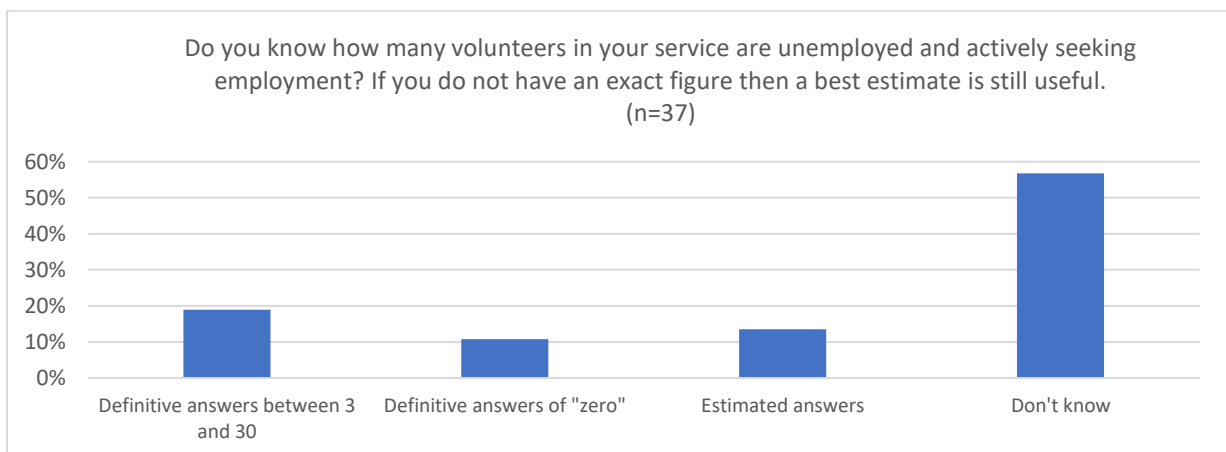
The final section of the survey asked questions about programmes and activities, again focused on specific types of support which emerged from the ethnography as important.

The first question was whether jobseekers would be able to volunteer in the library service as an intermediate or transitional step from unemployment to work. Here, 74% said that jobseekers are able to volunteer.



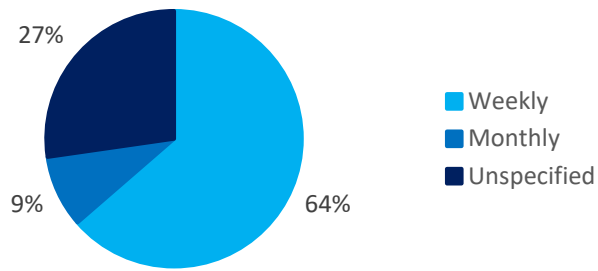
We also asked whether jobseekers taking part in adult learning receive guidance or support from the library service (eg study advice, help with motivation). Here the answer was less positive with one third saying this was available. Lastly, we asked whether volunteers (if they were jobseekers) would receive structured support with job seeking, work and careers. Although we know this is valuable where offered, only 13% of respondents said this was available in their service.

We asked how many volunteers were active in the service who were job seeking. This generated a mixed response. Less than one third of respondents were able to give a definitive response. This reflects wider issues acknowledged within the sector around the capture of impact data.



Our final question asked about job clubs and other group activities for jobseekers, and where these were offered, what format they took.

Job club of some form reported by 48% of respondents (i.e. 22 out of n=46) of which majority are weekly



Of those who answered that they did have a job club running, these were typically weekly (64%), although many of those who answered this question (27%) did not specify. Where information was offered about who runs these activities, the answers indicate there are a mixture of those run by the library service, those run by a partner organisation, and those run jointly.

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