

Role of public libraries in supporting and promoting digital participation

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For further information regarding this report please contact

Elizabeth Davies (Elizabeth.Davies@cfe.org.uk) or

Louise Peck (Louise.Peck@cfe.org.uk)

CFE / Phoenix Yard / Upper Brown Street / Leicester / LE1 5TE
T 0116 229 3300 / W cfe.org.uk

Executive Summary

The public library sector is undergoing a period of rapid change in its response to how people use and access digital technology. The sector is contributing to delivering Government policy objectives around digital technology including: promoting access to digital technology; reducing digital exclusion; and providing a role for community-based partners in helping people acquire the skills to enable digital participation.

In a speech to the Institute of Government in December 2009, the Prime Minister Gordon Brown announced a plan to protect frontline public services by developing a smarter and more efficient government. Plans for a 'smarter government' include exploiting rapid technological advances to expand online public services and open up public data and information. This requires a commitment to digital inclusion¹ including empowering citizens in their use of digital services and helping them acquire the digital skills to use these services to their full effect.² This plan and the visions outlined in the White Paper '*Digital Britain*' and the Modernisation Review of Public Libraries all refer to a role for libraries in delivering the Government's policy priorities.

The Digital Britain Report identified three key areas where the Government wants to take further action to drive digital participation:

- Affordability: both in relation to equipment and ongoing costs;
- Capability and relevance: ensuring that all citizens have the skills, motivation and confidence they need;
- Availability: by ensuring the wide availability of key services, in particular through the Universal Service Commitment for Broadband.³

Following the publication of '*Digital Britain*,' a consortium of partners chaired by Ofcom was charged with developing a national plan for digital participation. The Museums Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) is a partner within the consortium. The draft national plan sets out a strategy for securing the UK as one of the world's leading digital knowledge economies. The plan echoes sentiments expressed in the White Paper, i.e. that '*increasing the reach, breadth and depth of digital technology use across all sections of society, to maximise digital participation and the*

¹ 'Digital Inclusion' is about empowering citizens' lives and life chances, particularly the socially disadvantaged, through the benefits of digital technologies.

² HM Government Cabinet Office (2009). '*Putting the Frontline First: Smarter Government*', Foreword.

³ '*Digital Britain*' (2009) p. 34

economic and social benefits it can bring' is fundamental to achieving this ambition.⁴

As a member of the consortium, the MLA has undertaken research⁵ with representatives from the library sector to:

- Identify the extent of the existing digital offer in public libraries – the first survey to explore this since the People's Network was introduced into public libraries in 2001 ; and
- Identify the potential future role for the public library sector in supporting the delivery of the national plan for digital participation.

CFE has supported MLA in the analysis of the survey results. The survey findings demonstrate that library authorities offer a wide range of digital services to the public, characterised by:

A national network of over 3,000 service points - Libraries provide free internet access and help the public get online and develop digital literacy skills. Access and support with getting online is available during public library opening hours which includes weekdays, week day evenings and weekends.

- 79% of library authorities provide free internet access.
- 98% of library authorities have service points open on weekday evenings and at the weekend.

Help with getting online and developing digital literacy skills for local people - Help with getting on line is provided by over nine in ten library authorities through a combination of one-to-one support and group sessions delivered by frontline library staff, volunteers and third party organisations (including training providers, community partners and specialist organisations, typically organisations supporting older people, those seeking employment and other disadvantaged groups who might be digitally excluded).

- 93% of library authorities help new library members to get online.
- 91% of library authorities provide supported access to help all library customers get online and improve their digital skills.
- Group supported access is provided to library users in individual English Library Authorities by library staff (79% of authorities); third

⁴ 'Digital Britain' (2009) <http://www.culture.gov.uk/images/publications/digitalbriatin-finalreport-jun09.pdf> p.41

⁵ MLA designed and delivered an online survey distributed to all 152 English Local Authority Library Services in December 2010. CFE was commissioned to analyse the survey findings and prepare a report outlining the key research findings.

party training providers or community partners (49% of authorities) and by volunteers (22% of authorities).

- An average of 75 hours per week is spent in each English Library Authority providing one-to-one supported access for library users.
- An average of 46 hours per week is spent in each English Library Authority providing group supported access for library users.

Trained staff. All front line library staff were trained to European Computer Driving License standard in 2001 through a lottery grant. The current survey has identified that a high proportion of library authorities have continued to train frontline library staff in digital skills and ensure that new library staff are trained to help people get online. At present, the majority of training budgets are provided through local authority funding. A minority have received funding for training from UKOnline.

- Nearly three-quarters (72%) of library authorities report that their frontline library staff have received digital training since 2001.
- Nearly three-quarters (74%) of library services have received funding for training staff in digital skills from their local authority.
- Only one in six (16%) of library authorities which have at least one UKOnline membership centres within their authority have received funding for training from UKOnline.
- Nearly half (46%) of library authorities deliver training in digital skills to new staff and volunteers who help people to get online.
- Over one-quarter (27%) of library authorities require new staff to have ECDL or equivalent.

Delivery partnerships. Libraries have developed successful ICT delivery partnerships with third party organisations, including national organisations such as the Workers Education Association (WEA) and Age Concern. By inviting these partners into the library setting, libraries are able to deliver support that is tailored to the individual user group's needs in their local areas and maximise their outreach to the community.

- Three in ten (29%) authorities already take part in 'Get Online Day' and two-thirds (67%) would like to take part in future.
- 31% of library authorities have third party providers, e.g. training partners, providing one-to-one supported access to digital technologies within the library setting and 34% of library authorities have third party providers delivering group supported access to digital technologies within the library setting.

- 17% of library authorities provide supported access via digital access points in the community.

The research findings demonstrate that libraries are a key delivery mechanism to support the delivery of the national plan for digital participation and that public libraries are well placed to support future priorities including Online Basics, Smarter Government and the Pass it On campaign.

The following sections of this report provide an updated picture of the extent of digital participation support offered by public libraries. The results can be used to inform wider policy makers and stakeholders of the current and potential role of libraries in supporting digital participation and in furthering existing strategic and delivery partnerships to strengthen the library offer.

Further research is recommended to identify:

- The level of digital provision at individual library level;
- The level of customer demand for digital services and the nature of digital participation within the library setting, including more information on the extent and depth of one-to-one support to get online;
- The potential for expanding the number of volunteers working with digitally excluded groups;
- The capacity of library staff to undertake a greater number of supported access hours.

1 Introduction

This report is prepared by CFE on behalf of the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) in order to demonstrate the extent of the existing digital offer in public libraries; and identify potential future roles for the library sector in supporting the national plan for digital participation and the digital inclusion priorities set by Martha Lane Fox, the Digital Champion.⁶

Project Background

This project responds to an increasingly changing environment for libraries in regards to the policy context around digital inclusion, the ways in which people access information and in the support people expect from public services.

The White Paper '*Digital Britain*' has set out questions to be addressed about the future of library services in a digital environment. It focuses on how the digital revolution can increase public access to library resources through processes such as: remote access to downloadable information; virtual lending; and the engagement of social groups with limited access to digital technology in the home or workplace.

'*Digital Britain*' outlines the Government's ambition to open up public access to digital provision and opportunities for people to acquire or update digital skills. The paper sets out a vision for how people can access digital public services, which can provide greater flexibility and personalisation for the user. This vision is to be achieved by supporting Britain's public services (i.e. broadcasting companies, museums, libraries and galleries) to develop the capacity and capability to utilise digital technology.

In response to the White Paper, a consortium of partners, chaired by Ofcom, has been tasked to develop a national plan for digital participation. This plan will set out a strategy to increase the reach, breadth and depth of digital technology use. The plan will suggest ways to maximise digital participation and promote its economic and social benefits.

⁶ In June 2009 Martha Lane Fox, founder of lastminute.com accepted the role of Digital Champion for the Digital Inclusion Task Force, whose aim is to create better education, health, governmental and social opportunities for the most socially excluded people in the UK.

The vision for the national plan for digital participation is for everyone to have the opportunity, skills and confidence to fully participate in a digital society. From the individual's perspective, digital participation is the enjoyment of the opportunities, experiences and benefits of being online. It brings advantages to individuals, families and society as a whole. It brings personal benefits such as:

- Financial savings;
- Greater customer choice;
- Improved education and employment opportunities;
- Independent living for older people;
- Socio-economic inclusion for the physically and socially isolated and economically excluded;
- Improved access to health and well-being information and support;
- More opportunities for communication and self-publishing.

Benefits to the individual can in turn create longer term wider social and economic benefits such as greater opportunities for civic and democratic engagement.

The library sector contributes to digital participation through:

- Internet access - 'The People's Network' introduced into public libraries in 2001 is a network of 30,000 internet enabled computers available in every public library that offers over 60 million hours of internet access every year.
- All libraries are UKOnline centres and 2,000 are UKOnline membership centres because of their role in supporting people to get online. Public libraries make up 50% of the overall 6,000 UKOnline centre network.
- Public libraries offer support to local people to get online through both one-to-one and group sessions delivered by front line library staff, volunteers and third parties.
- MLA is a member of the consortium developing the national plan for digital participation and is ensuring that the role of the public library service in supporting the delivery of this plan is fully recognised.

Statistics published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) demonstrate an increase in individuals with access to the internet in their homes (from 57% in 2006 to 70% in 2009).⁷ Individuals without home or workplace access to the computers and the internet, often

⁷ DCM& BIS (2009). Digital Britain: Final Report. London: DCMS and BIS.

described as the ‘digitally excluded,’ are more likely to be older people and those from disadvantaged groups, including the unemployed. Of the two million annual users of UKOnline centres, three-quarters are counted as being socially excluded, and around half have no formal qualifications when they start using a centre.⁸

Research conducted in 2009 by SQW and MORI has demonstrated libraries’ effectiveness in engaging the digitally excluded. This research shows that library-based UKOnline centres have a higher level of footfall than community based UKOnline centres, i.e. 300 drop-in users per week per library compared to 40 per week in community based centres. This may be explained by the longer opening hours of libraries compared to community based centres.⁹

Research undertaken in 2009 by Simpson Carpenter and Regeneris Consulting, focused on digital provision in the South West of England. This research revealed that the average weekly footfall in a Voluntary Community Services (VCS) centre was 85 visits weekly, whilst education centres received around 100 visits weekly. Small libraries had an average of 1,600 visits per week, while large libraries received more than 6,500 visits per week on average. The research concluded that UKOnline centres located in public libraries have reached much higher numbers of people due to the higher footfall in people using libraries.¹⁰ This is an important point and highlights the importance of effectively marketing the digital offer within libraries and the sector’s potential to engage with the digitally excluded.

The level and nature of support available to users of digital services within library settings is further explored in this current research report, with positive findings emerging.

⁸ DCM& BIS (2009). *Digital Britain: Final Report*. London: DCMS and BIS.

⁹ MORI and SQW (2003). *‘UKOnline Centres and E-Government*. Nottingham: DfES p.ii. & p.5.

¹⁰ Simpson Carpenter & Regeneris (2006). *‘UKOnline Centres: Transformational Government for the Citizen*.’ Sheffield: Ufi Ltd. P.4.

This Report

This report has been prepared to support the MLA in demonstrating the role that public libraries have in supporting and promoting digital participation. The report presents data from an online survey of library sector representatives. The results can be used to inform future planning and ensure a more strategic approach to the delivery of digital participation by libraries, including a more targeted approach and more consideration of how the offer is marketed to local communities, particularly the disadvantaged and digitally excluded who do not always have access to online media and marketing.

This report is structured as follows: **Section 2** outlines the methodology used; **Section 3** presents the research findings; **Section 4** sets out the conclusions from the research; and **Section 5** provides recommended next steps.

2 Method

This research used a quantitative online survey to collect information about digital provision, supported access and library workforce's digital skills and training. The survey was designed to provide a general overview or indication of the level of digital provision in library authorities across England in order to assist planning and policy development. Survey responses were submitted by English Library Authorities who were asked to provide estimates about the level of digital provision and supported access across all the library service points in their local authority. It is important to note that the survey results provide information about provision at the level of the local authority and information about individual libraries was not collected.

Statistical validity

For some questions, respondents were asked to give a confidence score for the estimates provided. When reporting on the level and type of digital provision and who is delivering provision, respondents have indicated a relatively high level of confidence in the estimates provided. For questions about the numbers of supported access offered to specific social groups, i.e. older people, confidence in these estimates is lower, reflecting the fact that less management information is collected about support for specific social groups. For transparency, we have presented information about respondents' confidence in their answers alongside the statistical results.

Research Questions

The main objectives of this research are to:

- Demonstrate the extent of the current digital offer in public libraries; and
- Identify potential future roles for the library sector in delivering the national plan for digital participation.

A questionnaire was designed to measure the:

- Extent of the largely free internet access offered to local people in all public libraries, broken down by daytime hours, evenings and weekends;
- Level of support offered by public libraries to help people get online and who offers this support;
- Level and nature of the support offered by public libraries to help older people and the unemployed get online and develop digital skills;

- Number of library authorities who have library service points registered as UKOnline membership centres, thereby offering an enhanced digital participation role;
- Number of library authorities who use the myguide software to support local people to get on-line;
- Extent of digital training and development that has been made available for library staff since all frontline library staff were funded to achieve the European Computer Driving License, and how this training is funded;
- Wider support for the digital agenda and digital innovation.

Scope and Execution

Online survey

An online survey was designed and disseminated by the MLA. The survey was designed in Survey Monkey software¹¹ and used a combination of closed response questions (with both single and multiple response questions) and open response questions.

The questions in the survey collected information at English Library Authority level and did not explore levels of provision at individual library service point level.

The survey was sent to all 152 Heads of Library Services in England for completion by the relevant member of staff (see Figure 2 for details about respondents' job roles) during December 2010.

Response rate

Responses were received from 112 of the 152 English Library Authorities giving an overall response rate of 74%. Around 100 of these surveys were fully completed, the remaining partially completed. CFE considers this to be a good response rate to an online survey distributed to relatively senior officials, especially given the timing of the survey, which was in the field in the two weeks prior to Christmas 2009.

Analysis

Analysis of the survey was undertaken by CFE.

On receipt of the final survey data, responses were exported into SPSS for analysis. Frequency counts were generated for all questions and responses charted in PowerPoint to provide a summary of the data collected at a national level. Where categories

¹¹ <http://www.surveymonkey.com/>

were too small for purposeful analysis, several responses were aggregated to increase the size of the categories reported on.

Cross-tabulations were generated based on: region; size of the library authority as measured by the number of library service points; and membership of UKOnline. Chi-square tests were then performed in order to estimate the probability that the relationships observed between variables in the sample were not observed by chance and, therefore, evident in the population from which the sample was drawn.

The number of responses received, i.e. 112, and the relatively small size of the sub groups means that only a few of the cross-tabulations are found to be statistically significant. Therefore, this report discusses mainly top-line data, and only makes comparisons at sub group level where statistically significant differences between the answers of different sub groups are found.

Sample profile

Responses were received from all nine government regions. Figure 1 shows the composition of the sample by region.¹²

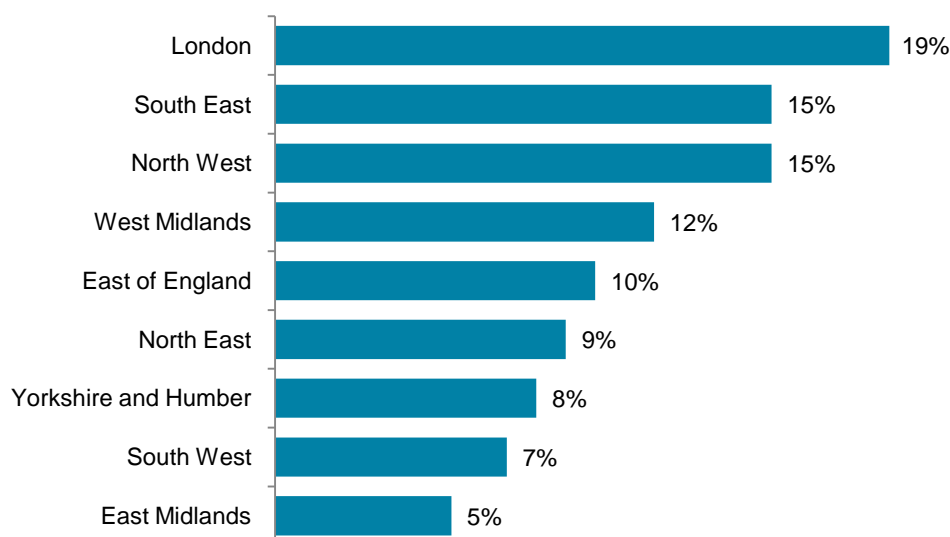


Figure 1: Respondent region
Base = 112 (Missing = 0)

¹² A response rate of 75% or greater was achieved from the following regions: North West; North East; West Midlands and South East. Between 60-75% response rates were achieved for Yorkshire and Humber; East Midlands and London. A 50% response rate was achieved for the South-West.

The survey was distributed to Heads of Service who were asked to either complete the survey themselves or to forward the survey to the person who would be most able to complete it or to seek the help of a range of individuals in collating the data. The main respondent who completed the survey on behalf of English Library Authorities occupied a variety of job roles. One-quarter (26%) of the surveys were completed by Heads of Service / Acting Heads of Service and their assistant or deputy and three-in-ten (30%) were completed by Library Managers and librarians. One-fifth (18%) were completed by library staff with a dedicated ICT role.

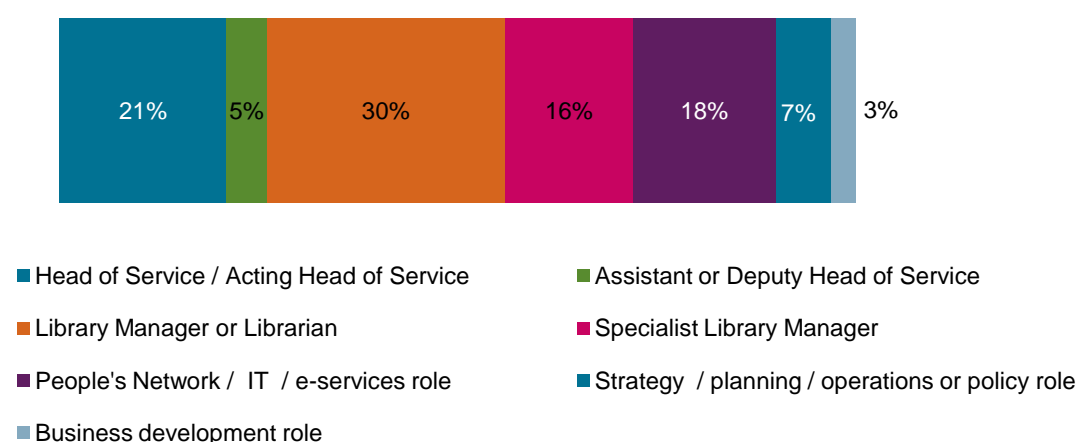


Figure 2: Respondent job role
Base = 112 (Missing = 0)

The library authorities that responded to the survey varied in terms of the number of individual library service points in each authority. The majority (82%) of respondents were from authorities with 20 or fewer service points. Half (50%) of the respondents reported between 11 and 20 service points. Only one respondent was from an authority with over 100 service points.¹³

¹³ An analysis of which local authorities responded to the survey shows that larger local authorities, i.e. those with more than 40 service points are under-represented in the survey.

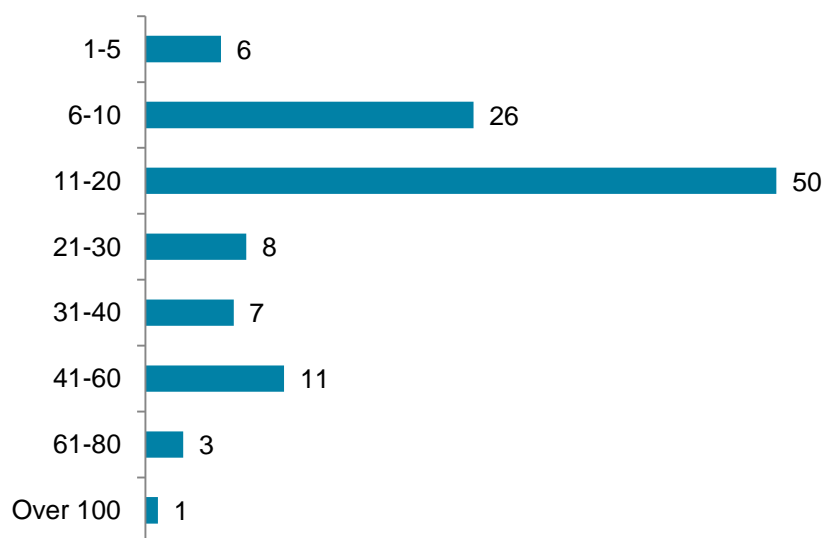


Figure 3: Number of services points per library authority
Base = 112 (Missing = 0)

Reporting

This report presents data at English Library Authority level. Proportions and frequencies describing an examined variable have been reported as percentages based on the count of the sub-sample for which the variable applies (valid percent). This practice allows us to illustrate the frequencies in a meaningful, unbiased way.

To provide information about their opening hours, respondents were asked to select one of several opening-hour ranges. Average opening hours were calculated by summing all the scores in the distribution (i.e. the sum of the frequency of each range multiplied by the mid-point of that range) and then dividing by the total number of scores. This method is widely used to transform categorical numeric data into continuous numeric data. It ensures that while performing this transformation we stay as close as possible to the information directly provided by our participants.

The report presents key findings and data from the research. To view full charted data from the research please refer to the accompanying PowerPoint information pack.

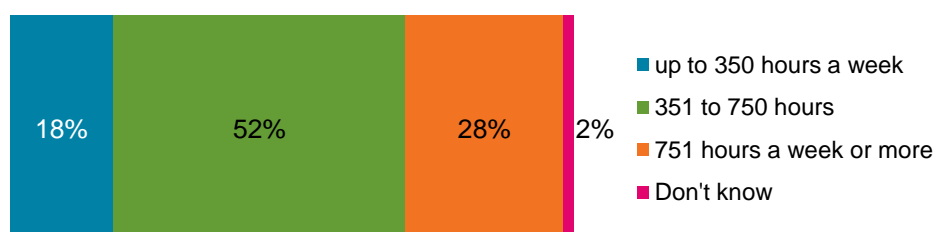
3 Key Findings

In this section we present the key findings from the online survey to provide an overview of the role of public libraries in supporting and promoting digital participation.

Extent of internet access made available by public libraries

Each English Library Authority provides an average of 762 hours of (largely free) internet access per week across all its library service points. (Please refer to Table 1 to see how this average differs across different sized library authorities).

The number of hours that library service points are open per week varies across local authorities and is dependent on the size of the authority, as measured by the number of library service points. Opening hours across all library service points total at least 351 hours per week in the majority (80%) of authorities. One-quarter (28%) of authorities have all their service points open for at least 751 hours per week. (Please refer to Table 1 to see how these averages differ across different sized library authorities).



Figure

4: Library authority opening hours per week across all service points
Base = 104 (Missing = 8)

Nearly all (98%) of English Library Authorities have service points that are open on weekday evenings (Monday to Friday) and at the weekend. Six in ten (59%) of English Library Authorities have service points open on a Sunday.

Table 1 below outlines the average number of opening hours across library authority service points over a typical seven day period and then at various times of the week. These statistics are presented for small, medium and large authorities, as measured by the number of library service points.

A clear relationship exists between the total number of opening hours across all service points and the number of service points within each local

authority. Larger authorities are reporting a higher number of opening hours across all service points per week.

Size of authority	Average number of opening hours across library service points over a typical 7 day period	Average number of opening hours after 5pm available across library authority service points from Mondays to Fridays	Average number of weekend opening hours across library authority service points	Average number of Sunday opening hours available across library authority service points
Small (1-10 service points)	337 hours per authority	47 hours per authority	62 hours per authority	13 hours per authority
Medium (11-20 service points)	547 hours per authority	80 hours per authority	85 hours per authority	13 hours per authority
Large (21 or more service points)	1,541 hours per authority	179 hours per authority	236 hours per authority	29 hours per authority
Total	762 hours per authority	98 hours per authority	120 hours per authority	18 hours per authority

Table 1: Average number of opening hours per week across all service points

Access to the internet is provided entirely free of charge to all library users in four-fifths (79%) of English Library Authorities. Nearly all (91%) offer at least the first hour of use free of charge. A small number of library authorities (4%) offer the first half hour for free, but then make a subsequent charge.

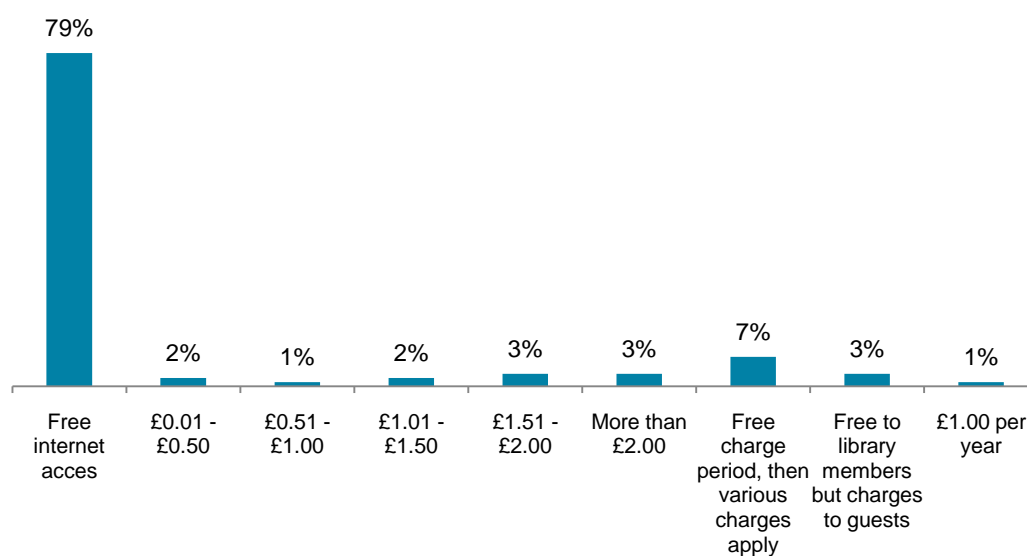


Figure 5: Cost of internet use per hour across all service points in each local authority
Base = 104 (Missing = 8)

Free and low cost internet access is promoted to library users in English Local Authorities in a combination of ways including: signposting by library staff (99%); on the library website (97%); with a poster or flier in the library (79%); and through signposting by wider community partners (72%).

"We put leaflets in community venues, signage outside library buildings and advertisements in community magazines." (Head of Service).

"It's widely advertised in all our promotions" (Strategic Librarian).

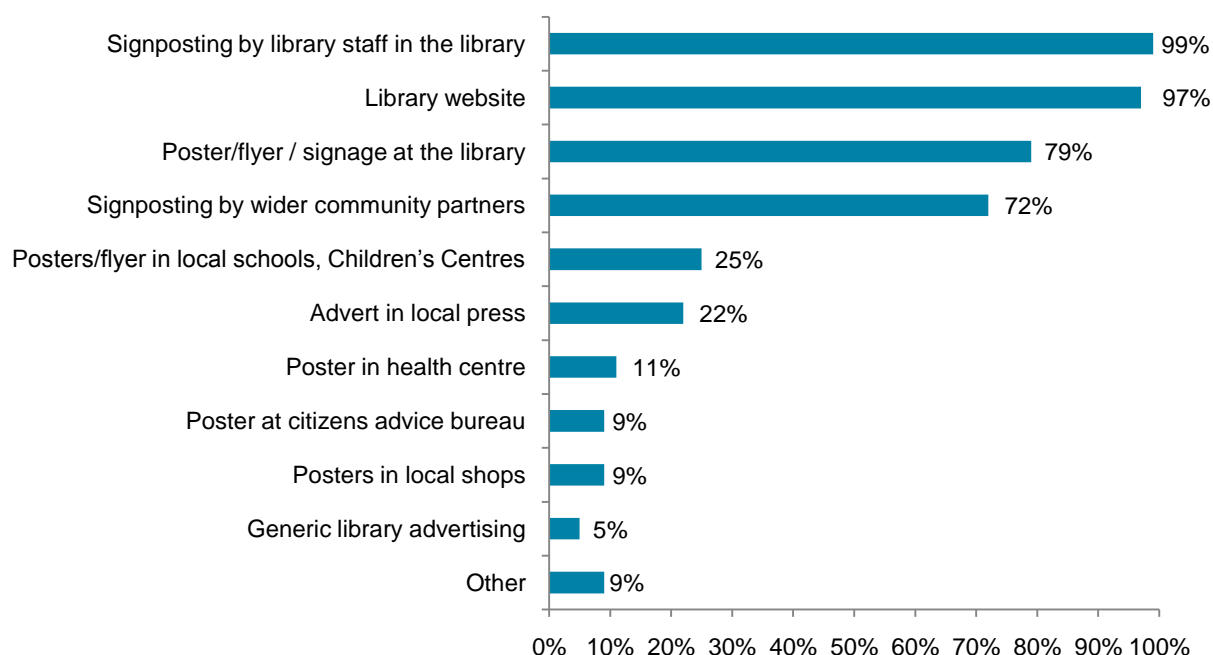


Figure 6: How free and low cost internet is promoted by individual library authorities
Base = 104 (Missing = 8)

Extent of support offered by public libraries to help people get online

Ninety-three (93%) of English Library Authorities offer support to **new library members** to get online. At least 91% of English Library Authorities say they offer support to **all library users** as a core element of their service (9% of respondents did not respond to the question). Libraries offer this support through a combination of one-to-one and group support typically delivered by frontline library staff, third party organisations, and volunteers. This support includes providing information and assistance about getting online through to formal training to help people acquire and update digital skills.

One-to-one support

Library staff members provide most of the one-to-one support. Three-quarters (75%) of English Library authorities offer one to one support from frontline staff. Third parties are used by four in ten (44%) local authorities and volunteers are used by one-third (34%) of local authorities.

Figure 7 shows the number of one-to-one support hours provided by library staff across each library authority per week.

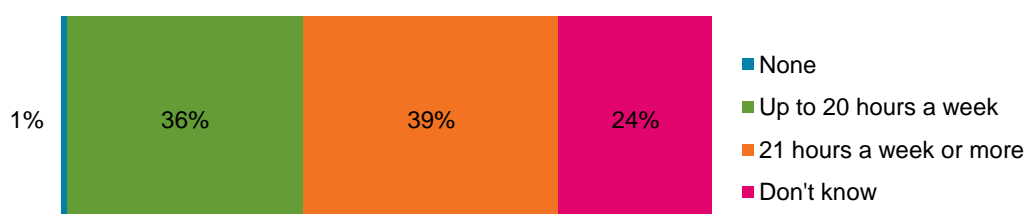


Figure 7: Number of one-to-one support hours provided by library staff across all service points in individual library authorities
Base = 102 (Missing = 10)

Group sessions

Frontline library workers deliver most of the group sessions in libraries that are designed to support people to get online, i.e. seven in ten (69%) English Library Authorities offer regular group sessions that are run by frontline library staff. Also delivering group support within libraries are: third parties (49% of local authorities) and volunteers (helping in 22% of local authorities).

Figure 8 shows the number of hours of group sessions run by frontline library staff across each library authority per week.

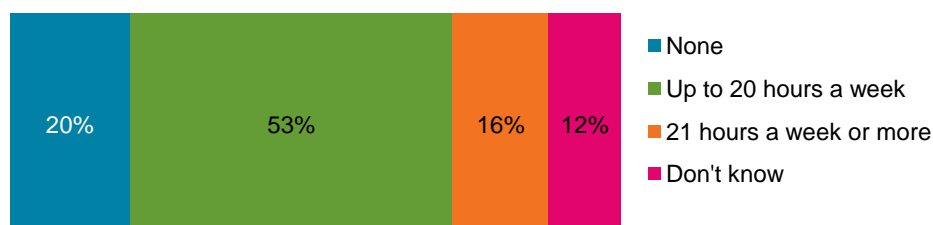


Figure 8: Number of hours of group sessions run by library staff across all service points in individual library authorities
Base = 102 (Missing = 10)

The opportunity to receive either one-to-one help or attend a group session to get help to get online is promoted by library services in a combination of ways including: signposting by staff in the library (99%); the library website (97%); and a poster in the library (79%).

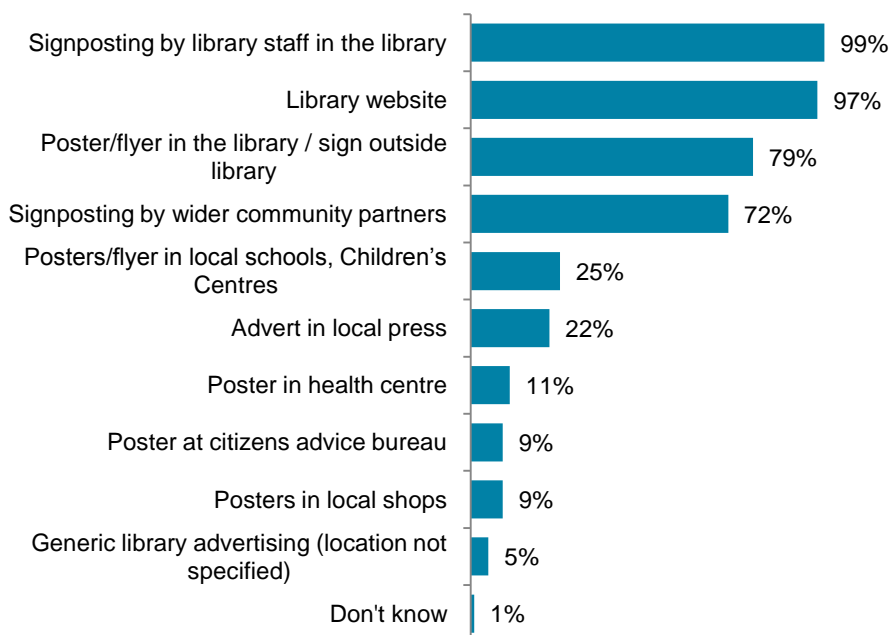


Figure 9: How individual library authorities promote their offer to help people to get online Base = 104 (Missing = 8)

Extent of support offered by public libraries to help older people and the unemployed get online

At least 76% of English Library Authorities (23% did not answer the question) offer specific support to older people to help them get online and develop digital literacy skills. Libraries offer this support through both one-to-one and group sessions with the support delivered through a mix of frontline library staff, third party organisations and volunteers.

At least two-thirds (64%) of libraries collect data on the number of one-to-one supported hours that are provided to older adults and at least two-thirds (66%) collect the data on the number of group supported hours provided to older adults.

A relatively large proportion of English Library Authority respondents are unsure about the exact number of one-to-one and group sessions made available to specific social groups across all library service points and have therefore chosen not to answer questions relating to estimating the number of hours of support offered specifically to older people and unemployed people. We may be under-representing the proportion of library authorities that are offering this help to these groups, simply because they have not been able to report on the number of delivery hours across all service

points in a typical week. There may be a case for developing management information systems that enable libraries to capture this information, both at individual library and local authority levels.

Amongst those who provided an estimate, one-to-one support for older adults is available for an average of 18 hours per week across all service points in each English Library Authority.¹⁴

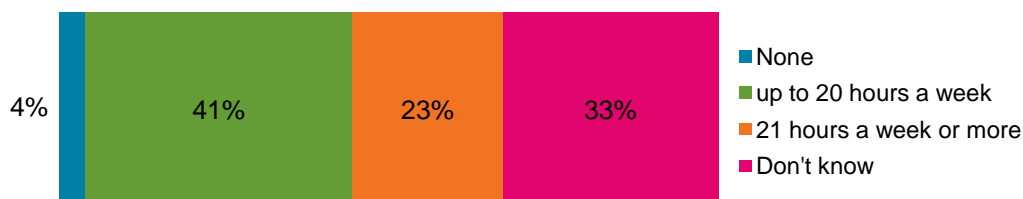


Figure 10: Number of one-to-one support hours available to older adults per week in individual library authorities
Base = 101 (Missing = 11)

One-to-one support for older adults in library authorities is delivered by a combination of library staff, volunteer and third party organisations.

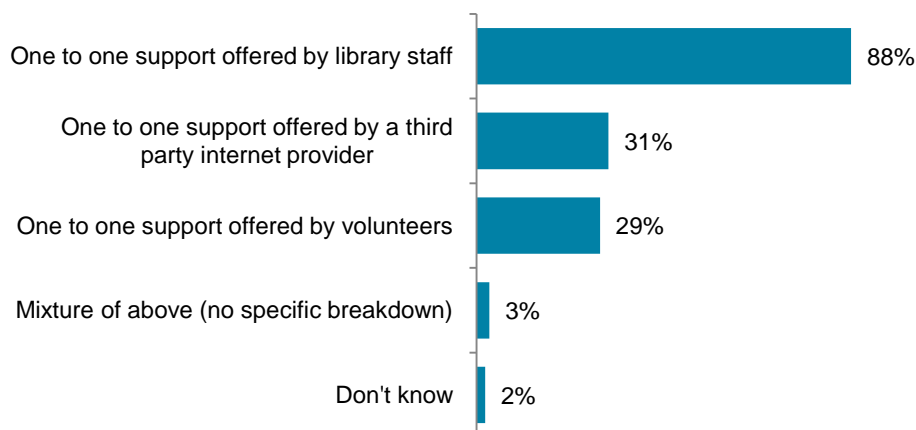


Figure 11: Who delivers one-to-one support to older adults in the individual library authorities
Base = 93 (Missing = 13; not applicable = 6)

Support for older adults through group sessions is available for an average of 26 hours per week across all library service points in each English Library Authority.¹⁵

¹⁴ 25% of respondents were very confident about their estimate and 45% were fairly confident (i.e. the overall confidence level for this question was 70%). 23% were not very confident and 7% were not at all confident.

¹⁵ 36% of respondents were very confident about their estimate and 42% were fairly confident (i.e. the overall confidence level for this question was 78%). 15% were not very confident and 7% were not at all confident.

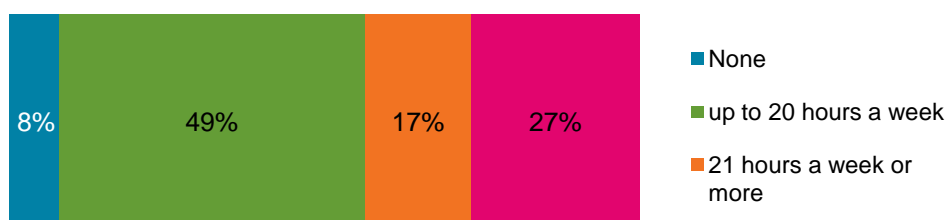


Figure 12: Number of group support hours available to older adults in the individual library authorities

Base = 101 (Missing = 11)

Support for older adults to get online through group sessions in public libraries is delivered by a combination of frontline library staff, volunteers and third party organisations. Some library authorities have agreements with specialist third party providers such as Age Concern, to deliver group activities for older adults.

“Over 50 hours of support is provided through AFCL courses, and about two-thirds of these courses attract members of the older population. Library staff offer 8 hours per week of group sessions, many around the silversurfing theme.” (Community Services Manager).

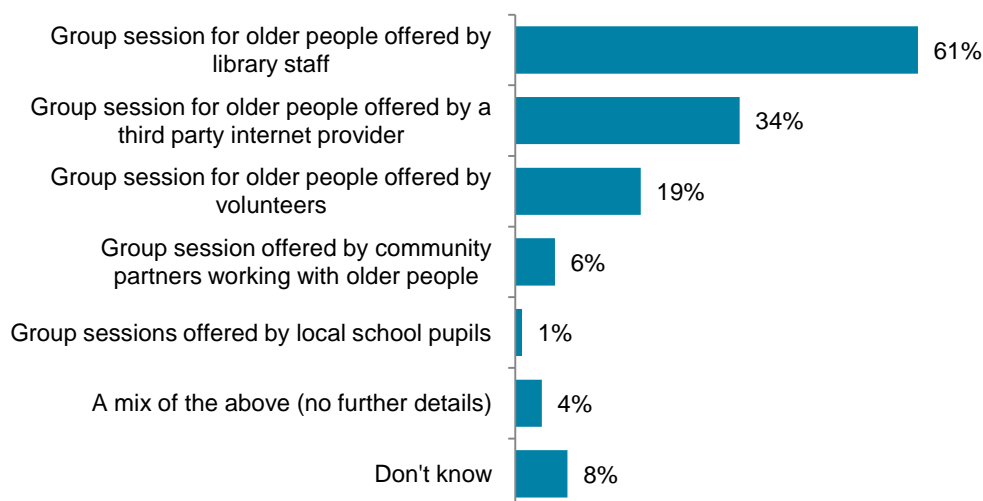


Figure 13: Who delivers support to get older adults online in the individual library authorities through group library sessions

Base = 85 (Missing = 11; not applicable or data not collected = 16)

The majority (at least 86%) of library authorities provide support to the unemployed to get online. This support is delivered through a variety of services including support with job-searching online (76%); support with CV writing (71%); and short courses to improve ICT skills (63%).

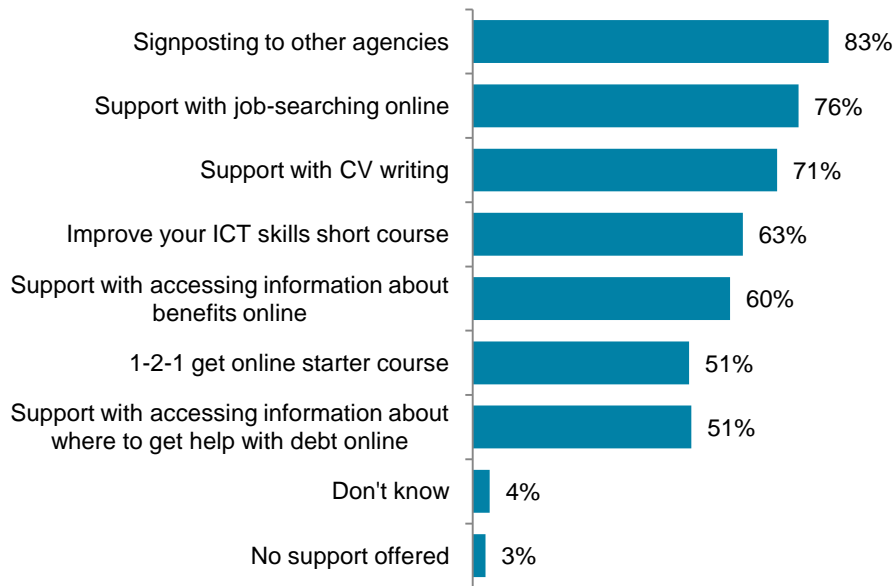


Figure 14: What types of support to get online is offered to unemployed people by individual library authorities
Base = 101 (Missing = 11)

When asked to describe in further detail about the specific activity library authorities undertake to support disadvantaged communities to get online, around half the sample (54 respondents) responded. Amongst this group, 42 respondents mentioned that training sessions and tasters targeted at digitally excluded groups¹⁶ were offered. Twelve respondents mentioned that employability support was offered in the library setting, e.g. help with preparing CVs and job search. Other types of support included home visits with tablet PCs for the housebound; specialist support for children including homework clubs and internet safety sessions; supporting national initiatives such as Adult Learners Week and Family Learning Week; Skills for Life training; library tours and inductions; and applying to funding bodies for additional finance to support activities.

“We offer taster sessions supported by community language interpreters or sign language interpreters. We have adaptive technology - Supernova magnification and screen reading software and adaptive mice etc. We do taster sessions for traveller groups and group sessions for learners with learning difficulties.” (Head of Service).

¹⁶ The social groups targeted for support include: the unemployed; benefit claimants; the disabled; people with learning difficulties; non English speaking residents and speakers of other languages; asylum seekers and refugees; travelling communities; homeless people; women's groups; BME groups; blind and deaf people; offenders in the community and ex-offenders; pupils in non-standard schooling; carers; and those living in social housing.

Number of public library services registered as UKOnline membership centres

Over three-quarters of respondents (77%) reported that at least one library in their authority is a registered UKOnline membership centre providing an enhanced digital participation offer. On average, library authorities with UKOnline membership centres reported that 18 of their library service points were UKOnline membership centres.¹⁷



Figure 15: Percentage of library authorities which have UKOnline membership centres
Base = 108 (Missing = 4)

Nine in ten (89%) of library respondents are aware that UKOnline membership centres can access a range of support from UKOnline including staff training and opportunities to take part in funded digital promotions. However, this figure falls to 14% for authorities without UKOnline membership centre libraries.

¹⁷ Management Information Data from UKOnline that has been shared with MLA suggest that 2,200 of the 3,000 UKOnline centres that are registered as UKOnline membership centres as libraries.

Number of public library services using myguide software

Half (53%) of library authorities use myguide software to support people to get online. However, one in five (21%) are aware of myguide software but do not currently use it. When asked why myguide was not used, the most common three responses are: non-awareness of the product (24%); followed by a preference for using alternative packages, e.g. BBC Webwise (21%); and that the library workforce does not have the capacity to undergo training (18%).

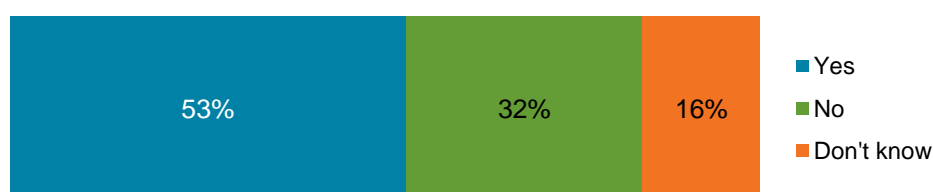


Figure 16: Percentage of library authorities that use myguide software in at least one library service point
Base = 108 (Missing = 4)

Use of myguide in individual library authorities appears to be related to the size of the Library Authority as measured by the number of library service points. Figure 17 shows that larger library authorities are more likely to use my guide than smaller authorities.

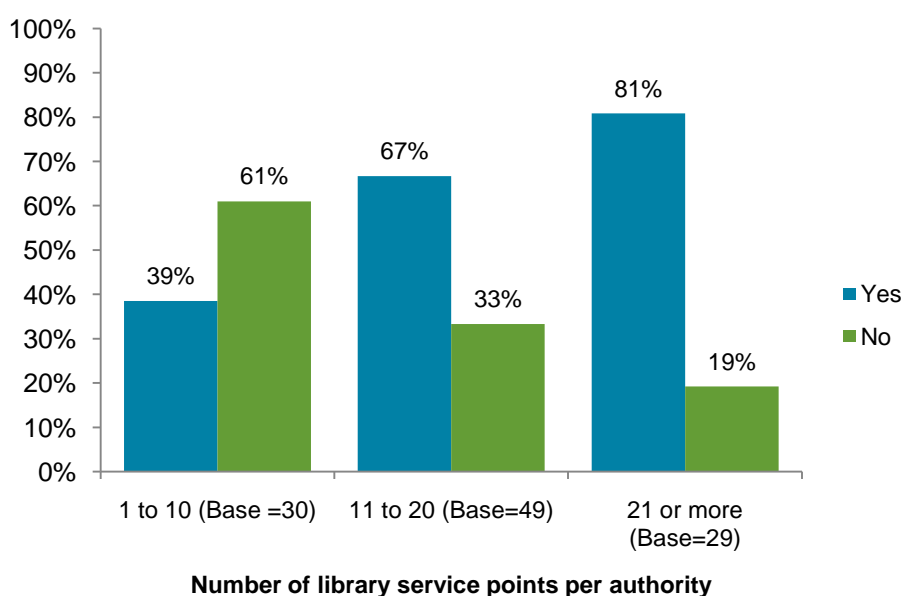


Figure 17: Use of myguide based on size of library authority

Participation in Get Online Day

Three in ten (29%) English Library Authorities have already participated in 'Get Online Day' and a further two-thirds (67%) would be interested in taking part in the future.

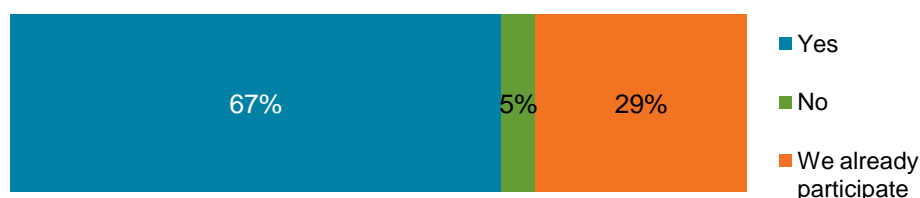


Figure 18: Library authority interest in taking part in 'Get Online Day'
Base = 108 (Missing = 4)

Digital training of library staff

Nearly three-quarters (72%) of library authorities report that their frontline library staff have received digital training since receiving their European Computer Driving License (ECDL) in 2001.



Figure 19: Has digital training been received by frontline library staff in individual library authorities since receiving the ECDL in 2001
Base = 100 (Missing = 12)

Nearly half (46%) of library authorities deliver training in digital skills to new staff and volunteers who help people get online. Over one-quarter (27%) of library authorities require new starters to have the equivalent of the ECDL so that they are equipped to support people to get online as part of their core job role.

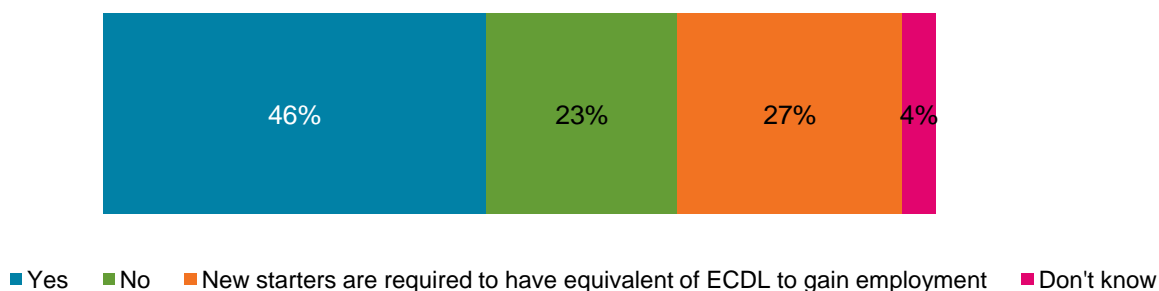


Figure 20: Does the library authority provide training in digital skills to new starters and volunteers who will be responsible for supporting people online.
Base = 100 (Missing = 12)

Four-fifths (80%) of library authorities have received funding to train their frontline library staff in digital skills from their local authority. Only 13% of library authorities have received funding for digital training of library staff from UKOnline. One in six (16%) of library authorities with service points registered as UKOnline membership centres have received funding for digital training of frontline library staff from UKOnline.

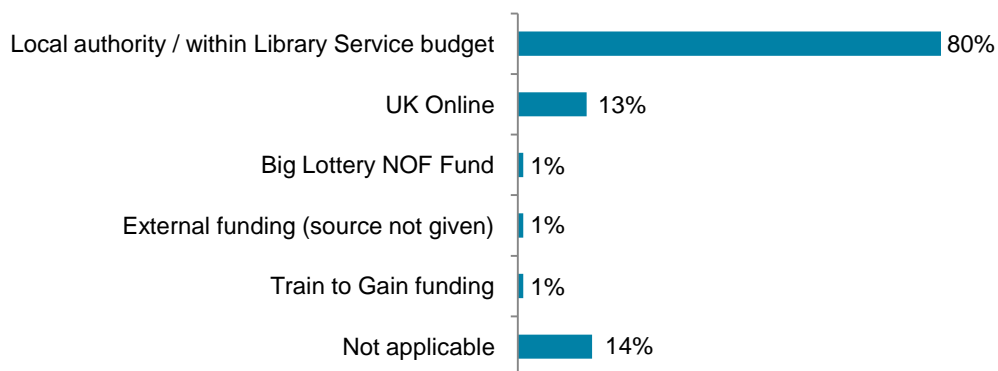


Figure 21: Where local authorities access funding for training in digital skills for their staff
Base = 100 (Missing = 12)

E-services offered by public libraries

Library authorities collect a range of data on their online services including: online renewals (96%); website hits (91%); online reservations (91%); and online information (68%).

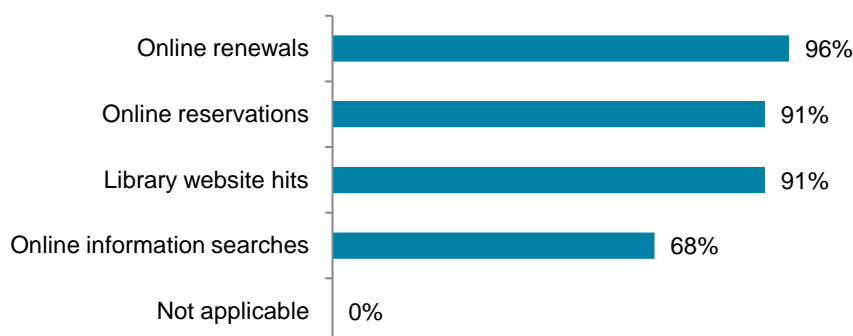


Figure 22: Library Online Services that individual library authorities collect data on
Base = 99 (Missing = 13)

Over four-fifths (86%) of library authorities provide access to social networking sites with a further 81% providing access to e-information on health and well being.

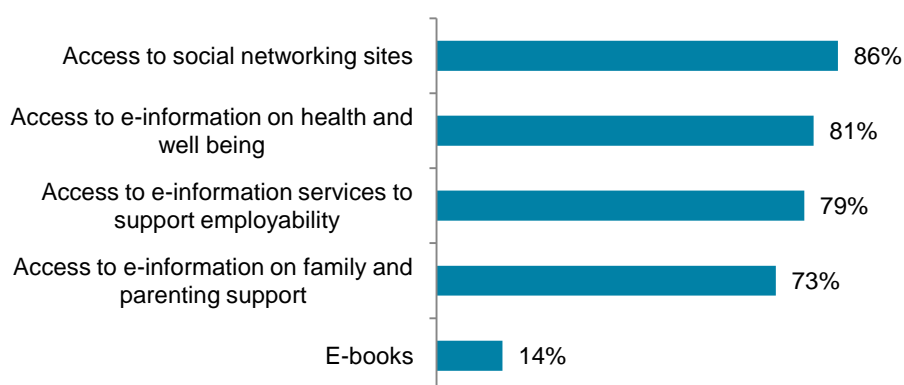


Figure 23: Digital services available in individual library authorities
Base = 99 (Missing = 13)

When asked what motivates library users to access the internet in the library setting, nine in ten (89%) English Library Authorities said 'to send email' and six in ten (60%) said to 'receive email.' Other popular responses include 'to access a social networking site' (41%) and 'to research a family tree' (41%). Using the internet to find employment, i.e. job search activities (35%) and writing CVs (28%) were also mentioned with frequency.

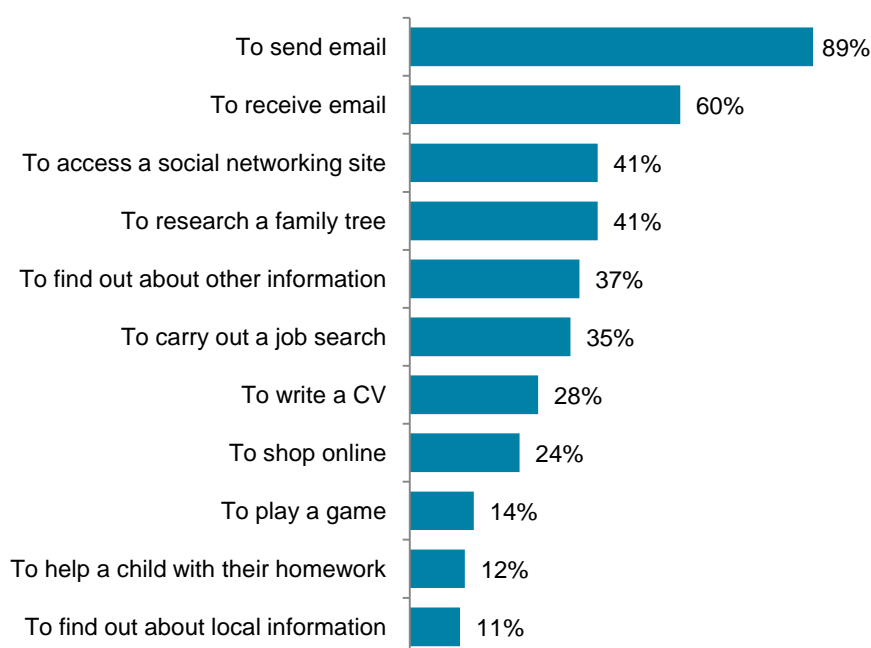


Figure 24: What library authorities believe motivates people to get online in a library
Base = 99 (Missing = 13)

Wider support for the digital agenda

Towards the end of the survey, library authorities were asked an open ended question about how they are supporting the digital agenda. Whilst many respondents re-iterate the types of support that the prompted survey questions ask about, i.e. access to digital technology and supported access and training provided by library staff, volunteers and third parties, the following percentages of library authorities are offering the following:

- 22% are offering the space for users to undertake self-study, e.g. UKOnline and BBC Webwise;
- 8% are offering IT taster sessions as a precursor to formal supported access;
- 8% are offering e-books;
- 8% are investing in self-service technologies including RFID, online catalogues, renewals and reservations;
- 8% are developing strategic partnerships (mainly within their local authority) to develop digital provision in conjunction with a range of community groups;
- 8% have invested in upgrading hardware and software;
- 6% are actively targeting digitally excluded citizens for supported access;
- 6% think that the library offers a welcoming and non-traditional learning space that encourages customers to access digital training.

Library authorities were also asked to describe their future plans to develop digital library services and other digital innovations. Six in ten (61%) plan to introduce more downloadable content, e.g. e-books, CDs and DVDs into the library catalogue. Other plans revolve around improving services for customers, e.g. installation of Wi-Fi (19%); delivering further training in the library (15%); self-service technologies (14%); and making community information available online (10%). Library authorities are also thinking about how these services can be most effectively marketed by promoting library services via social networking sites (15%); further developing the library website (12%) and targeting training and support at digitally excluded groups (8%).

“We want to develop public access Wi-Fi in our libraries, develop our presence in social networking and explore the e-book options. We are using our Community Information Database to support the authority's Transforming Social Care agenda in relation to information and are also looking into the potential for effective interaction on Digital TV for the service.” (Head of Service).

“Digital library services are a key service priority and all our development plans are around digital inclusion with a particular emphasis on creative media.” (Head of Service).

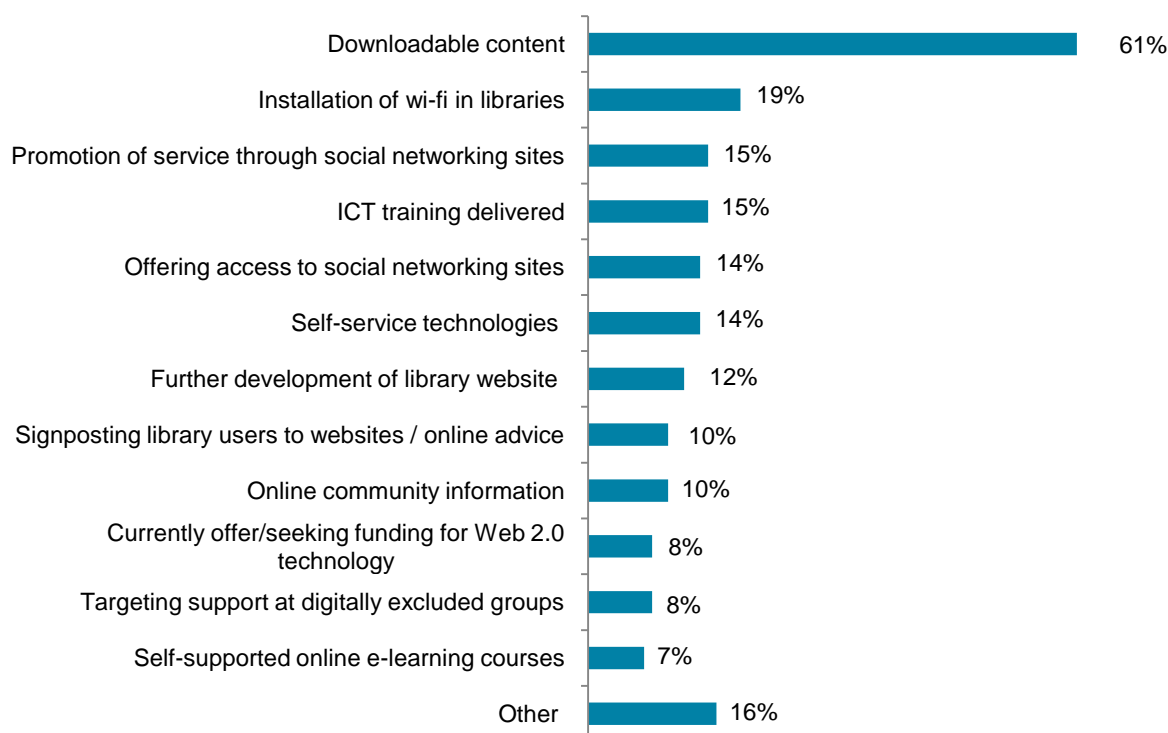


Figure 25: Please provide information about any future plans you have to develop digital library services or other digital innovations
Base = 99 (Missing = 13)

4 Conclusions

The research findings demonstrate that libraries are a key delivery mechanism with a role to play in executing the national plan for digital participation. Public libraries are well placed to support future priorities including Online Basics, Smarter Government and the Pass It On Campaign.

Libraries provide the public with free internet access and help people to get online throughout its network of 3,000 public library service points. Libraries offer choice about when this support can be accessed, opening on weekday evenings and at weekends.

Libraries offer a mix of supported access to get people online and in developing digital skills including support from frontline library staff, volunteers and third party organisations e.g. WEA and local training providers. Frontline library workers are the core resource in the delivery of support to get people online in the library setting. English Library Authorities use frontline library staff to deliver both one-to-one and group sessions, many of these targeted at older people.

In addition to support from library staff, some English Library Authorities provide help for older people to get online through organisations that specialise in supporting older people, e.g. Age Concern and Partnerships for Older People (POPP). Other library authorities reach disadvantaged groups by providing an outreach service, i.e. sending trained frontline library staff to community venues to offer guided access and support.

A high proportion of local authorities report that frontline library staff members have been trained in digital skills. The majority of funding for training comes from local authorities. Only one in six library authorities with UKOnline membership centres have received training from UKOnline.

There is a high level of awareness about UKOnline membership centres and myguide software, but a number of Library Authorities do not have any library service points registered as UKOnline membership centres and approximately 50% of Library Authorities do not use myguide. The reasons given for not using myguide include: non-awareness; use of alternative software packages, including those developed in-house by library services or the BBC, and that earlier versions of myguide are considered to be less comprehensive than alternative packages.

Libraries are also continuing to support the employability agenda through their digital services, offering services such as writing CVs and online job search activities.

The digital participation offer available from public libraries, i.e. the extent of the free internet service and support for people to get online and develop digital skills is variable from library service to library service. However, the data analysis did not reveal any significant differences by region, size of the English Library Authority, or UKOnline membership centre status.

5 Next Steps

The research findings demonstrate that libraries are contributing to digital participation and are well placed to support the drive to engage priority groups who are currently digitally excluded. The following next steps are recommended for the MLA in developing this offer:

- Increase awareness of public libraries' current contribution and future potential role amongst strategic partners through dissemination of this research. Ensure that the role of public libraries in supporting digital participation is fully recognised in the national plan for digital participation.
- Work with BIS, UKOnline and other key stakeholders to identify how the public library element of the UKOnline network can be further developed to reach its full potential to promote digital inclusion and participation.
- Ensure that the public library network is clear about its role in reducing the digital divide – including marketing services via offline and online media to maximise digital inclusion and targeting of priority groups.
- Explore through further research the way in which services are organised within the English Library Authority in order to identify where provision is focussed (central libraries, smaller libraries etc).
- Encourage the library sector to strengthen links with organisations with specialist support expertise (including agencies that work with older people, unemployed people and other disadvantaged groups) to increase levels of specialist support people can receive in libraries.
- Work with strategic and delivery partners to explore future funding and training opportunities.
- Consider how the home library service could develop a digital inclusion element to ensure that older people with limited mobility are not excluded from participation.
- Explore through further research the level of demand for digital services in libraries i.e. how library users interact with digital services (on and off library sites); frequency of use; services accessed; perceptions of services accessed; and future requirements.

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