

# Consultation for the Modernisation Review of Libraries

DCMS

CFE submission

January 2010

- 1 CFE is pleased to submit a response to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport for their consultation for the Modernisation Review of Libraries.
- 2 CFE are research and consultancy specialists in employment and skills. We have been providing our expert services to public and private sector clients for over twelve years. We re-invest our profits to fund innovative research projects and our Policy Insight series. With over 35 dedicated staff, we work on behalf of government departments and agencies, local authorities, colleges, universities and employers. Our experience and unique understanding of the local, regional and national policy landscape enables us to deliver services that are innovative, practical and responsive to the needs of our customers.
- 3 Our response is informed by our research in the library sector, including research for the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA).
- 4 CFE's reports which are referenced in this response can be found at the following links:
  - Local access to careers information, advice and guidance for employability: Provision through public libraries in the North East of England
  - Volunteering in the cultural sector in the East Midlands
  - Role of public libraries in supporting and promoting digital participation

## National and local leadership

*CFE response to Q3:*

- 5 CFE believes that central government departments and local authorities could use libraries better to communicate initiatives and contribute to other public services. However, our research indicates that this is already happening successfully in many library authorities and that there is potential to build on this.



- 6 Our research shows that libraries are contributing to and have the potential to contribute to a range of initiatives and services which aim to increase people's skills, overall employability and digital inclusion. Libraries contribute to this through: signposting to public services such as Nextstep, WEA and Age Concern; providing a delivery location for public services; and actual delivery of support and training.
- 7 However, central government departments and local authorities could do more through libraries to communicate initiatives and contribute to other services. In particular for initiatives and services targeted at 'hard to reach groups'.
- 8 Libraries' particular strength is as a gateway to engaging 'hard to reach' groups that may be some distance from the labour market or learning opportunities. A survey undertaken by CFE<sup>1</sup> of over 3,000 library users in 38 library locations in the North East showed that two thirds (61%) of all library users who spoke with our interviewers were in employability target groups.<sup>2</sup>
- 9 Libraries are an effective mechanism to engage with these hard to reach groups due to their reputation as neutral, comfortable spaces. When asked why they had accessed, or would like to access Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) support in libraries, respondents identified primarily environmental factors, including proximity to their homes/communities and a relaxed atmosphere. However, more should be done to increase the declining number of library users to ensure this group continue to be engaged so libraries can continue contributing to initiatives and services.

## What services should be made available to users?

*CFE's response to Q11:*

- 10 Libraries are currently expanding their appeal and accessibility to users by offering a range of services that are not considered 'traditional' library functions. For example, CFE's research has found that libraries are providing IAG support to library users in employability target groups. One in five library users had used the library to access IAG about education, training or work. A further third (32%) of library users had not accessed IAG from a library but expressed an interest in using this service in the future. Libraries are also a key delivery point for learning and training courses, 5% of respondents to our 2008 survey had accessed courses delivered within the library. However, this number has the potential to increase if more users were engaged by libraries.

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<sup>1</sup> Ravenhall, M, Peck, L, Howe, P, & Davies, E (2008). *Local access to careers information, advice and guidance for employability: Provision through public libraries in the North East of England*. Leicester: CFE

<sup>2</sup> Aged 17-64, in socio-economic groups C1, C2, D, E, with an educational attainment of up to and including Level 3.

- 11 Many library authorities engage with external partners in order to provide services which contribute to national and local priorities. The utilisation of partners allows libraries to provide a wider range of services within constrained budgets by utilising partners' existing expertise rather than expanding levels of staffing or investing in staff training. For example many libraries have regular sessions where nextstep advisers are available to meet users to discuss career and learning opportunities. These partnerships allow other public services to take advantage of the presence of their target groups in the library.
- 12 Some libraries widen their offer by investing in training their staff and accessing alternative public funding for the support they provide. For example, Durham Library Service trained staff in NVQs for advice and guidance and drew additional funding from the North East nextstep prime contractor to develop their own internal IAG model.
- 13 Research should be undertaken with library authorities, library users and a range of public services to understand:
  - What wider services are currently available in libraries?
  - What wider services would library users like to access from libraries?
  - How can libraries deliver these services (either through increase of staff skills or partnerships with other agencies)?

## Digital

### *CFE response to Q7:*

- 14 Library authorities have been continually responding to changes in technology and library user expectations through increasing their own technical capabilities and resources and by supporting their users to access the internet.
- 15 The library sector is already making a significant contribution to the Digital Inclusion agenda in a variety of ways, including: providing internet access through 'The People's Network' which offers internet enabled computers in every public library; participation with UKOnline - all libraries are UKOnline centres and 2,000 are UKOnline membership centres because of their role in supporting people to get online; and MLA's membership of the consortium developing the national plan for digital participation to ensure that the role of the public library service in supporting the delivery of this plan is fully recognised.
- 16 The support provided by libraries is for the most part a free service. Research undertaken by CFE and MLA<sup>3</sup> with 112 of the 152 library authorities shows that 79% of library authorities provide free internet access with the remainder

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<sup>3</sup> CFE & MLA (2010). *Role of libraries in supporting and promoting digital participation*. London: MLA

providing mostly low cost internet access (only 3% of library services charge more than £2.00 an hour).

- 17 Library authorities also offer support (both one-to-one and in groups) to get people online. Nearly all library authorities (91%) provide supported access to help all library customers get online and improve their digital skills. Specific digital support has been developed in libraries for groups that are considered most likely to be digitally excluded including: older adults and unemployed people.<sup>4</sup> Over three-quarters (76%) of library authorities say they provide digital support specifically for older adults and over four-fifths (79%) of library authorities provide support to help unemployed people get online.
- 18 This access and support is available during public library opening hours which includes weekdays, week day evenings and weekends; 98% of library authorities have service points open on weekday evenings and at the weekend.

*CFE response to Q8:*

- 19 CFE welcomes the consultation document's emphasis on the need for libraries to embrace new digital technologies. Our research demonstrates that library authorities are increasingly taking advantage of such technology, including online renewals (96%) and online reservations (91%), in order to widen their offer. However, libraries need to ensure that by embracing these technologies they are not marginalising some of their core customers who may be digitally excluded.
- 20 As our research demonstrates, libraries currently offer support to these groups to access the internet, however, libraries need to continue to engage with these groups in order to ensure they receive the training they need to take advantage of new ways in which to access library services.

## Training, leadership and services for staff

*CFE response to Q18:*

- 21 Library staff already have an increasingly diverse skill-set from what is considered as 'traditional librarianship'. However, skills have primarily been developed as a result of the changing services that individual library authorities offer.
- 22 Our research has identified that nearly half (46%) of library authorities have delivered training to new starters and volunteers who support people to get online. Moreover, 27% of library authorities require new starters to have the equivalent of the European Computer Driving License (ECDL).

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<sup>4</sup> Individuals without home or workplace access to the computers and the internet are often described as the 'digitally excluded'. This group are more likely to be older people and those from disadvantaged groups, including the unemployed.

