



department for  
**culture, media  
and sport**

# Summary of Responses to the Consultation on the Modernisation Review of Public Libraries

March 2010

Our aim is to improve the quality of life for all through cultural and sporting activities, support the pursuit of excellence, and champion the tourism, creative and leisure industries.

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# Chapter 1: Background

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On 1 December 2009 DCMS launched a consultation seeking the views of a wide range of people on the future of public library services in England. Publication of the consultation document (*Empower, Inform, Enrich – the modernisation review of public libraries: a consultation document*) continued the Library Service Modernisation Review which Andy Burnham, the former Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport launched in October 2008.

This document provides a summary of the issues raised during the consultation and the Government's recommendations. Fuller recommendations are published in *The Modernisation Review of Public Libraries: a Policy Statement*.

The consultation document set out five challenges for Public Libraries:

1. How can we reverse the current trend of decline in library usage and grow the numbers using the library service?
2. How can the library service respond to limited public resource and economic pressures?
3. How can all libraries respond to a 24/7 culture and to changing expectations of people who want immediate access to information?
4. How can all libraries grasp the opportunities presented by digitisation?
5. How can the library service demonstrate to citizens, commentators and politicians that they are still relevant and vital?

and sought opinions from stakeholders about these challenges by asking 23 questions on issues including:

- the role for libraries
- national & local leadership
- organisation structures, governance & funding
- digital services
- what services should be available to users
- commercial activities & partnerships
- location & buildings
- training, leadership & services for staff
- how should we monitor library performance and what should we aspire to

The consultation document was printed and distributed to organisations and bodies with an interest in libraries. It was also published on the DCMS website and over 100 organisations were notified by email, resulting in 154 responses.

The Department would like to thank those individuals and organisations that responded to this consultation. Responses from organisations can be viewed in their entirety on the DCMS website at [http://www.dcms.gov.uk/reference\\_library/consultations/6752.aspx](http://www.dcms.gov.uk/reference_library/consultations/6752.aspx).

## Chapter 2: Summary of Responses

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**Q1: Does every library authority have to share a common purpose? Are these purposes complementary and relevant? Are some more important than others? Are there other purposes we should consider?**

The majority of respondents to this question (and around 80% of local government respondents) felt that sharing a common purpose or vision was important, with most agreeing that this should be a national service but delivered locally to ensure 'the local offer' can be tailored to the needs of the local community in consultation with them. Respondents agreed that the purposes outlined in the consultation document were broadly correct.

**Q2: Do you think the current roles as defined for central and local government are still appropriate? Is the 1964 legislative framework still appropriate or does it need review? If so what changes would you like to see? Is there any value in central government having a more direct role in setting the vision and objectives for the library service or is the service better managed entirely at local level.**

While acknowledging that the Public Libraries & Museums Act 1964 is outdated and ought to reflect better the role of libraries in today's society, respondents felt that central government should set the national vision for a continuing statutory library service to ensure all citizens have access to a quality library provision. Respondents called for more clarity around the roles of central and local government and some felt the current model of 151 library authorities was inefficient.

**Q3: Could (a) central government departments, and (b) local authorities better use the public library service to communicate initiatives and contribute to other public services? Do you have any ideas on how this might work?**

Around a quarter of respondents to this question felt library services already do communicate initiatives and contribute to other public services. Examples showing how libraries are already 'plugged in' to government priorities around health & wellbeing and informal adult learning were provided. However, it was generally agreed that central

and local government could better use them to do so. Some respondents felt this would compromise libraries' neutrality/impartiality.

**Q4: Are there benefits in changing the structures in government? Are there benefits in changing the structures or roles of the public bodies? Is there a value in a greater central function around particular issues? Eg Marketing and publicity, digital services? Do you think a Library Development Agency is a good idea? Do you see any benefit in establishing national library service delivered locally, as set out in Margaret Hodge's essay?**

In order to simplify relations between central and local government the majority of respondents called for one body responsible for library funding and policy. While a number reported that MLA has taken a more strategic approach to libraries recently, most (89%) supported the idea of a Library Development Agency which could advocate for libraries more effectively and co-ordinate marketing activity more cost efficiently.

**Q5: What other governance models might be suitable for library services or are there barriers to introducing these models? For instance: What could libraries learn from other sectors including the private sector? Would other models of delivery and funding - eg the academy model for schools or Foundation Trusts for hospitals - be appropriate for library services?**

While the majority of respondents to this question felt that other models of delivery and funding would be appropriate for library services, many commented that there would need to be accountability to the local authority and that local circumstances would dictate which model would be most appropriate. Trusts were considered more favourably than academy models but a number of respondents were not convinced that either model was proven to be more successful than existing arrangements. Other models proposed included subscription, co-operatives/collectives and more regional delivery of library services with one library authority commissioned by its neighbours to provide services. A number of respondents felt the MLA could explore the opportunities offered by trusts and private companies and issue guidance to the sector.

**Q6: How can we prioritise investment in libraries, especially at a time of financial constraints? You may like to consider: How we might ensure that all libraries are able to develop successful funding models which are based on a diversity of funding streams? How could we help open new and more revenue streams for libraries? What could libraries learn from other sectors? How do we effectively spread best practice?**

Many respondents suggested that library funding should be maintained during a recession. There was wide recognition that communicating the

impact and benefits of library use would increase partnership and funding opportunities and have a positive effect on participation.

**Q7: What is the future of library services in a digital environment? What changes do you envisage as a result of changes in technology over the next 5-10 years? You might like to consider: How can we use the digital revolution to extend access to library resources? Should virtual lending [ie lending downloads to the home via the internet] be the future of the public library service either generally or in some areas? What challenges would virtual lending present? What digital content should libraries provide? For example should all libraries make subscription online services available to users? Should this be a free service? Web 2.0 enables people and communities to contribute web content. Do you think that there is a role for libraries in Web 2.0? If so, what? Is there other content or technology which you think should be guaranteed to users? How can libraries support the Digital Inclusion agenda? What are some of the potential obstacles to greater digital engagement within libraries, and how might these be overcome? What other opportunities does new technology present for libraries? Do you have ideas for innovative ways in which new technology could be applied in local libraries?**

The majority of respondents believed that providing digital services would be a crucial aspect of library services in the future. The most commonly cited reason for this was the role that libraries, as free, neutral public spaces, can play in making digital technology available to the digitally excluded supported by knowledgeable and trained staff. 92% of those that answered the question thought that there was a role for Web 2.0, particularly as a way of reaching new audiences (especially the 16-24 age group). Library use of Flickr, Facebook, Twitter and blogs was advocated by many.

E-book lending was felt to be a logical next step (with some respondents referring to potential loan of e-readers too) and free loan of e-books was widely felt to be the right approach to take. E-book lending was considered to be likely to have an impact on the physical estate – with perhaps less space needed for physical stock as digital availability increases. Other respondents referred to the potential loss of income from fines (as e-book ‘loans’ simply ‘expire’ on their due date). Many responses referred to the existing electronic subscription deals nationally negotiated by MLA and a number of respondents felt that there is potential for efficiencies through national negotiation of e-book subscriptions too.

Concern was expressed that successful digital services are dependent on funding to upgrade hardware and to train and employ staff to support this new type of work. Some respondents questioned the wisdom of launching relatively new and untested services (such as e-books).

The commonly held opinion was that libraries should provide internet access without charge as doing so could be an obstacle to engagement. Similarly speed of the internet connection was felt to be an obstacle, with

a number of respondents advocating the faster broadband available by moving to JANET. Free Wi-Fi was also mentioned regularly in responses.

Virtual reading groups, homework clubs, provision of classes to support people's use of the technology were all referred to as services that could or should be offered.

**Q8: How can we spread best practice and maximise the opportunities presented by digital technology? Self service and return technology is intended to free up library staff to deal with more complex customer enquiries. Should this technology be available in all libraries?**

Implementation of technology such as Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) was noted as being expensive and most respondents recognised that the local circumstances would dictate whether or not it should be implemented. Benefits of more integrated systems and increased consortia agreements (beyond cash savings) were widely recognised – though respondents were clear that this technology should be introduced in consultation with the community to improve services to customers and not to save money by reducing staffing costs.

Many respondents felt a national body should be responsible for spreading best practice around the use of national standards, RFID and Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) technology in order to increase economies of scale. Some suggested national introduction of RFID could have significant Invest-to-Save potential.

**Q9: Do Local Authority IT strategies support or impede libraries' digital innovation? Should libraries have a national web presence? Would a national online catalogue covering all public libraries be beneficial?**

With some exceptions, respondents agreed that local authority security concerns can limit what a good library service wants to achieve in terms of both its own library website or the services it wishes to provide to users. 86% of all those that answered the question said that libraries should have a National web presence and the majority favoured a national catalogue as well, though some concern was expressed about resourcing these developments.

**Q10: Are there any services which you consider should be prescribed across all library services or should services be entirely determined at local level? Is there any value in having a clear national 'offer to consumers of the library in the 21st century'. If so which elements would be vital components? Besides hard copy books do you think there are other services which should be free at the point of delivery on a national basis?**

85% of all those who answered the question were in favour of a national offer. Most thought availability of books, information,

newspapers, online access, space for studying, children's services, assistance from staff and Home Delivery Services for housebound people would be appropriately prescribed nationally with local needs dictating additional services to be offered at a local level e.g. services targeted at disadvantaged groups, books in community languages, health and wellbeing agendas and activities. There was also consensus about the desirability of providing free internet access and information resources, free access to a space to study in a safe environment & free support and assistance from knowledgeable and well-trained staff.

**Q11: How can we widen usage and make libraries more accessible to the public? For instance: On what basis should library leaders make decisions about opening hours and location? Should library joining and membership arrangements be simplified across all libraries? Indeed should library membership be national so that citizens can use any library and borrow and return material anywhere. Do you think there are particular services which would encourage more library use? You might wish to consider a universal home delivery service (in addition to the scheme for housebound people), and enabling people to request a book online. How can we ensure that young people who leave full time education remain library users? How can we improve our understanding of the people who use libraries – and of the people who do not – in order to improve services to them? How might library users have a greater voice in decision making?**

Most respondents agreed that decisions about services, opening hours and locations must be based on consultation, research and outreach in the community to assess local needs. Simplified joining arrangements were considered favourably by the majority of respondents who expressed an opinion, as was national membership. Home delivery for all was considered to have potential to increase usage but cost was identified as an issue. Partnership working with schools, third sector specialist providers and youth services was mentioned by a number of respondents as an appropriate way to maintain membership among the 16-24 age group.

**Q12: Do we do enough to market library services? If not, what more could/should be done to promote or explain the benefits of libraries?**

The majority of respondents who commented felt that there was much more that could be done to promote the benefits of libraries to those who do not currently appreciate what libraries offer. One proposal was to create a national web presence for libraries. Others argued that a successful marketing campaign would depend on the audience and the message being delivered.

**Q13: Commercial partnerships through libraries are not common. How might we bring more private funding into the public library service? What commercial activities should we encourage libraries to operate? What benefits do you think these might bring to the library service? Are there any commercial activities which you think are not appropriate for libraries to undertake?**

Advertising, coffee shop concessions and working with booksellers were identified as potential income generators - potentially negotiated at a national level to increase efficiency. Some respondents felt that libraries' neutrality should not be compromised by commercial opportunities and that it would be inappropriate for libraries to form partnerships that could be perceived as being in any way controversial e.g. with fast food outlets. Very few respondents felt increased commercial partnerships would have a positive effect on participation as opposed to income.

**Q14: Where can libraries learn from the commercial sector and what private partnerships can you think of which have been useful for library services? How can we better spread good practice here?**

Respondents suggested that libraries could learn about marketing themselves, display/layout of buildings, targeting customers (using data on customers to encourage use), understanding and adapting quickly to changing customer needs, performance management of staff, procurement, and contract management and noted that they should also learn from the third sector too.

**Q15: What are the circumstances in which a Local Authority would be justified in closing a library?**

Respondents felt the decision to close a library should always be part of an agreed strategy which ensures there is a clear plan for the development of the library service as a whole and that arrangements to cater for the local community through alternative provisions (especially the vulnerable or disadvantaged) have been agreed with them and are in place before the closure. There was agreement that consideration should be given to re-location, co-location or redevelopment and that libraries should not close solely as a cost-cutting measure. When a new building is available to house the library or alternative (and better) provision can be found elsewhere, when the existing location no longer meets the needs of the community in terms on accessibility of the building (especially in relation to disabled users), where the location is not suitable, or when the building is not fit for purpose or its fabric is beyond cost-effective repair, closure of a library may be justified. Some respondents cited low usage as a justification of closure but there was no consensus on this with others seeing low usage as a symptom of a poorly delivered service that could be reversed following further investigation. A number of responses identify web-based services and mobile delivery as an effective alternative to library buildings.

**Q16: When is co-location successful and what factors should LAs consider in making co-location decisions?**

Respondents said co-location works when it brings together complementary services on an equal footing. A small number advocated consideration of the potential difficulties associated with co-locating with schools. Where co-location includes service integration consideration should be given to appropriate training to enable staff to respond positively.

**Q17: What should library leaders consider in making decisions about the make-up of their library service? For instance: What kind of customer information should library leaders have in deciding where to locate libraries? How should Library leaders make decisions about library buildings' accessibility and fitness for purpose? How should the library service be provided in small rural communities? Are there benefits from unstaffed mini-libraries, library machines and self service check out of books? How important is it that libraries should be housed in dedicated buildings?**

Once again, the most important factor in deciding where to locate libraries was a consideration of the needs of the community through effective engagement. Mobile libraries and 'library access points' in community spaces were broadly considered a suitable alternative in some communities to dedicated library buildings.

**Q18: How could we encourage a greater skill mix beyond traditional librarianship in the library service? Do you think library courses have the relevant content and teach the right skills to equip the library workforce? How can we ensure that the library service attracts and nurtures leaders with the ability to drive improvement, engage in partnerships and innovate services? What other skills and/ or qualifications are required to staff a modern library?**

73% of those that commented said that library courses did not have the relevant content or teach the right skills to equip the library workforce. Highly developed 'people', IT, marketing, and entrepreneurial skills, in addition to information-handling skills were considered essential now, and respondents felt Cilip, SCL and MLA should do more to develop skills.

**Q19: Do you think that volunteering is a useful component of the library workforce? How can we ensure that volunteering arrangements are used to best effect?**

Respondents were supportive of the use of volunteers to provide training, to sit on steering boards and to advocate for the service provided that they are suitably trained and supervised, and are not used to replace paid staff.

**Q20: Is it important that libraries remain a statutory obligation for local authorities? What might be the advantages and disadvantages? For instance, would the removal of statute allow greater flexibility for fundraising or different modes of operation currently off limits?**

80% of all respondents in local government thought libraries should remain a statutory obligation (and 60% of all responders). Most felt that without the statutory duty, libraries would be in danger of becoming an easy target for spending cuts and closures, especially in the current economic climate. Lifelong access to free information, books and learning was seen to be a right for every citizen, and that without statutory status, this universal provision would be compromised and this would be particularly damaging for the vulnerable and disadvantaged in society who are most reliant on the service. Most respondents agreed that the statutory obligation has not prevented some authorities from developing different models of operation, and that it is not the legislation that inhibits sourcing other funds.

**Q21: Is the obligation to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service the correct one? Does it need further definition or guidance around what that means or should the interpretation be left to local authorities? For instance, should there be more prescription around opening hours, web presence, service provision, staff skill mix?)**

58% of those that answered the question thought the obligation to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' service was correct. 75% of those that answered the question said that further definition and guidance was needed if the statutory duty is to be meaningful for both authorities and the Secretary of State. However, it was noted that a definition would have to be flexible enough to accommodate local variation in response to local need. Some respondents called for a return to 'library standards'.

**Q22: How should we measure performance? You might like to consider: Is there a need for less, more or different local or national monitoring? Are visits and books borrowed still relevant? What else should we consider and measure when determining the efficiency and effectiveness of our libraries? Would an accreditation scheme for libraries be beneficial or are there other systems which might incentivise libraries to deliver more effectively? Is the Secretary of State's power to intervene still appropriate?**

Nearly all respondents felt changes should be made to the way library performance is measured with many suggesting national standards or benchmarking. While book issues and visits were still felt to be relevant, there was a general desire among respondents for more outcome/impact focused monitoring. Customer satisfaction was also

felt to be an important measure. Of those who expressed an opinion, around 80% of respondents supported an accreditation scheme for libraries. 96% of all those that answered the question thought that the Secretary of State's power to intervene was still appropriate.

**Q23: What research do we need to do to best demonstrate the benefits of the library service to local and national leaders? Who would be best placed to initiate this research?**

A number of respondents felt that there is already plenty of good evidence available to convince people about the benefits of library services. However, a large number of respondents mentioned the need for longitudinal research into impact and there was general agreement that any research should be centrally coordinated.

## Chapter 3: Government Response and Next Steps

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The policy document which accompanies this summary of responses addresses a sixth challenge emerging from the consultation and discussions with stakeholders: that despite some world class libraries, there continue to be some library authorities in England which are not performing effectively. The document therefore addresses the five challenges referred to in the introduction above and an additional challenge: to drive up the quality of all library services to the level of the best. Government's recommendations for addressing these six challenges are presented in the policy document and summarised below.

### 1. Aim: to drive the quality of all library services up to the level of the best

Government believes that the community should be at the heart of the library service and recommends that all library authorities introduce a **Library Offer to the Public** to act as best practice guidance on how to deliver a 'comprehensive service' as required by the Public Libraries & Museums Act 1964. The Library Offer will be made up of a 'core offer' - services which Government believes should be offered across all library authorities, and a 'local offer' - services which are shaped and provided at local level.

Following on from the Sue Charteris inquiry into the library services in the Wirral the Government issues, in the policy document, **best practice guidance on processes of engagement and consultation** which will sit alongside the Library Offer. This will support library authorities in delivering their statutory obligations. Although not intending to use it very often, the Government will **amend the secondary legislation under which library inquiries** are conducted in order to simplify the inquiry process.

The Government is minded to establish a **strategic body for the library sector** as a means of providing a stronger national voice for libraries and improving leadership and development of the sector. The Government will consider bringing together the functions of three different organisations – the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA), the Advisory Council on Libraries and the Registrar of Public Lending Right. The Government believes that any such body should be an improvement and development agency and have a statutory advisory function, with the formal power to advise the Secretary of State on his role under the 1964 Act. The Government will initiate a **business case** in consultation with stakeholders and will publish more detail

as part of the broader review of arms length bodies, including an assessment of the capability of the MLA to undertake that role alongside its other functions, including those for museums and archives.

As part of its responsibilities the strategic body for libraries will devise and run a **voluntary peer review and accreditation programmes** for public library services based on similar models in the museum, tourism and sports sectors.

## **2. Aim: to reverse the trend of decline in library usage and grow the numbers using the library service**

From April 2011 the Government expects all library services to offer **library membership as an entitlement from birth**. This might be achieved in a number of ways:

- Offering Library membership at the registration of a birth
- Offering Library membership along with child benefits
- Offering library membership with Bookstart packs

**Communicating the Library Offer** to the public, users and non-users, will be an important task, giving people guarantees of high quality public services. The Government therefore recommends that all library authorities make their Library Offer to the public clear and visible to all the citizens in the area – on their website, in library buildings and through any other local marketing opportunities.

The Library Review process identified the importance of engaging in outreach activities to attract new members and Government therefore recommends all library authorities should consider how they are **attracting new members**, through seeking greater community engagement and through community outreach initiatives. The Government also expects library services to consider how they are providing an **accessible service to the public** including consideration of opening hours, building infrastructure and partnership and co-locating services.

## **3. Aim: that the library service is able to respond to limited public resource and economic pressures**

There is a growing mixed economy of delivery models and governance across library authorities. The Government believes that the current model of 151 library authorities is unsustainable in the current economic climate. Library authorities will need to consider innovative ways to generate improvements and efficiencies through **shared services, partnership working, new delivery models and new governance arrangements**.

Rather than rationing resources by departmental silos, local government is moving towards **commissioning of services** according to their contribution to local priorities. All library services should consider how they can use this model to position themselves as partners of choice and offer services of recognised value in the pursuit of local policy goals.

The Government recognises that many library authorities have worked hard to maximise their efficiencies in the **supply chain**. It is vital that all libraries do so through examining Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) and Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) opportunities.

Local authorities need not always look to fund service improvements through local resources or tax rises. New opportunities can be created, as many libraries are already doing, by exploring innovative revenue streams, sponsorship and **commercial partnerships**.

Beyond the opportunities for commercial partnerships and business sponsorship, public libraries could do much more to promote **philanthropy** and to benefit from the generosity of private donors across society. The strategic body for libraries will explore the opportunities for developing philanthropic giving to the public library service.

#### **4. Aim: to ensure that all libraries respond to a 24/7 culture and respond to the changing expectations of people who want immediate access to information**

Library services need a **flexible and user responsive workforce** to offer the level of **customer experience** that the public want, but while there is excellent best practice, some services remain unable to meet this challenge. Training and development, recruitment, leadership, working effectively as a strategic partner, and the role of volunteers are key to providing the 21<sup>st</sup> century library service.

#### **5. Aim: that all libraries grasp the opportunities presented by digitisation**

The Government believes libraries are at the heart of digital inclusion. Access to the internet is now seen as a right for all citizens. As more public services move online, there are significant opportunities for budget saving and, as a consequence local authorities must ensure that everyone can access those digital public services. Libraries are a vital component in guaranteeing that universal access. **The Government expects that from April 2011 all library services will provide free internet access to users as part of their Library Offer to the public.** Government

also recommends that **all library services provide support and advice for users wanting to get online** as part of their Library Offer to the public.

The Government wishes to encourage library authorities and library users to utilise new and exciting opportunities around **digital lending of e-books** and will amend legislation to **prevent libraries from charging for e-books** of any sort including remotely.

The Government recommends that library authorities use digital technologies to enhance and complement their existing offer.

## **6. Aim: to demonstrate to citizens, commentators and politicians that libraries are still relevant and vital**

Modern library services do not operate independently but work with a broad range of public, private and third sector partners and in many areas the library is a “shop window” for local public services. The Government recommends **all library authorities consider connections to local policy priorities**, innovate around their service provisions to align the libraries’ work with local needs

Many of the consultation responses raised concerns about the quality of the **data** on libraries currently being used. **From 2011 the DCMS Taking Part Survey will include visits to libraries for paid work or academic study**. Also from 2011 the DCMS Taking Part Survey will include questions from our Omnibus survey to develop an ongoing picture about what people use libraries for and what library services might be attractive to non-users.

Stakeholders identified the importance of **measuring the impact on libraries library users**. **A consortium of partners** with a research interest (universities, third sector bodies etc) will come together to develop a cross sectoral approach to measuring impact.





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