

DEPARTMENT FOR CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT



**“NEW LIBRARY:
THE PEOPLE’S NETWORK”
THE GOVERNMENT’S RESPONSE**

*Presented to Parliament by the
Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport
by Command of Her Majesty
April 1998*

FOREWORD

Our public library system is one of our most important and respected public services, offering levels of customer usage, satisfaction and brand loyalty that most private sector organisations can only dream about. Library membership spans all ages and social groups. Nearly 60% of adults are members of a public library; there are around 400 million library visits every year; and nearly 10 million people use a library at least once a fortnight. The library is the most frequently used local service, and is often the main point of contact between local authorities and the communities they serve.

Libraries contribute to four of this Government's most important policy objectives. They underpin *education*, providing essential support for school children, students, and lifelong learners; they enhance *public access* to the world's storehouse of knowledge and information; they promote *social inclusion*, by helping to bridge the gap between those who can afford access to information and those who can't; and, increasingly, they have a role to play in the *modernisation* and delivery of public services.

A nationwide public libraries IT network, linked to the National Grid for Learning, will help deliver these objectives. Libraries will continue, quite rightly, to focus on their core book lending service; but IT provides them with new opportunities to prosper and grow. As a signal of our belief in the library service, and in the significance of the public libraries IT network, we intend that, where practicable, every public library should be connected to the National Grid for Learning by 2002.

The proposals set out in this document will allow libraries to make the "IT shift" necessary for this change to take place. The key to success lies in the creation of partnerships between the private sector, local authorities and Government. The private sector will be attracted by the vast new educational market being created by the National Grid for Learning. New opportunities for business are developing in the areas of content creation, training and the provision of network infrastructure. We are therefore establishing a process which will encourage the private sector to invest in this. We will support this task by providing Lottery funds to re-skill library staff and to create a quarry of nationally available digital information, and by providing programme funds to pump-prime the development of the network infrastructure.

The Library and Information Commission's (LIC) "New Library" report acted as the catalyst for these changes. The LIC will continue to play a major role in the changes that are to come. The work of their Implementation Committee will play a vital part in establishing the development framework for the network. This work will be for real; the development of the network will depend upon it. As with "New Library", their remit will be UK-wide.

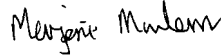
Our aims and ambitions for the libraries network are challenging. To meet these, library authorities and libraries will need to plan for the managerial challenges ahead. Developing the network will not be easy; but the prize of a reinvigorated public library service will make the journey worthwhile.



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INTRODUCTION

1. In February 1997 the Government asked the Library and Information Commission (LIC) to consider how, collectively, public libraries can respond to the challenge presented by the development of new information and communications technology. The Commission subsequently established a working group to consider this issue. Their terms of reference can be found at Annex A.

2. In October 1997 the Commission published their conclusions in a report entitled "New Library: The People's Network". This was widely welcomed by the library community and others as providing a carefully considered and constructive framework for the development of a public library IT network. The report recommended that the Government should develop the network by:

- (i) creating a UK 'backbone' infrastructure to link individual public library networks;
- (ii) encouraging library authorities to upgrade local library networks to a common UK standard on a shared-funding basis;
- (iii) developing appropriate partnerships between the public and private sectors to implement the networking plan;
- (iv) making a funding commitment which will encourage others to invest in the network;
- (v) developing a training strategy for the 27,000 employees in the public library sector, and to develop new training resources to be delivered over the network;
- (vi) developing new content and services to be delivered over the network;
- (vii) establishing a development agency - the Public Library Networking Agency - to energise and coordinate UK-wide networking developments; and
- (viii) establishing a central coordinating mechanism which brings together appropriate government departments and regulatory bodies.

This paper provides the Government's strategic response to these recommendations.

3. The LIC's report raises a large number of complex issues which relate closely to a range of important Information Technology-based initiatives including the National Grid for Learning, the University for Industry, government.direct and IT for All. A number of detailed financial, technical and legal issues remain to be resolved. Further work will be undertaken on these during the course of this year. However, the Government wishes to maintain the momentum created by the LIC's report, and to encourage local authorities and the private sector to consider the part they can play in delivering a comprehensive public libraries IT network. The Government has therefore decided to issue its strategic response to the LIC's proposals now, in order to signal its commitment to the public libraries

IT network and to provide a general indication of the direction in which central government, local authorities and the private sector will need to plan in order to turn the network into reality.

The Information Age

4. The Government recognises that the proposed public libraries network will play a central role in delivering its wider objectives for the role of information technology in society. The Prime Minister has today published on the Internet a paper entitled “Our Information Age”. This sets out the strategy and policy objectives needed to allow Britain to increase its prosperity and quality of life through new and pioneering uses of information and communication technologies. The document provides the foundation and framework for ensuring that Britain seizes the opportunities provided by these new technologies. A public libraries IT network is an integral part of this vision and will play a leading role in delivering the Government’s objectives for the Information Age.

The National Grid for Learning

5. The UK’s successful leadership of the Information Age depends upon the development of the highest possible standards in education and lifelong learning. Improving basic standards of literacy, numeracy, motivation and learning skills will help to underpin the innovation and creativity on which our success will depend. The Government aims to harness the Internet for education, to ensure that it is not just about commerce and entertainment, but contributes to a true National Grid for Learning – as set out in “Connecting the Learning Society”⁽¹⁾. The Grid will connect schools and other public institutions, like libraries and museums, to the Internet and therefore to each other and to the home. But these wires will only come to life with people trained to use them, and content to make them useful.

6. Libraries will be key to this. Once libraries are connected to the Grid, they will become a place where people can go and access the Internet. Once librarians are trained, they will become guides for people who are taking their first steps with these new technologies. Libraries won’t be limited to the stock they can put on their shelves. They will become even more well equipped to deliver education and learning in its broadest sense.

7. “Our Information Age” also identifies three other areas where the public libraries network will help develop the Information Society. These are:

- (i) through the IT for All programme;
- (ii) through the delivery of Government services to members of the public; and
- (iii) through the University for Industry (UfI).

8. The IT for All programme provides a network of sites designed to familiarise members of the public with new information and communication technology by giving them hands-on experience in

(1) Connecting the Learning Society: National Grid for Learning; The Government’s Consultation Paper, DfEE 1997.

a friendly and helpful environment. The Government aims to see a minimum of 4,000 access sites in place by the end of 1998. Some of these will be IT for All learning centres where the public can get a basic introductory training session in IT skills. In view of their position at the centre of most communities, public libraries are ideally placed to contribute to the IT for All programme. This role is likely to increase as libraries develop their IT capabilities, and as library staff become familiar with the uses to which the technology can be put.

9. Many local authorities already recognise the part libraries can play in delivering local services to the public. The Information Age allows this to extend to central government services as well. New technology will allow everyday transactions such as renewing a licence or paying tax to be conducted electronically through touch-screens and computers. Libraries will play an important part in providing assisted access for those who do not have access to a computer terminal at home and those uncomfortable with electronic media.

10. Libraries will also have an important role to play in delivering the Government's proposal to establish the UfI. Using modern information and communication technologies the UfI will promote the availability of high quality learning in the home, in the work place and in learning centres country-wide. These learning centres will be based in a range of locations including public libraries. A series of development projects will test out specific aspects of the UfI model. European Social Fund money will be available to support some of these projects in Great Britain through the ADAPT programme. An ADAPT-UfI Call for Applications will be published in April. Local authority partnerships will be able to bid for funds to carry out projects which may include libraries or focus on their potential role as UfI learning centres.

A public library IT network

11. The Government believes that public libraries play a vital social, economic and educational role in the daily life of the nation. The development of information technology provides new opportunities for libraries to deliver better services to more customers. We recognise that libraries will, quite rightly, continue to provide important traditional services concerned with the lending of books and reference materials. But developing their IT capabilities will allow them to do much more besides and to become even more central to the communities they serve.

12. For these reasons, the Government wholly endorses the objectives for the public libraries IT network set out by the LIC. It will do all it can to create the conditions required to ensure its success. As a signal of its intent, the Government has set the target of ensuring that, where practicable, all public libraries should be connected to the National Grid for Learning – and trained to use it – by 2002. To help realise this aim, the Government will take the action set out below.

Development Agency

13. The LIC Report proposed that a Development Agency should be established to carry out a number of key functions associated with the planning, establishment and management of the network. The Government agrees that there will be a need for specialist advice and coordination

across a range of issues associated with implementing the network. It has not yet reached a definitive view on the scope of such a body and whether this role should be vested in a single new or existing body, or spread across a variety of organisations with relevant expertise.

14. However, there is an urgent need to maintain the momentum on those issues which the LIC identifies as falling to a Development Agency. The Government has therefore asked the LIC to establish an Implementation Committee for the public libraries IT network. This will act as a focal point for the implementation of the network throughout the UK, provide expert advice, leadership and coordination; develop the technical specification for the network; and consider the process by which industry can be most effectively challenged to provide network services. The LIC will need to ensure that the interests of the whole of the UK are represented on this Committee and that the needs and circumstances in each of its component parts are attended to appropriately. Given the wider context of the National Grid for Learning, the Implementation Committee will also be charged with ensuring that it links effectively with the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) and the British Educational and Communications Technology Agency (BECTA), who will be supporting the development of the National Grid for Learning. The terms of reference and membership of the Committee will be announced shortly.

Content creation

15. To ensure that the public libraries IT network provides as broad a range of new and interesting material to as many people as possible, the Government will ensure that a total of £50 million of National Lottery funds is available throughout the UK for the digitisation of educational and learning material held to a great extent by public libraries. The material created under this initiative will help support the Government's plans to establish the National Grid for Learning and its plans to equip teachers and librarians with the skills required to benefit from the use of Information Technology. We would expect the public library sector to play a leading role in establishing a programme for achieving this. The Government envisages that these funds, which will be distributed by the New Opportunities Fund (NOF), will focus on material used to support lifelong learning and education in its broadest sense. The funds will complement those provided from other sources, including the Heritage Lottery Fund and the private sector. They will also complement curriculum based material which will be developed for schools through the National Grid for Learning.

16. It will be for the NOF to consider the funding priorities, the partnership funding requirements, the arrangements by which the funds are administered, and individual bids for funds. However, to help prepare the ground for the NOF's decisions about these issues, the Government will ask the LIC to take forward preparatory work, on a UK basis, on identifying the priorities for the programme across the range of content holding organisations.

17. The LIC will therefore consider, inter alia, the funding priorities for the creation of new digital content taking into account educational need and existing commercial opportunities; possible eligibility criteria; and the balance between national, regional and local projects. This will build upon the groundwork conducted in "New Library: The People's Network" and in the subsequent review

of digitisation activities within the sector conducted by Information North⁽²⁾ on the LIC's behalf. We will ensure the LIC involves appropriate bodies from the museums, archives and educational sectors in taking forward this work. The purpose of the work will be to ensure that all content holding organisations, including libraries, are ready and able to take advantage of the NOF's content creation stream as soon as funds start flowing in 1999. Subject to the NOF's views on appropriate partner agencies, the LIC's role may ultimately encompass the provision of advice to the NOF on individual bids for Lottery funding.

Training and development

18. In order that library staff are trained to use the technology on which the network will be based, the Government will ensure that a total of £20 million is made available through the NOF to provide for the training of all 27,000 library staff throughout the UK. This will complement the parallel initiative to provide IT training for teachers and school librarians.

19. As with other Lottery initiatives, it will be for the NOF to decide on the precise delivery mechanism for this funding stream, the specification required for training providers, and on the grant allocation to individual library authorities. However, the Government believes it is important that these arrangements should seek to maximise the opportunity for synergy and secure the economies of scale between the librarian and teacher training strands. It is also vital to ensure that those with appropriate expertise in librarianship issues have the opportunity to inform and contribute to the process.

20. The Government has already asked the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) to undertake work which will help to inform the NOF about the teacher training element of the IT training stream. The DfEE and the TTA are currently considering three main issues:

- (i) the identification of training needs;
- (ii) the development of a specification of training needs; and
- (iii) ways of monitoring and assessing training provision.

21. The Government proposes that the DfEE and TTA, with BECTA, should take on a similar role for the training of librarians in Information Technology. However, to ensure that this work reflects and safeguards the needs and interests of the library sector, the Government will ask the LIC to coordinate the sector's interests in IT training and work alongside the TTA and BECTA in taking matters forward. The LIC's role will therefore be central to the success of the initiative. As part of this work the LIC will also be asked to report on the extent to which IT training needs of librarians will be met in the longer term by accredited undergraduate and postgraduate librarian training programmes. Subject to the NOF's views on appropriate partner agencies, this role may ultimately encompass the provision of advice to the NOF on individual library training applications.

(2) A review of Digitisation Projects in Local Authority Libraries & Archives.
A report of the Library and Information Commission, December 1997

22. The arrangements for IT skill training for teachers and library staff in Scotland and Wales are under separate consideration.

Network Infrastructure

23. The infrastructure required to support the public libraries network will include hardware, software, telecommunications and other services. The way in which the provision of the network infrastructure is managed represents one of the most critical elements of the network.

24. For the longer term development of a comprehensive IT infrastructure, the Government will establish a framework which challenges the private sector to contribute and participate in the provision of the network. The details of this will be considered by the LIC's Implementation Committee. This work will need to consider how the infrastructure should be developed to enable access to the National Grid for Learning by both schools and libraries. One option will be to link the roll-out of the public library network to the arrangements under consideration for the development of the National Grid for Learning in schools. Such an approach could have significant attractions. Economies of scale between the schools and libraries element of the Grid would help to drive the unit costs down to affordable levels; and the private sector would be invited to make only a single investment in an interconnected learning network. The framework would need to be devised in such a way as to avoid creating monopolistic supply arrangements, and to encourage diversity. It would also need to allow for the potential for generating reliable income streams from, for example, microcharging, or for specific services relating to central and local government functions. The Government will work closely with the LIC in carrying out the further consultation and market testing required before setting out its detailed proposals for delivering the network.

25. To assist with the development of network infrastructure in the short term, the Government will provide pump-priming investment by refocusing the existing DCMS-Wolfson Public Libraries Challenge Fund to fund "Libraries of the Future" in England. The libraries chosen will act as cutting edge pathfinder projects demonstrating the potential of new technology. The DCMS-Wolfson Fund will provide £6 million for this purpose over 1998/99 and 1999/2000. This will provide a stimulus to both local authorities and private sector partners to make initial investments, and will also help demonstrate and inform how the network can best be implemented. The Government will seek bids from library authorities for these funds by the middle of June 1998.

26. The Scottish Office has provided £250,000 in 1997/98 for a similar Fund on a pilot basis. The future of this fund is currently under consideration. Supplementary funding of a similar order is being made available by the Welsh Office this year. This will support joint school/library projects from which a number of lessons are likely to be learned for the future – not least concerning IT development.

Telecommunications Costs

27. The costs associated with the connection and ongoing charges for telecommunications could present a significant obstacle to the development of the public libraries IT network. For example, the LIC report estimated that these services together could cost between £7 million and £15 million per

year, depending upon the level of service chosen. Securing reductions in the initial connection costs and in ongoing charges will help substantially in encouraging the development of the libraries network. The Government will therefore do all it can to make the provision of services to the libraries sector attractive to both telecommunications operators and users. As part of this process, it will explore with OFTEL and the telecommunications industry the scope for securing reduced connection and ongoing charges for libraries.

Local Government partnership

28. Implementing the networking proposals will depend to a large extent on securing the commitment of the private sector to respond to the huge opportunity that they present, and in encouraging local authorities* to commit their existing resources to the development and delivery of services to a wider cross-section of the population. The work of the LIC's Implementation Committee will play a central role in identifying the framework for achieving this.

Conclusion

29. The Government believes that the combination of these measures and secure funding, which amounts to a total of over £70 million spread as necessary over the next four years, should provide a sufficient basis for the private sector and local authorities to invest in the implementation of the national public libraries IT network. The arrangements for favourable telecommunications costs and the use of open competitive processes should drive down costs and will help to make the network an attractive investment. The availability of significant Lottery funding and the DCMS-Wolfson Fund will encourage private sector to participate on a partnership basis, significantly boosting the resources that local authorities may themselves commit.

30. The Government is committed to the establishment of a public library IT network as part of its wider objectives for encouraging lifelong learning and providing readily available and widely accessible educational services for all our citizens. It is making a substantial contribution to kickstart this initiative and ensure its ongoing success. Further detailed work will now be done in order to bring about the LIC's vision of the public libraries IT network. Further announcements will be made over the course of the year as this work reaches fruition.

31. The Government would be interested in comments from interested parties on the issues covered in this paper by 15 June 1998. These should be sent to:

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* Educational and Library Boards in Northern Ireland

Comments relating to the proposals as they apply to Scotland should be sent to:

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The Scottish Office Education and Industry Department
Arts & Cultural Heritage Division
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Edinburgh EH6 6QQ

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E-mail: John.Wastle@SO013.scotoff.gov.uk

Comments relating to the proposals as they apply to Wales should be sent to:

Michael Brooke
Culture and Recreation Division
Welsh Office
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Tel: 01222 826058

Comments relating to the proposals as they apply to Northern Ireland should be sent to:

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TERMS OF REFERENCE OF LIC PUBLIC LIBRARIES IT NETWORK WORKING GROUP

The overall aim of the Working Group will be to report to Government on the steps which need to be taken for public libraries in the United Kingdom to respond effectively to the challenge of the new information and communications technology. The Group should report by the end of July 1997, although their work may continue beyond this date. A critical success factor for the Working Group will be establishing a practical method of ensuring quick and effective communication and negotiation with local authorities. The Group should address:

- (i) what services and 'content' a public libraries information technology network might deliver to the end-user;
- (ii) how a public library network might contribute to the more efficient management of the nation's library resources, by improving communications between libraries;
- (iii) the value of electronic data links for the exchange of information between public libraries and other networked information resources in the public, academic and commercial sectors, including the value and feasibility of links to existing networks such as JANET, and to museums and galleries;
- (iv) the possible role of a public libraries network as a gateway for remote users to a whole range of sources of electronic information;
- (v) the implementations of (i) to (iv) above for the design and technical specification of a public libraries IT network, building on the work done by Information for All, but not constrained by it. The Group should also consider a more flexible approach, incorporating a number of different financial and technical models;
- (vi) funding of the network and the potential role of the private sector and the Lottery in providing the initial capital investment, managing the system and supplying content;
- (vii) charging mechanisms and policies;
- (viii) how the network should be procured and run, including how negotiations with suppliers of IT systems and copyright owners might best be handled;
- (ix) how training and development requirements might be met.

The Public Libraries Review highlights some particularly important IT developments, which the Group will need to take into account in framing its recommendations. The relationship of a public libraries network to the British Library's electronic services, including its programme of text

digitisation, will need to be carefully examined. The impact of the Government's IT for All and government.direct programmes and how public libraries can contribute to these initiatives should also be considered with the relevant agencies and departments.

Because of the range and diversity of the issues and interests involved, the Working Group will not itself aim to be representative, but will be a small team drawing on the advice of a number of specialist sub-groups focused on particular tasks or problems.

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