

A New Chapter

Public library services in the 21st century

English data about attitudes to and use of public libraries

This factsheet reports on the data from research carried out by Ipsos MORI for the Carnegie UK Trust. The research consisted of an omnibus poll carried out in all five jurisdictions covered by the Trust in its work (England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland).

This factsheet contains the data which relates to England. Where relevant, comparison is made with data from the other jurisdictions. A full report of the research can be obtained from the Carnegie UK Trust website www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk. Separate factsheets covering the other four jurisdictions are also available, as well as a short discussion paper setting out the Trust's view of the key policy issues.

Research findings

The findings from the omnibus poll provide comparable data from all five jurisdictions. In England, 1,301 adults over the age of 15 were included in the poll.

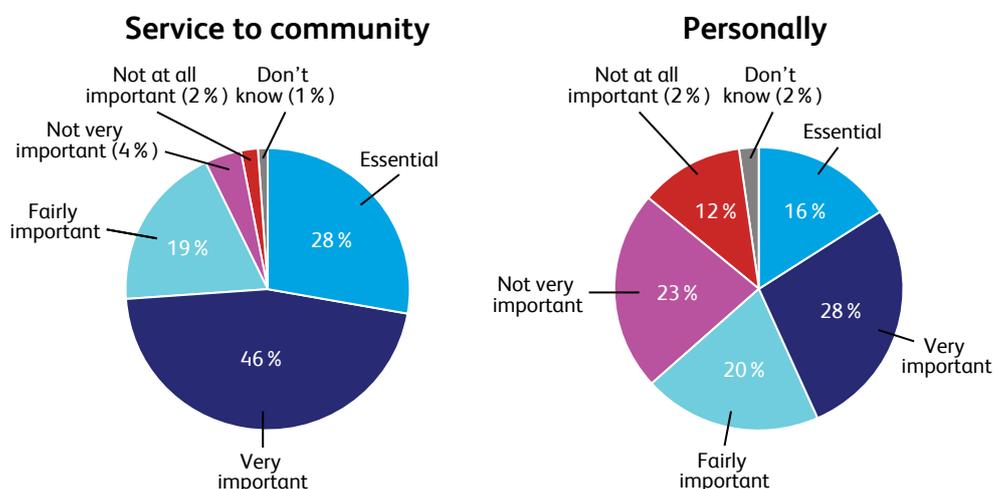
2.1 Importance of public libraries

- Our data shows that, overall, around three quarters (74%) of those surveyed in England felt that libraries were ‘very important’ or ‘essential’ for communities, while less than half (44%) said that they were very important or essential to them personally. These figures are similar to those in other jurisdictions.
- Senior managers and professionals were most likely to say that libraries are ‘essential’ for communities (48%) whereas skilled manual workers were least likely (21%).
- More of those who thought libraries were ‘not very’ or ‘not at all’ important to communities were in the lowest socio-economic grouping (6%), compared with senior managers or professionals (2%).

2.2 Use of public libraries

- Exactly half of those surveyed had used a public library in the previous 12 months.
- More women than men had used the service (53% compared to 46%) in England, but this was less variation than in some other jurisdictions, particularly Scotland.
- Library use by 15-24 year olds (55%) was higher than the average over all age groups (50%), which contradicts some earlier research findings which suggested that libraries did not appeal to younger people.
- There was a strong and statistically significant relationship between library use and two other factors: being a prolific reader (reading at least one book every 6 weeks) and having children.
- The relationship with reading is consistent across all five jurisdictions, and the relationship with having children is found in all jurisdictions except Wales.
- In relation to social class it appears that senior managers and professionals (71%) were more likely to have visited a library than those in semi-skilled or unskilled occupations (42%).

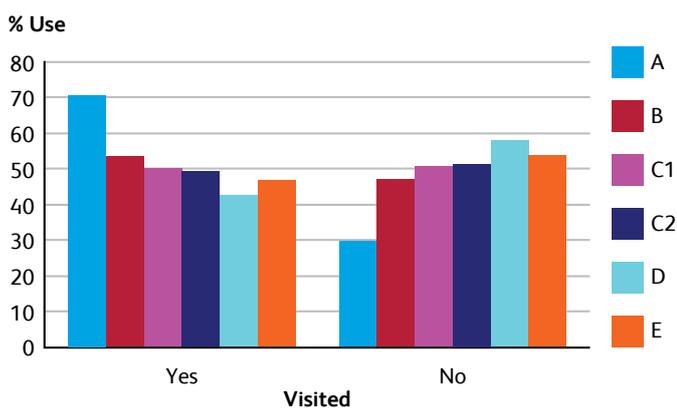
Table 1: Importance to the community and to the individual: Generally speaking, how important or unimportant do you think public libraries are as a service to the community? How important or unimportant are public libraries to you personally?



Base: All English adults 15+ (1,301), 2-8 September 2011

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Table 2: use of public library in last 12 months by social class



- In relation to employment status, those who work part-time, or who are not working, use the service more than those who are in full-time work. Use by retired people is close to the average.
- There was no significant difference in use between those living in rural and urban areas in England.

2.3 Frequency of use

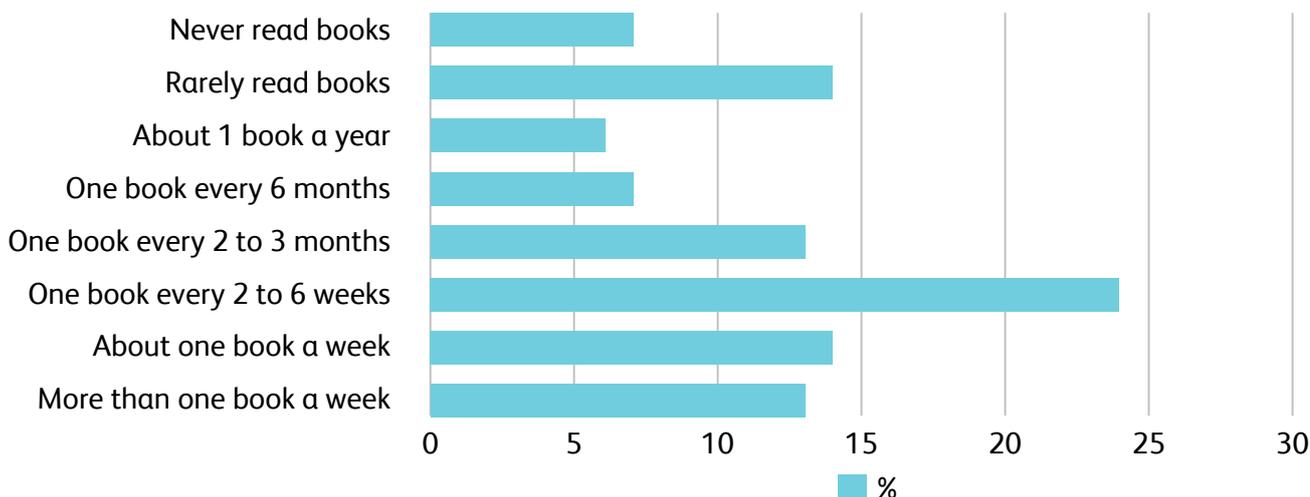
- Just over half (52%) of those who had used a library in the previous year were frequent users, ie using the public library at least once a month. This is in line with statistics from the other four jurisdictions.
- In England, there was a statistically significant relationship between having children or being a prolific reader and frequency of library use.
- Senior managers and professionals were the most likely socio-economic group to say that they had visited libraries at least once a month.

2.4 Reading behaviour

We asked people how many books they read.

- In England, the percentage of those who say they rarely or never read books (21%) is the median point of the five nations – with people in Scotland and Ireland reading more, and people in Wales and Northern Ireland reading less.
- Across the five jurisdictions, those who are most likely to be prolific readers are women and retired people.

Table 3: Reading behaviour in England



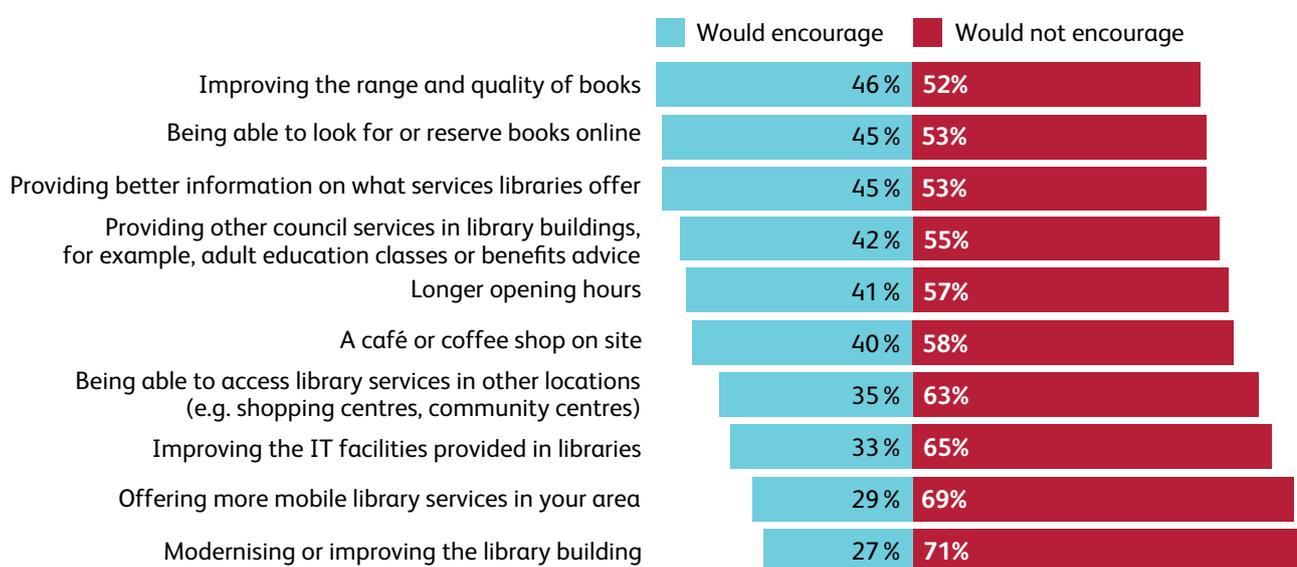
2.5 Attitudes to possible service improvements

Overall, this data shows that none of the suggested changes would make a difference to more than half of those surveyed. The most popular improvements to the service in England would be improving the range and quality of books, being able to look for or reserve books online, and providing more information about the services available at the library. It is almost certainly the case that all library authorities do already provide

the facility to look for or reserve books online, so these figures suggest that a lot of people are unaware of the kind of service currently offered by public libraries.

Although most people say that modernising or improving the library building would not make a difference, most evidence shows that new or improved library buildings does lead to significant increase in use, so people's attitudes may not be reflected in their behaviour.

Table 4: Which particular changes or improvements would affect library use



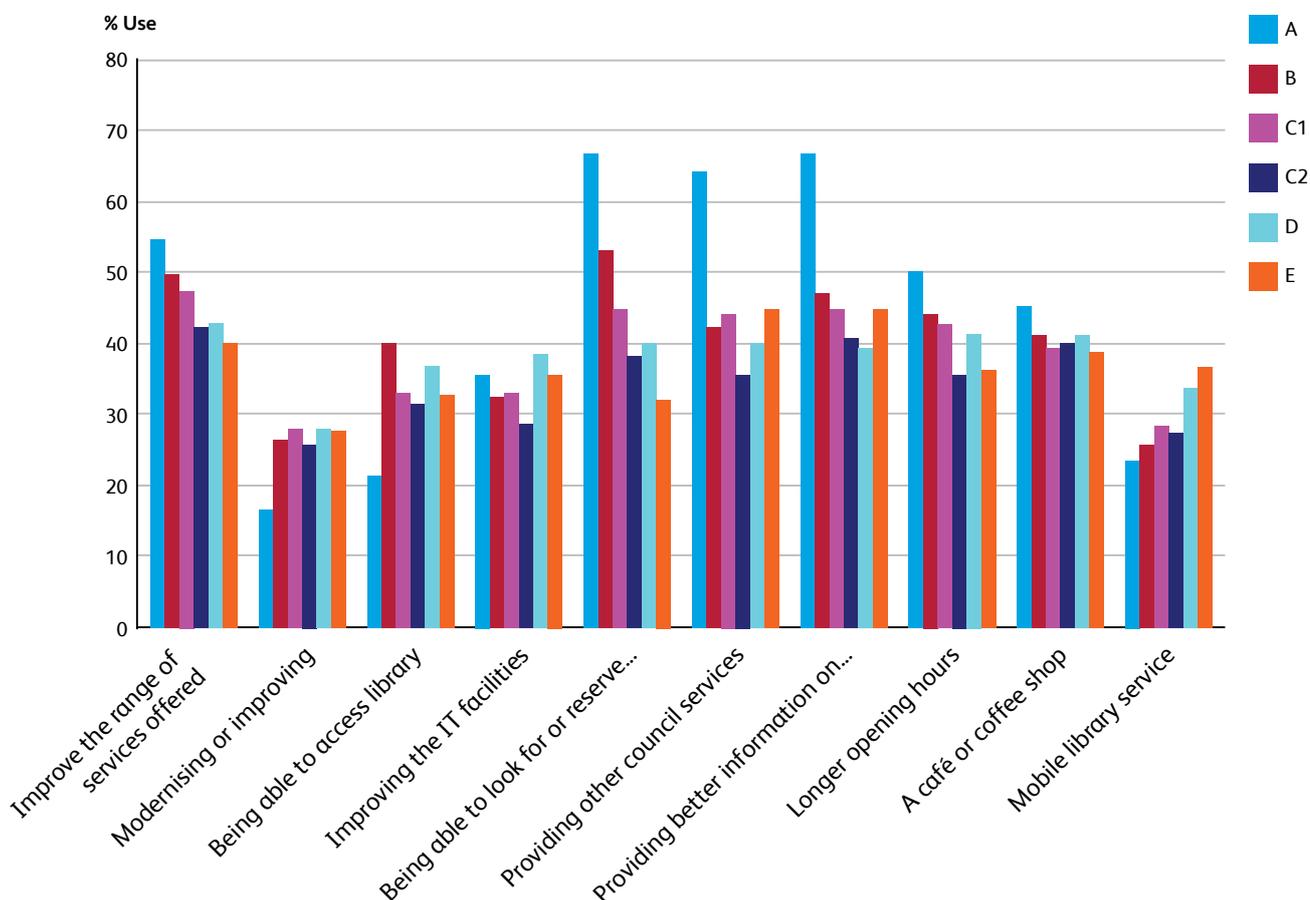
Base: All English adults 15+ (1,301), 2-8 September 2011

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- In all five jurisdictions there was more difference between users and non-users of the service than between frequent and infrequent users. Users were more likely to say that the improvements would increase their use of the service than non-users, with little difference between frequent and infrequent users.
- In England, 42% of non-users said that none of the changes or improvements would encourage them to make more use of the service, compared with 13% of users who said this.

- Senior managers and professionals would be most likely to increase their use if they were able to look for or reserve books online, and if there was better information about the services libraries provided.
- Those in social groups C1, C2 and D said that they would use libraries more if they improved the range and quality of books offered.
- Those in social group E indicated they would use libraries if they provided better information on the services provided (45%) and if they provided other council services (47%).
- Those in social group E (37%) were most likely to use libraries more if there was a mobile library services whereas those in social group A (24%) were least likely to be encouraged by this service.
- Improvements in the IT facilities were more attractive to those who are not working and to students than to those who are working, and those who are retired.
- Providing more council services in library settings is more popular with unemployed people or people working part-time than with others. Unemployed people and those working part-time were more likely to be in favour of being able to access libraries in other locations.

Table 5: Attitudes to service changes or improvements by social class



Definition of socio-economic groups

A	Senior managers and professionals
B	Middle managers
C1	Junior managers; small traders with staff and premises
C2	Skilled manual workers
D	Semi-skilled and unskilled workers
E	Casual workers; those with no income other than state benefits

The Carnegie UK Trust works to improve the lives of people throughout the UK and Ireland, by changing minds through influencing policy, and by changing lives through innovative practice and partnership work. The Carnegie UK Trust was established by Scots-American philanthropist Andrew Carnegie in 1913.

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