**Libraries Omnibus – Initial Findings**

1. **Background**

In December 2009, DCMS commissioned Ipsos MORI to carry out research into public library usage. This involved face-to-face surveys with a representative sample of 5000 people aged 15+[[1]](#footnote-1) in England. Through Taking Part and CIPFA, we have knowledge about the number of public library users and of visits made, but have been lacking data regarding other aspects of library usage.

This omnibus was therefore designed with two main aims:

* To find out what people visit public libraries to do.
* To investigate the level of latent demand – that is, how many people are doing activities elsewhere that could potentially be done in a library?

The headline findings are outlined below, with references to the tables of data which can be found in appendix 1.

1. **Library users**

**41.0%** of our sample had been to a public library in the past 12 months. This is higher than the most recent Taking Part figure (37.5%). Although this could represent a recent upswing in engagement – mirroring an upswing seen in other sectors in Taking Part data – it is more likely down to sampling differences in the two surveys.

The activities done by these library users is summarised below[[2]](#footnote-2):

1. **Potential library users**

There is a high degree of possible latent demand – that is people who have not been to a public library in the past 12 months, but who have done an activity which could be done there such as borrowing a book. Therefore there is the potential that many of these people could become library users if the offer better meets their needs.

Of the 48.5% of our sample who had not visited a library in the past 12 months, 31.2% had either borrowed or wanted to borrow a book. **That is 15% of our total sample if half of these could be persuaded to borrow from a library - that would increase the total library engagement to closer to 50%**

1. **Digital engagement**

Of those who access the internet via a public place (4.8% of our sample), just over half had done so in a public library. So there is potential for a modest rise in the number of people using public libraries for internet access.

Computer usage in a public library reduces as income rises, suggesting that this provision is serving the lower income members of the community. Usage was highest amongst those still in education (of the students in our sample who had visited a library, 33% had used a computer there) and the unemployed (30% of unemployed library users in our sample).

12% of our sample had used the internet to look at public library websites.

1. **Demographic influences**

In order to try and paint a picture of who is and is not using public libraries, we need to look at some basic demographic information. Are certain characteristics more prevalent in either group, for instance?

**By age:**

**By employment status:**

**By income:**

**By ethnicity:**

Whilst public library usage does not vary much across age groups, we see some variance in different income levels with the highest usage amongst people with average salaries.

We see greater differences across ethnicity and different employment status.

To explore this further, the tables below show what activities people within these groups are doing in public libraries:

**% By ethnicity:**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **White** | **Mixed** | **Asian** | **Black**  |
| **Borrow book** | 81 | 85 | 83 | 69 |
| **Do own research** | 30 | 51 | 26 | 48 |
| **Children’s activities** | 20 | 31 | 28 | 13 |
| **Borrow music etc** | 22 | 40 | 9 | 18 |
| **Use PC on own** | 18 | 15 | 15 | 28 |
| **Info on health etc** | 16 | 25 | 25 | 25 |
| **Quiet study** | 16 | 39 | 17 | 18 |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Most popular activity |
|  | Second most popular activity |
|  | Third most popular activity |
|  | Forth most popular activity |

We can see that book borrowing is the main activity for all groups, but that the highest level occurs in the mixed ethnicity group, and the lowest in black group.

Doing own research is a secondary activity to most groups but beyond this activity priorities vary, although we see seeking information and health, jobs and so on remaining significant.

The latest Taking Part data also show highest proportional library usage amongst ethnically mixed groups, but alongside Asian rather than black people. Ethnic minority groups tend to be harder to reach in surveys and so, given the slightly differing methods used by Taking Part and the omnibus, this could account for this difference. However, in both instances we see BME groups proportionally being the highest users of public libraries.

**% By employment status:**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **In education** | **Full-time/self** | **House wife** | **Part-time** | **Unemployed** | **Retired** |
| **Borrow book** | 80 | 76 | 87 | 84 | 69 | 88 |
| **Do own research** | 36 | 32 | 19 | 29 | 35 | 28 |
| **Children’s activities** | 4 | 25 | 44 | 31 | 17 | 7 |
| **Borrow music etc** | 11 | 22 | 22 | 25 | 21 | 15 |
| **Use PC on own** | 33 | 16 | 13 | 17 | 30 | 8 |
| **Info on health etc** | 12 | 15 | 13 | 20 | 29 | 14 |
| **Quiet study** | 38 | 14 | 6 | 13 | 10 | 4 |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Most popular activity |
|  | Second most popular activity |
|  | Third most popular activity |
|  | Forth most popular activity |

Here we see that once again book borrowing is the most common activity across all groups, and is highest amongst retired people and housewives, along with visiting children’s section for the latter.

Beyond this, secondary activities vary across the groups although doing own research remains important.

Those still in education mainly use the library primarily for the activities one would expect - for doing their own research and a quiet place to study.

Computer use is highest amongst those still in education and unemployed. The latter group also has the highest rate of seeking information on health, jobs etc and getting help to use a computer suggesting that libraries are able to provide important services for this group.

1. Under 16 year olds were removed from the analysis due to the small sample size. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Borrow films, music or computer games; Information on jobs, health, training, local events etc;

‘Other’ includes attending a group or class, getting help using a computer, reading a magazine or newspaper, and using a photocopier. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)